

Abstract

Young earth creationists have often supplied responses to arguments used by old earth creationists. These responses typically take one of two forms. Either they are in the form of a short article designed to refute one argument or an entire book is written to respond to the views of one particular old earth creationist or viewpoint. This paper represents a comprehensive critique of the old earth creationist's biblical and theological arguments used in an effort to refute young earth creationism.

Although the scientific evidence certainly bears weight in the debate between these two camps, this paper focused entirely on biblical and theological arguments. After all, if one side cannot support their view from Scripture then it cannot be the proper view. Also, the debate over flood geology and uniformitarianism was purposely avoided as well. This debate is just as important as the focus of this paper and may be the subject of a future study.

Finally, 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 fallacies of distraction and ambiguity. It is this author's hope that this paper will serve to clarify the debate primarily by eliminating the many fallacious arguments so often employed by one side or the other.

Outline

- I. Introduction
- II. Summary of Young Earth Creationist Major Arguments
- III. Old Earth Creationist's Responses to Young Earth Creationist Arguments
 - a. Misrepresentation of Young Earth Position
 - b. Revisionist History
 - c. Improper Hermeneutics
 - d. Pragmatic Appeals
 - e. "Creation Agnosticism"
 - f. Straw Men
 - g. Contextual Conflicts
 - h. Improper View of General and Special Revelation
 - i. Creation of Adam and Eve
 - j. The Length of the Seventh Day
- IV. Recommendations for Improving the Debate
- V. Conclusion

The Futility of Old Earth Creationist Arguments

Timothy R. Chaffey¹

“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.” – Isaiah 55: 11

“Neither may we hope to gain by being neutral, or granting an occasional truce. We are not to cease from conflict, and try to be as agreeable as we can with our Lord's foes, frequenting their assemblies, and tasting their dainties. No such orders are written here. You are to grasp your weapon, and go forth to fight.” – Charles H. Spurgeon²

Introduction

The early 19th century witnessed a major paradigm shift in the evangelical hermeneutical approach with respect to the early chapters of Genesis. Prior to this time, the majority of Christians believed the Bible taught that the world was created within the past six thousand years.³ As the scientific community began promulgating a 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. Throughout the past two centuries these theories have been tweaked while others have been created.⁴ 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 Framework Hypothesis⁵ and Progressive Creation⁶ are popular among theologians and Christian scientists.

¹ Tim teaches high school science at Tri-State Christian School in Galena, IL. He is the founder and director of Midwest Apologetics (www.midwestapologetics.org). He holds a Master of Arts degree in Biblical & Theological Studies and is currently working toward an Master of Divinity degree at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary.

² Stated by Charles Spurgeon in a sermon entitled “The Sword of the Spirit” delivered on April 19, 1891 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.

³ See Dr. Terry Mortenson's *The Great Turning Point* (Master Books: Green Forest, AR 2004) for a history of the geological battles of the early 19th century.

⁴ Other views include the Revelatory Day Theory and the Literal-Day-With-Gaps Theory.

⁵ Briefly, the Framework Hypothesis claims that Genesis 1 – 11 need not be interpreted as literal history yet should be viewed as a literary device used to teach truth. A full description of this view written by Meredith Kline can be found at <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1996/PSCF3-96Kline.html>.

⁶ Progressive Creation is a spin-off of the Day-Age Theory. Rather than accepting biological evolution, Progressive Creationists, such as Hugh Ross, believe that God's creative processes took place over a period of 14 – 16 billion years culminating with the creation of Adam and Eve.

With the resurgence of young earth creationism (YEC)⁷ 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 a church that is relatively uninformed on this issue. In their zeal to convince others many of these scholars have resorted to poor and oftentimes fallacious arguments and reasoning.

Dr. Jonathan Sarfati's 2002 article entitled "Moving Forward: Arguments We Think Creationists Should Not Use" sounded a clarion call for YECs to use more discretion when advancing their view.⁸ The publication of this article was a risky move for *Creation* as it opened the door for criticism from fellow YECs who used these arguments or supported ministries that did. Nevertheless, his 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 creationist's (OEC) side.⁹ Since such a critique is not forthcoming from OECs one will be offered here. The purpose of this article will be twofold: first, to categorize and summarize the OECs responses to YECs claims and second, to illustrate the extremely shaky theological ground occupied by the old earth position. Prior to examining the OEC's responses, a summary of YEC arguments will be listed to illustrate what the OECs are responding to.

While it is crucial to this study, the arguments over the scientific evidence will not be examined here; however, a few comments are in order.¹⁰ Oftentimes, OECs accuse YECs of rejecting science because they do not accept the Big Bang theory and the standard dates for age of the earth and universe. In reality, YECs disagree with the OEC's interpretation of the scientific evidence. They are not anti-science as evidenced by the number of YECs who hold advanced degrees in science.¹¹ Moreover, YECs are not alone in their rejection of the Big Bang theory. A large group of naturalistic scientists recently published a paper calling for the need to research alternative cosmogonies because they believe the Big Bang is fraught with too many insurmountable problems.¹²

⁷ For the purposes of this paper, young earth creationists are defined as Christians who believe God created everything during a six-day period of time no more than ten thousand years ago. These days are to be understood as approximately 24 hours in length.

⁸ Jonathan Sarfati, "Moving Forward: Arguments We Think Creationists Should Not Use" *Creation* 24: 2 (March – May 2002): 20 – 24.

⁹ Old earth creationists are defined as Christians who accept the vast ages suggested by many modern scientists but still adhere to creation *ex nihilo* by the God of the Bible.

¹⁰ This paper will focus on the biblical arguments from both sides rather than the scientific claims. For an overview of the scientific arguments from a YEC position see Dr. Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise* (Master Books: Green Forest, AR 2004) and Dr. Don DeYoung, *Thousands... Not Billions* (Master Books: Green Forest, AR 2005). For an overview of the scientific arguments from an OEC position see Dr. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (NavPress: Colorado Springs, CO 1994).

¹¹ A good overview of this topic can be found in John Ashton, *In Six Days*: (Master Books: Green Forest, AR 2003). This book is a compilation of interviews with fifty scientists who are also YECs.

¹² This paper was originally published in *New Scientist* (May 22, 2004) and is available at www.cosmologystatement.org. 34 scientists signed it at the time of publication with another 500 scientists signing it since then. Their names and credentials are all listed on the website.

The fact of the matter is that the scientific evidence does not necessarily lend as much support for an old earth as OECs often imply.¹³

Summary of Young Earth Creationists' Major Arguments

Young earth creationists have argued that their position is the clear teaching of God's Word.

Taking Genesis 1 in this way, at face value, without doubt it seems to say that God created the universe, the earth, the sun, moon and stars, plants and animals, and the first two people, within six ordinary (approximately 24-hour) days. Being really honest, one would have to admit that you could *never* get the idea of millions of years from reading this passage. (bold and italics in original)¹⁴

Some OECs admit that this supposition is a major strength of the YEC position but still adhere to an old earth interpretation because of their acceptance of modern scientific theories concerning the age of the earth. Pattle Pun of Wheaton College stated:

It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of Genesis, without regard to the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created the heavens and the earth in six solar days, that man was created on the sixth day, and that death and chaos entered the world after the fall of Adam and Eve, and that all fossils were the result of the catastrophic deluge that spared only Noah's family and the animals therewith.¹⁵

While not all OECs would concur with Pun, the fact remains that YECs often cite this as evidence in favor of their position.

Along with this concept of the plain reading of the text, YECs point to Exodus 20: 11 and 31: 17 which both state, "...For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth." Since the context refers to the keeping of the Sabbath Day, YECs contend it is natural to assume the author is referring to literal 24-hour days.

A major point of contention centers on the definition of the word day in Genesis 1 and 2. Just like the English word day, the Hebrew word *yom* can refer to the daylight portion of a day, a twenty-four hour period, or an indefinite period of time. The proper interpretation is dependent upon context. YECs are quick to point out that nearly every time *yom* is paired with the words evening, morning or night it refers to an ordinary day. Moreover, each time *yom* appears with an ordinal number¹⁶ it refers to a literal day. Throughout Genesis 1, *yom* appears with ordinal numbers and the words evening, morning, and night.

¹³ It cannot be emphasized enough that the debate between YECs and OECs is not about religion vs. science. It is over the interpretations of scientific evidence and, more importantly, the interpretation of God's Word.

¹⁴ Don Batten, ed., *The Revised and Expanded Answers Book* (Master Books: Green Forest, AR 2000) p. 33.

¹⁵ Pun, P.P.T., *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* **39**:14, 1987; emphasis added.

¹⁶ A number designating the place (as first, second, or third, etc.) occupied by an item in an ordered sequence.

YECs also point to several theological difficulties and contradictions created when one attempts to insert vast ages into the Genesis record. The most serious error is that it necessarily places death, disease, and bloodshed before sin and in the process undermines the foundation of the Gospel message itself.¹⁷ If animal death and bloodshed occurred before sin, then in Genesis 1: 31 God labels death as “very good.” The Curse pronounced on Adam, Eve, and the ground becomes an empty threat because there was already death and the ground was already producing thorns and thistles.¹⁸

If billions of years existed prior to Adam’s creation then Jesus Christ is made into a liar. When questioned by the Pharisees concerning divorce He replied, “Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female...” (Matt. 19: 4). The obvious implication here is that Jesus knew that Adam and Eve were created “at the beginning.” Billions of years passing before they were created makes our Lord’s claim that this occurred “at the beginning” inconceivable. This is only possible if the days of creation were literal 24-hour days.¹⁹

Many theological problems of a lesser degree²⁰ are created by the acceptance of long ages. The flood in Noah’s day is generally demoted to a mere local catastrophe.²¹ Isaiah 65 speaks of a peaceful time in which “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together” (v. 25). This restoration harkens back to the original creation when all animals were vegetarian (Gen. 1: 30); however, according to OECs certain animals, such as Tyrannosaurus Rex, could not have been vegetarian. Furthermore, in the future there will be “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21: 1). OECs do not believe it will take God 14.3 billion years to create our future home so why insist that He took this long the first time?²²

Several other theological problems could be listed, as well as scores of scientific difficulties but these will suffice to give a summary of the YEC’s major biblical arguments. It is time to examine the OECs’ responses to these points to see if they offer a consistent theological framework and a superior hermeneutic to the YEC’s.

Old Earth Creationists’ Responses to Young Earth Creationist Arguments

As will be demonstrated, OECs seem to have a difficult time responding to the arguments given above. Several well-known evangelical leaders have offered arguments against YEC. It is truly surprising to see the appallingly inadequate responses from

¹⁷ Please note that OECs are not being accused of denying the Gospel. Although a few YECs have made this accusation, most do not. YECs contend that the acceptance of billions of years necessarily places death before Adam’s sin (which OECs agree) and that this idea undermines the very reason Christ came to earth.

¹⁸ Thorns and thistles are found in the fossil record in layers that are allegedly several million years old. Roses are said to have evolved around forty million years ago.

¹⁹ Few OECs have addressed this issue. Their rare responses will be dealt with later in this paper.

²⁰ These are called “lesser” because they do not directly impugn God’s character or the Gospel message. However, since these difficulties and/or contradictions attack the authenticity and authority of Scripture they should not be thought of as minor problems. Any assault on the inspiration of Scripture should be considered grave indeed.

²¹ Ironically, some OECs accept a global flood. Apparently, they do not recognize the inconsistency of adhering to vast geologic ages while at the same time believing in a worldwide cataclysm that would have produced the very rock layers that led to their belief in billions of years.

²² Although his dates change on a regular basis, popular progressive creationist Hugh Ross claims that God needed 14.3 billion years to make this world.

otherwise brilliant men. Sadly, many OECs knowingly misrepresent YECs while others resort to *ad hominem* and straw man attacks and other fallacious debate tactics.

Misrepresentation of YEC position

Perhaps the most common approach utilized by OECs is to misrepresent the YEC position.²³ Oftentimes, YECs are represented as hard line fundamentalists who believe that all OECs are heretics and should be disfellowshipped.²⁴ This is simply not true. Ken Ham is the most popular creation speaker in the world today. In his lectures and books he has made it clear that he does not question the faith of the OECs he is arguing against. In fact, his organization, Answers in Genesis, is on the record as not questioning the faith of the OEC.²⁵ However, YECs will often warn of what they see as a dangerous hermeneutical precedent. That is, if the days of the creation week can be interpreted as long periods of time, where does one stop reinterpreting Scripture on the basis of modern scientific opinions?²⁶

In 2000, John Ankerberg hosted a debate between Dr. Hugh Ross and Dr. Kent Hovind, a popular YEC.²⁷ As moderator, Ankerberg revealed his old earth bias on numerous occasions by siding with Ross in arguing against Hovind. He stated, “the argument that *yom* never means anything in the Bible but a literal 24 hours is completely untenable in the light of scriptural usage elsewhere.”²⁸ Ankerberg is absolutely correct that *yom* can mean something other than an ordinary day. The problem is that Kent Hovind did not make this claim and neither does any other YEC. John Ankerberg followed a common line of attack on YECs by misrepresenting their position on the Hebrew word for “day.”

In the second volume of his *Systematic Theology* Dr. Norman Geisler offers an appendix on the “Various Views of the ‘Days’ of Genesis.” Among his arguments for the young earth view, Dr. Geisler offers the following straw man argument:

²³ It is often difficult to fairly represent the opposing view since every person is biased. Nonetheless, every attempt should be made to truthfully present both sides of the debate. The people quoted in the following section are notable evangelical scholars and should know better.

²⁴ There may be a handful of YECs who fit this description but it is nowhere near the majority opinion of YECs. A cursory study of the publications of major YEC organizations (Institute for Creation Research, Creation Research Society, and Answers in Genesis) will show that they do not question the faith of the OEC. It must be noted that all OECs quoted in this paper are regarded as solid Christians by the author.

²⁵ Ham wrote, “We do not seek to pass judgment on his Christian character or his commitment to the Lord.” This particular statement was made in reference to Dr. Hugh Ross, who is perhaps the leading OEC in the world. The entire article is available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/4077.asp>. See also Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, p. 26. Ham has made many similar statements concerning other OECs in his lectures.

²⁶ For example, the majority of scientists do not believe that dead people can come back to life. If one applies the same hermeneutic to the resurrection of Jesus Christ then should he conclude that Christ did not rise from the dead?

²⁷ Dr. Kent Hovind is a popular YEC speaker and the founder of Creation Science Evangelism. Dr. Hovind continues to use some of the arguments called into question by Dr. Sarfati. Dr. Hovind responded to the article and Ken Ham, Dr. Carl Wieland, and Dr. Sarfati offered a rebuttal of Hovind’s response. Their comments may be read at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2002/1011hovind.asp>.

²⁸ This debate originally aired in October 2000. Ankerberg made this statement during the Q & A time. DVD on file.

It is well known that the theory of evolution (or common ancestry) depends on very long periods of time for life to develop from a one-celled animal to human beings. Without these long periods of time, evolution would not be possible. Thus, it is argued by young-earthers that granting long periods of time is an accommodation to evolution.²⁹

Dr. Geisler proceeds to torch this straw man by correctly pointing out “scientists had concluded that long periods of time were involved before Darwin wrote in 1859.”³⁰ The problem with Dr. Geisler’s argument is that no informed YEC would claim that “long periods of time [are] an accommodation to evolution.” YECs agree with Geisler that the idea of an old earth predates Darwin’s writings. It would be accurate to claim that these “long periods of time” are an accommodation to uniformitarian geology popularized in the early 19th century by James Hutton and Charles Lyell. In fact, the Gap Theory and the Day-Age Theory were developed prior to Darwin’s *Origin of Species*. Since these views were created in an effort to synthesize the biblical record with scientific opinion it is obvious that the long periods of time were not an accommodation to evolution.³¹

Dr. Geisler makes a more astonishing claim about YEC when he wrote, “Light was not created on the fourth day, as defenders of the solar day³² argue; rather it was made on the very first day when God said, ‘Let there be light’ (Gen. 1: 3).”³³ He does not document this claim so one must wonder where he came up with it since it is not an argument used by YECs. This writer has been studying creationism in depth for nearly a decade and has never seen or heard a YEC use it. YECs absolutely believe that light was created on the first day as verse three states. They differ from OECs in that they do not believe this light came from the sun since they accept that it was created on the fourth day (Gen. 1: 16). YECs have consistently made their position clear and have even offered plausible explanations as to what the light on the first three days may have been:

Where did the light come from? We are not told, but Genesis 1: 3 certainly indicates it was a created light to provide day and night until God made the sun on day four to rule the day He had made. Revelation 21: 23 tells us that one day the sun will not be needed, as the glory of God will light the heavenly city.³⁴

²⁹ Dr. Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume Two* (Bethany House: Minneapolis, MN 2003) p. 639. This work will be cited more than any other in this paper. As such, it should be made clear that Geisler is not being intentionally singled out. It is just that he provided a great summary of old earth creationist’s responses to young earth arguments in the fourth appendix. Also, it should be stated that Norman Geisler is highly respected by this writer and considered to be an outstanding apologist. However, for whatever reason, his arguments in this area seem especially weak.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 643.

³¹ Evolution was not discovered or invented by Charles Darwin. He merely popularized natural selection, the mechanism he believed was capable of changing one type of organism into another.

³² That Geisler calls YECs “solar day” defenders is also misleading. It is true that some YECs have used the phrase “solar day” but it is not an accurate designation of their position. According to their view, the first three days could not have been “solar” days since this term is derived from the name of our sun, “Sol.” Dr. Jason Lisle, an astronomer with Answers in Genesis recommended to this writer that “sidereal” would be a better term to use.

³³ Geisler, *ST II*, p. 641. Geisler also makes this statement in his *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI 1999) in his section entitled “Genesis, Days of.”

³⁴ Don Batten, ed., *Answers Book*, p. 44.

At best, Geisler's blunder on this point reveals his ignorance of the YEC perspective.³⁵ At worst, and sadly, more likely, Geisler displayed his willingness to mislead his readers by using this straw man argument.³⁶ Whatever the case, a misrepresentation of this magnitude is unacceptable from a person of Dr. Geisler's tremendous erudition.

Revisionist History

The debate over the proper interpretation of the creation days is nothing new in Church history. A handful of church fathers wrote in favor of interpreting the days as something other than ordinary days. Dr. Hugh Ross cites them as support for his view that the days were long periods of time. Among the fathers cited by Ross are "Philo, Josephus,³⁷ Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Ambrose, Origen, Lactantius, Victorinus of Pettau, Methodius of Olympus, Augustine, Eusebius, and Basil the Great."³⁸ In *The Genesis Question*, Ross claimed:

Their [Anti-Nicene scholars] comments on the subject [meaning of the word day in Genesis 1] remained tentative, with the majority favoring the "long day" (typically a thousand year period) – apart from the influence of science. Not one explicitly endorsed the twenty-four hour interpretation.³⁹

There are several problems with this argument. First, Ross overstates the number of church fathers who allegedly support his view. Of those cited, Ambrose, Lactantius, and Methodius favored the literal six day position. Only Philo, Origen, and Augustine clearly believed the days were something other than twenty-four hours. The remaining fathers were unclear in their writings.⁴⁰

Second, his argument proves too much. These men interpreted the days figuratively because they believed that God created everything instantaneously.⁴¹ Rather than supporting an old earth view, these allegorists argued exactly the opposite. Augustine went so far as to write:

Let us, then, omit the conjectures of men who know not what they say, when they speak of the nature and origin of the human race....They are deceived, too, by those highly mendacious documents which profess to

³⁵ This statement cannot be viewed as a "typo" or an innocent mistake since he made it twice in books published four years apart.

³⁶ This comment is not meant in any way to disparage Dr. Geisler. He has been a wonderful defender of the Christian faith and his work has been of great benefit to the Church. What this comment does show is that everyone has a bias that can lead to making egregious mistakes.

³⁷ Please not that Philo and Josephus were not church fathers. Philo was a Hellenistic Jew and Josephus was a Jewish general and historian.

³⁸ Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, p. 108.

³⁹ Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question*, (Navpress: Colorado Springs, CO 2001) p. 67.

⁴⁰ From Robert Bradshaw's in-depth study, *Genesis, Creationism and the Early Church*, chapter 3. <www.robibrad.demon.co.uk/Chapter3.htm>, August 13, 2003 cited in Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, p. 121.

⁴¹ Batten, *Answers Book*, p. 34.

give the history of many thousand years, though, reckoning, by the sacred writings, we find that not 6,000 years have yet passed.⁴²

Mark Noll's *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* raised some legitimate concerns regarding evangelicalism's inability to influence modern academia. Unfortunately, Noll spends an entire chapter accusing YECs for being one of the leading causes behind this problem. Even though he is a first-rate historian, it is alarming to see the amount of misinformation Noll advanced in this book. Relying heavily on a book by Ronald Numbers, Noll claims that YEC originated with Seventh-day Adventism.

[Creationism] has spread like wildfire in our century from its humble beginnings in the writings of Ellen White, the founder of Seventh-day Adventism, to its current status as a gospel truth embraced by tens of millions of Bible-believing evangelicals and fundamentalists around the world.⁴³

Regrettably, on the very next page Noll turns to Numbers for the following ridiculous claim concerning creationism:

Numbers described how a fatally flawed interpretive scheme [YEC] of the sort that no responsible Christian teacher in the history of the church ever endorsed before this century came to dominate the minds of American evangelicals on scientific questions.⁴⁴

First, YEC did not begin with the writings of Ellen White, who lived from 1827 – 1915. Dr. Terry Mortenson's thesis dealt with a handful of "scriptural geologists" who lived and taught in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The arguments employed by these men are identical to those used by modern YECs.⁴⁵ Moreover, Noll's reasoning is poor because he commits a logical error known as the genetic fallacy.⁴⁶ Whether or not YEC began with Ellen White would have no bearing on its truth or falsity.

Second, Noll's claim that "no responsible Christian teacher" has ever endorsed YEC is simply false. Surely Martin Luther could be called a "responsible Christian teacher." He made his position on the days of creation clear:

When Moses writes that God created heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this period continue to have been six days, and do not venture to devise any comment according to which six days were one day. But if you cannot understand how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are. For you are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind that God Himself says what is written. But since God is

⁴² Augustine, *De Civitate Dei (The City of God)*, 12(10).

⁴³ Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, MI 1994) p. 13.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴⁵ Mortenson, *The Great Turning Point*, p. 15.

⁴⁶ In logic, the genetic fallacy occurs when one confuses the origin of a view with the truth of the view. It may be a good strategy in a courtroom (i.e. discrediting the witness) but it has no bearing on truth or the validity of an argument.

speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go.⁴⁷

Luther was not the only “responsible Christian teacher” in Church history who believed the days of Genesis 1 were literal 24-hour days and the earth was approximately 6,000 years old. John Calvin wrote:

For it is not without significance that he divided the making of the universe into six days, even though it would have been no more difficult for him to have completed in one moment the whole work together in all its details than to arrive at its completion gradually by a progression of this sort.⁴⁸

In this statement, Calvin explicitly denied an instantaneous creation, which was a view commonly held in his day but did not necessarily address those who believe the days were long periods of time.⁴⁹ However, Calvin’s use of the word day was obviously referring to a normal day of twenty-four hours. For example, he wrote, “They will not remain from guffaws when they are informed that but little more than five thousand years have passed since the creation of the universe.”⁵⁰

Improper Hermeneutics

Over the past century a different approach to this debate has gained acceptance. Some OECs have sought to reconcile the apparent conflict between science and Scripture by changing hermeneutical guidelines. A. Berkeley Mickelsen authored a comprehensive textbook on hermeneutics. In an otherwise outstanding work, Mickelsen advocated a unique approach be applied to the Genesis text. He writes, “the age of the universe, the nature of light, [and] the time and procedures by which God prepared the earth for habitation of man are not touched upon at all [in the Bible].”⁵¹ By applying the standard historical-grammatical hermeneutic to the Book of Genesis it is easy to see that Mickelsen is dead wrong. First, the age of the universe can be calculated to within a few generations by adding up the ages given in the genealogies. Even if one allows for gaps in the genealogies it is absurd to try to fit tens of thousands of years or more into the record.⁵² Second, it is rather easy to conclude that it took God five ordinary days plus a part of the sixth day to prepare the earth for the “habitation of man.”

⁴⁷ *What Luther Says. A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, compiled by Ewald M. Plass, Concordia, 1959, p. 1523.

⁴⁸ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, J.T. McNeill, editor (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960), 1.14.22

⁴⁹ An instantaneous creation was popular because many sought to fit Greek philosophical beliefs concerning creation into the text. This is probably the reason Calvin did not write against the idea of long periods of time – no one held that view so it did not need to be refuted.

⁵⁰ Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:925.

⁵¹ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans 1963) p. 307.

⁵² The case for open genealogies in Genesis 5, 10, and 11 is surprisingly weak. The inclusion of the “extra Cainan” (see Luke 3: 36 and Genesis 11: 12) is most likely a copyist error since it did not appear in the earliest Lucan manuscripts. See J. Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, pp. 295 – 297.

Another old-earther, Bernard Ramm also sought to ignore the plain language of the creation account by applying an illogical and dangerous approach to its interpretation. He stated, "No interpretation of Genesis 1 is more mature than the science that guides it."⁵³ In context, Ramm was referring to the fact that hermeneutics is a science. As such, one can only be as sure of his interpretation as he is of his science of interpretation. There is certainly a great deal of truth in this statement; however, it is incongruous to reserve this assertion to the Genesis text alone. After all, if one applies the same dictum to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, he will find that these accounts must refer to something other than a bodily resurrection since the majority of scientists do not believe that resurrections are possible. If proper interpretation of biblical texts depends on the approval of modern scientific opinion then interpretation with any degree of certainty becomes impossible.

In fact, Ramm confessed that scientific philosophy should carry great weight in one's exegesis when he wrote:

"If uniformitarianism makes a scientific case for itself to a Christian scholar, that Christian scholar has every right to believe it, and if he is a man and not a coward he will believe it in spite of the intimidation that he is supposedly gone over into the camp of the enemy."⁵⁴

This startling admission illustrates the dangerous hermeneutic Ramm advocated. That is, if scientific opinion contradicts one's understanding of God's Word then one must change his view of Scripture rather than his view of science.⁵⁵

The great Princeton theologian, Charles Hodge, had adopted this view well before Ramm. In his *Systematic Theology*, Hodge promoted the Day-Age Theory as a viable interpretation of Genesis one. He wrote:

It is of course admitted that, taking this account by itself, it would be most natural to understand the word in its ordinary sense; but if that sense brings the Mosaic account into conflict with facts, and another sense avoids such conflict, then it is obligatory on us to adopt that other.⁵⁶

In this example, Hodge actually encouraged Bible students to ignore the proper interpretation of the text if that interpretation caused a conflict with scientific "fact." The problem is that the scientific "facts" promoted by Hodge have changed while the Bible has remained the same. As a result, when one adopts this hermeneutic, the meaning of God's Word must change whenever scientific opinion changes. Certainly, this is an illogical approach to the Word of One whose words will never pass away (Matt. 24: 35).

Like Mickelsen, some have argued that the first chapter of Genesis should not necessarily be considered historical narrative. Instead, supporters of the Framework Hypothesis claim that Genesis one is simply a literary framework and should not be

⁵³ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House 1970) p. 213.

⁵⁴ Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishers 1954) p. 171.

⁵⁵ This view is extremely hazardous. Scientific views are developed by fallible people who were not around to observe the events they are studying. Meanwhile God's Word is inspired by the One who is infallible and is responsible for the events being studied.

⁵⁶ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*. Originally published 1872. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) pp 570 – 571.

viewed as a strict chronological account of creation events. Meredith Kline of Westminster Theological Seminary developed this approach. Kline stated his purpose for developing this view in his introductory paragraph:

To *rebut the literalist interpretation* of the Genesis creation week propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article. At the same time, the exegetical evidence adduced *also refutes the harmonistic day-age view*. The conclusion is that as far as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the *scientist is left free of biblical constraints* in hypothesizing about cosmic origins.⁵⁷ (italics added for emphasis)

Kline's intentions are clear. His goals are to rebut "young-earth theorists"⁵⁸ and to free the scientist from any biblical constraints when "hypothesizing about cosmic origins."⁵⁹ One must wonder about Kline's motives here. While he does address the text in his paper, his conclusion that the scientist is free from any biblical constraints makes it clear that the text is virtually meaningless in terms of coming to a sound conclusion. If Kline is correct, why did God include this in His Word in the first place?

Kline and the others are misguided in their attempts to re-label the genre of the Genesis text. Dr. Steven Boyd, a Hebrew Professor at The Master's College, recently conducted a statistical examination of narrative and poetic passages in Scripture. He also analyzed the ratio of preterites to total finite verbs and found that the Genesis text is undoubtedly historical narrative. Dr. Don DeYoung summarized Boyd's findings:

The distribution of finite verbs in Hebrew narrative writing differs distinctly from that used in poetry. Moreover, statistical analysis categorizes biblical texts as narrative or poetry to a high level of accuracy. Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 is determined to be narrative with a probability of virtually one [the highest]. There follow at least three major implications from this study. First, it is not statistically defensible to interpret Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 as poetry or metaphor. Second, since Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 clearly is narrative, it should be read as other Hebrew narratives are intended to be read. That is, the creation account describes actual events which carry an unmistakable theological message. Third, when Genesis 1: 1 – 2: 3 is read as narrative, there is only one tenable view: God created everything during six literal days. This is surely the plain, direct intention of the text.⁶⁰

Another argument that has been raised against the young earth position attempts to redefine the Genesis account as nothing more than a polemic against the surrounding idolatrous peoples. Conrad Hyers wrote:

In the light of this historical context it becomes clearer what Genesis 1 is undertaking and accomplishing: a radical and sweeping

⁵⁷ Meredith Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48: 2 1996. Also available at <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/PSCF/1996/PSCF3-96Kline.html>

⁵⁸ Kline has no love for the young earth position, which he calls "a deplorable disservice to the cause of biblical truth." *Ibid.*, footnote #47.

⁵⁹ Interestingly enough, Kline claims that his paper refutes the Day-Age Theory. The fact that the alternative views of the creation days refute each other is evidence in favor of the young earth position.

⁶⁰ Dr. Don DeYoung, *Thousands...Not Billions* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books 2005) p. 169.

affirmation of monotheism vis-à-vis polytheism, syncretism and idolatry. Each day of creation takes on two principal categories of divinity in the pantheons of the day, and declares that these are not gods at all, but creatures - creations of the one true God who is the only one, without a second or third. Each day dismisses an additional cluster of deities, arranged in a cosmological and symmetrical order.⁶¹

Rather than being an historical report of actual events in space and time. Hyers proposed that each of the days of creation was written to counter the deities of the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Assyrians. Although most evangelicals would consider Hyers a theological liberal due to his acceptance of the now defunct JEPD theory his ideas are influencing evangelicals.⁶²

Hyers claims fail for several reasons. First, he placed the authorship of Genesis in the 5th century following the Babylonian captivity. If Genesis was composed during the life of Moses then Hyers' theory collapses. While they may have been well acquainted with Egyptian mythologies, the wilderness wandering Jews would not have been heavily influenced by the mythologies of Assyria and Babylon. Second, there is nothing in the text to indicate its alleged polemical nature even though it most certainly could be used as a polemic due to its historicity. This leads the third fatal problem with Hyers' view. It would be nonsensical to develop a polemic against pagan mythologies that is nothing more than mythology itself. The only effective polemic is one that is based on real history. If Hyers is correct then one is left to choose one mythology over another.

Pragmatic Appeals

Perhaps the most frustrating argument used by some OECs is that YECs are hindering the work of evangelism. Dr. Hugh Ross wrote, "As circumcision distorted the gospel and hampered evangelism, so, too, does young earth creationism."⁶³ Both sides of this debate are quick to tout their effectiveness in reaching the lost. No doubt, the lost have been reached through the work of both OECs and YECs.

Dr. Robert Pyne of Dallas Theological Seminary put forth a slightly different version of this argument. In the seminary's latest systematic theology work, Pyne likened the creation v. evolution debate to a ballgame. The problem for creationists is that the rules of the game only allow for naturalistic explanations of the world's origin. Hence, theists must be disqualified but many of them refuse to exit the field. Pyne writes, "From that vantage point [the seats] we can see that those who still try to play the game are failing, but they have convinced themselves they are succeeding. We call attention to their failure, but only to criticize the futility of the game itself."⁶⁴

⁶¹ Conrad Hyers, "What Genesis is Really About?" Originally published in Reports of the National Center for Science Education 18: 3. Available online at http://www.ncseweb.org/resources/rncse_content/vol18/328_what_genesis_is_ireallyi_12_30_1899.asp.

⁶² In the past month, two conservative evangelical pastors have told this author that Genesis was merely a polemic against their pagan neighbors.

⁶³ Dr. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress 1994) p. 162.

⁶⁴ Charles Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, General editors, *Understanding Christian Theology* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers 2003) p. 657. In this particular statement, Pyne does not single out YEC. Nevertheless, he concludes by proposing that YEC is probably the wrong view.

Contrary to Pyne's statement, the game is not futile, especially in light of the earlier statement that souls have been saved through the efforts of creationist ministries. Unfortunately, Pyne has been caught up in the movement that seeks to legitimize some form of creationism by gaining acceptance among secular academia.⁶⁵ Pyne wrote, "However, I, too, would prefer to see contemporary discussions turn to the more winnable (and more significant) issue of intelligent design."⁶⁶ God has not commanded His people to play the game by the world's standards. He has called His people to proclaim His Word because it will accomplish His purpose (Isa. 55: 11).

The issue of intelligent design may be "more winnable" according to the rules of Pyne's naturalistic game but it is certainly not "more significant." More than one billion Muslims believe in intelligent design but are still lost because they do not know the Intelligent Designer who has revealed Himself in His Word. The purpose of the creation v. evolution debate is not to teach people to believe in a creator but to place their faith in THE Creator.

Actually, the debate between OECs and YECs is not really about the age of the earth and universe. Primarily, it comes down to biblical authority.⁶⁷ Did God really do what He said He did in Genesis one? If it really took Him billions of years to create everything then He could have stated that in His Word.

"Creation Agnosticism"

Ultimately, Pyne's conclusion that dinosaurs probably lived "a long, long time ago" and that "it looks like they all died before any people got to see them"⁶⁸ reveals another approach used by theologians who favor the OEC view. He continues, "Some of our friends [YECs] think people did see them, and they may turn out to be right."⁶⁹ This tactic seems to be gaining acceptance among conservative scholars. Briefly stated, the Bible does not give enough information about the age of the earth so one really cannot base his conclusions on Scripture. Instead, one should look to science to answer such questions.

In his *Systematic Theology*, Wayne Grudem advocates this idea that one cannot really know:

Therefore, with respect to the length of days in Genesis 1, the possibility must be left open that God has chosen not to give us enough information to come to a clear decision on this question, and the real test of faithfulness to him may be the degree to which we can act charitably

⁶⁵ This is the approach advocated by the Intelligent Design movement. While they may rightly be considered a scientific movement, their goal is to gain the world's respect and gain an equal hearing in the public forum. This certainly would be interesting to see but this pragmatic approach could never serve as an adequate test for the truth or falsity of the young earth creationist's position.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 671.

⁶⁷ Ken Ham has been arguing this point for at least the past seven years. He wrote an article entitled "A Young Earth – It's not the Issue!" that was published on Answers in Genesis' website. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs/1866.asp>. He delivered a lecture by the same title at the Creation 2001 conference in West Harrison, IN.

⁶⁸ Charles Swindoll and Roy B. Zuck, General editors, *Understanding Christian Theology*, p. 671.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

toward those who in good conscience and full belief in God's Word hold to a different position on this matter.⁷⁰

Grudem's second point is appropriate and echoes the purpose of this paper. True debate can only occur when sound arguments are utilized in a civil manner. However, it is Grudem's first point that must be scrutinized. Nothing in the text of Genesis 1 or any other place in Scripture, for that matter, would indicate an age of the earth beyond 10,000 years. Grudem recognized the considerable strength of the YEC's theological position:

At present, considerations of the power of God's creative word and the immediacy with which it seems to bring response, the fact that "evening and morning" and the numbering of days still suggest twenty-four-hour days, and the fact that God would seem to have no purpose for delaying the creation of man for thousands or even millions of years seem to me to be strong considerations in favor of the twenty-four-hour day position.⁷¹

Nevertheless, he refuses to take a stand because of a non-contextual argument⁷² and the alleged age of the universe.

In his influential *Genesis in Space and Time*, popular Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer also sought to avoid the debate by pleading "creation agnosticism." After listing three possible interpretations of *yom*, Schaeffer concluded:

Therefore, we must leave open the exact length of time indicated by day in Genesis. From the study of the word in Hebrew, it is not clear which way it is to be taken; it could be either way. In the light of the word as used in the Bible and the lack of finality of science concerning the problem of dating, in a sense there is no debate, because there are no clearly defined terms upon which to debate.⁷³

Christian apologist and philosopher J. P. Moreland has used this tactic as well. On at least two occasions, Moreland stated, "I'm an old earth creationist five days out of the week; I'm a young earth creationist two days out of the week."⁷⁴ One must wonder why Moreland waffles so much on this issue. Could it be that he truly believes the Bible teaches a young earth but cannot bring himself to believe it because of scientific opinion? Apparently, this is precisely the reason. During a lecture at Northshore Church in Everett, WA on February 2, 2002, Moreland demonstrated an acceptance of scientific opinion. Also, Moreland refused to address the biblical arguments for a young earth. Instead, he appealed to authority when he cited fellow OECs Walter Kaiser and Gleason Archer.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1994) p. 297.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Grudem cites 2 Peter 3: 8 to show that "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This popular argument will be dealt with shortly.

⁷³ Francis Schaeffer, *The Complete Words of Francis A. Schaeffer: Genesis in Space and Time* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1982) p. 39.

⁷⁴ Moreland made these remarks during at least two Association of Christian Schools International conventions: November 2000 in Denver, CO and October 2003 in Minneapolis, MN.

⁷⁵ Moreland's comments are available at Dr. Hugh Ross' website http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/moreland_jp_age_of_earth.shtml?main

Straw Men

Moreland's comments at Northshore Church introduce some more poor arguments in the OEC arsenal. In an effort to repudiate the YEC position, Moreland linked YEC to the myths that Scripture teaches geocentrism and a flat earth.⁷⁶ This approach is typical from OECs and naturalistic evolutionists.⁷⁷ Contrary to popular opinion, the Church as a whole never accepted the concept of a flat earth and neither does Scripture. In fact, the Bible reveals the earth is round in several places.

As for geocentrism, it matters not that many in the medieval Church held to it. The Bible does not teach it. This straw man is based on a hyper-literal reading of Joshua 10: 12 – 13. However, it is quite obvious that Joshua was simply using the language of appearance as is commonly employed by trained meteorologists today when they speak of the sun "rising" and "setting."

OECs try to make the connection between YEC and these two straw men because they wish to demonstrate that YEC is based on an over-literal interpretation of the text. In fact, YECs are often called "literalists."⁷⁸ Once again, this argument fails. YECs would generally accept being called "literalists" but not in the form that OECs misuse the term. What OECs typically refer to in this context would be more accurately called "letterism." Letterism does not allow for the use of figurative or poetic language. Instead, everything is to be taken at face value. YECs do not accept this hermeneutic and use the historical-grammatical approach, which allows the various literary styles and interprets them as such.⁷⁹ The problem for the OEC is that Genesis 1 is clearly written in narrative form.

Taking the lead from Bible skeptics and critics, some OECs introduce the infamous trial of Galileo in an effort to attack YEC. By posturing the Galileo affair as a battle over religious interpretation and scientific fact, OECs claim that the Church's interpretation was wrong in the 17th century and needed to be adjusted according to the latest scientific findings. Similarly, YECs hold a wrong interpretation of Scripture that needs to be conformed to popular scientific views.⁸⁰ The whole Galileo controversy has been distorted. It is true that some religious leaders of the day held to a geocentric view of the universe. Nevertheless, Galileo found himself in trouble with Rome, not because of his scientific views but because of his harsh criticism of the pope.⁸¹ In fact, many Jesuit astronomers of the day had already rejected the Ptolemaic system.⁸² It is simply a mistake to link YEC with the Church of Galileo's day.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See "Did Bible Writers Believe the Earth Was Flat?" at ChristianAnswers.net (<http://www.christiananswers.net/q-eden/edn-c015.html>)

⁷⁸ As cited in an earlier quote, Meredith Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48: 2 1996.

⁷⁹ For an excellent summary of the YEC hermeneutic, see Russell Grigg, "Should Genesis Be Taken Literally?" *Creation* 16: 1 (December 1993) pp. 38 – 41.

⁸⁰ Craig Rusbult, Ph.D., "Age of the Earth: Why it Does and Doesn't Matter" published on ASA's website, <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/origins/whyoe.htm>

⁸¹ Thomas Schirrmacher, "The Galileo Affair: History or Heroic Hagiography?" *TJ* 14: 1 (April 2000) pp. 91 – 100.

⁸² Ibid.

Numerous straw man arguments are leveled against the events recorded in Genesis 1. Perhaps the most popular argument in this vein used by modern OECs is that the events of day six could not have taken place in the span of twenty-four hours.

Gleason Archer summarizes this alleged problem:

...We are told that God created Adam first, gave him the responsibility of tending the Garden of Eden *for some time* until He observed him to be lonely. He then granted him the fellowship of *all the beasts and animals of earth*, with opportunity to bestow names upon them *all*. Some *undetermined period after* that, God observed that Adam *was still lonely* and *finally* fashioned a human wife for him by means of a rib removed from him during a “deep sleep.” Then *at last* he brought Eve before Adam and presented her to him as his new life partner. Who can imagine that all of these transactions could possibly have taken place *in 120 minutes* of the sixth day (or even within twenty-four hours, for that matter)? And yet *Gen. 1:27 states that both Adam and Eve were created at the very end of the final day of creation*. Obviously the “days” of chapter 1 are intended to represent stages of unspecified length, not literal twenty-four-hour days.⁸³ (italics added for emphasis)

The italics were added to emphasize the amount of eisegesis performed by Archer on this text. Notice Archer’s attempt to add time to this day with the use of words and phrases like “at last,” “finally,” “undetermined period after,” and “still lonely.” Nowhere does Genesis 2 state that Adam needed to tend the Garden “for some time” before he named the animals. He was put there so that he would tend the Garden (v. 15). Neither does the text state that Adam had “fellowship” with and named “all the beasts and animals of the earth.” Adam only named the cattle, beasts of the field, and birds of the air (v. 20). It has been demonstrated that Adam could have easily named each of these creatures in less than four hours, while taking a five-minute break every hour!⁸⁴ Also, the Bible does not say that all of this took place in the final two hours of the sixth day. Finally, Genesis 1: 27 does not state that Adam and Eve were created at “the very end” of the sixth day. God could have easily created the land animals in the first hour of the day, formed Adam from dust shortly after, and later in the day created Eve from Adam’s rib.

Despite his eisegetical insertions, other OECs have followed Archer’s example and even added their own ideas. For example, Norman Geisler claims that God’s statement “I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2: 18) implies a period time between the proclamation and the actual performance.⁸⁵ Yet God could have put Adam to sleep immediately after making the statement. Geisler attempts to squeeze more time into day six by writing that “Adam indicated he had anticipated Eve for some time” (Gen. 2: 23). Here is what the text actually says, “And Adam said: ‘This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.’” Where does Adam indicate that he “anticipated Eve for some time?” Paul Copan repeats this error in his review of Dr. Hugh Ross’ book *Creation and Time*. Copan

⁸³ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. [3rd. ed.]. Chicago: Moody Press, 1998, c1994.

⁸⁴ Andrew Kulikovsky, “How Could Adam have Named All the Animals in a Single Day?” *Creation* 27: 3 (June 2005) pp. 27 – 28.

⁸⁵ Geisler, *ST II*, p. 643.

inserts the words “At last!” into Adam’s mouth when he saw Eve.⁸⁶ These are classic examples of the OEC’s concerted efforts to deny the plain reading of the text.

Dr. Ross has tried to avoid the obvious problem of death before sin by claiming that plants must have died prior to Adam’s sin. Since Adam, Eve, and the animals used energy they must have eaten food. Genesis 1: 29 – 30 reveals what that food was when it states that both man and animal were to eat plants. Dr. Ross concludes, “The death of at least plants or plant parts must have occurred before Adam sinned.”⁸⁷

The problem with Ross’ argument is not that plants were eaten but that they experienced death in the same sense that animals and humans do. The Bible makes a distinction between animal life and plant “life.” YECs point out that only creatures described as *nephesh chayyah* (“living soul” or “living creature”) could not have died before the Fall. Plants are never described as *nephesh chayyah* nor does the Bible ever say that plants die.⁸⁸ It may also be helpful to point out that when one eats an apple or when a cow eats grass, it does not kill the plant but only removes a portion of it.

Contextual Conflicts

Much of the debate often centers on the meaning of *yom*, the Hebrew word for day. OECs are quick to point out that this word can mean something other than an ordinary twenty-four hour day. YECs admit this fact but remind OECs to look at the context. In response to this argument, OECs have crafted a few popular but faulty arguments.

Again, Norman Geisler illustrates this poor reasoning. While responding to YEC arguments concerning the normal meaning of the word day, he wrote:

It is true that most often the Hebrew word *yom* (“day”) means “twenty-four hours.” However, this is not definitive for its meaning in Genesis 1 for several reasons.

First, the meaning of a term is not determined by majority vote, but by the context in which it is used. It is not important how many times it is used elsewhere, but how it is used here.

Second, even in the creation story in Genesis 1 – 2, “day” (*yom*) is used of more than a twenty-four-hour period. Speaking of the whole six “days” of creation, Genesis 2: 4 refers to it as “the day” (*yom*) when all things were created.

Third, and finally, *yom* is elsewhere used of long periods of time, as in Psalm 90: 4, which is cited in 2 Peter 3: 8: “A day is like a thousand years.”⁸⁹

First, it must be pointed out that Genesis 2: 4 does not refer to the day when “all things were created.” It refers to the “day when God made the earth and the heavens.” It

⁸⁶ Paul Copan, Book Review of Dr. Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation Date Controversy*. *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Volume 39, Vol. 39, 1996, p. 307.

⁸⁷ Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days*, (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004) p. 98.

⁸⁸ Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, p. 205. The Bible states that plants wither but never claims that they die.

⁸⁹ Geisler, *ST II*, p. 639.

may be legitimate to interpret this as referring to the entire creation week prior to Adam; however, it may also be referring to the first day when “God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1: 1) or perhaps the first two days. John MacArthur points out, “Verse 4 gives a summary of days one and two, before the vegetation of day three.”⁹⁰ If the second option were correct, then this example of the word “day” would still refer to a twenty-four hour period. Nevertheless, most YECs admit this is an example in which *yom* does refer to something other than a twenty-four hour period.

Second, despite Geisler’s plea for sticking with context, his two examples are not part of the context. Although Genesis 2: 4 is in the creation account it is not part of the narrative reporting of the first six days, each of which is paired with an ordinal or cardinal number⁹¹ as well as the phrase “evening and morning.”

Geisler again ignores his contextual plea by quoting 2 Peter 3: 8. This strategy is extremely common but is completely unfounded. First, Geisler does not finish the quote, which actually states “A day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” If this is supposed to offer support for the OEC view it is difficult to see how it can. For example, if this is a mathematical equation that proves the days were long periods of time then one must include the second part of the verse and the equation would be 1 day = 1,000 years = 1 day. This does not help the OEC position at all. Second, this quote is found in a passage dealing with the upcoming return of Christ. It is simply referring to the fact that God is not bound by time so even though it may seem like a long time to man, God is not neglecting His promise. Finally, even if this verse did support long periods of time for the days of creation, it only gives the OEC another 6,000 years with which to work. It does precious little in terms of fitting billions of years into the text.

A major problem for OECs is that there are several Hebrew words that could have been used in place of *yom* if the author meant to convey the idea of long periods of time. Russell Grigg highlighted this point in “How Long Were the Days of Creation?”⁹² Grigg cites ten Hebrew words that would have made much more sense than *yom* if the days were long periods of time. Appropriately, he asks:

Why did God not use any of these words with reference to the creation days, seeing that He used them to describe other things? Clearly it was His intention that the creation days should be regarded as being normal earth-rotation days, and it was not His intention that any longer time-frames should be inferred.⁹³

Improper View of General and Special Revelation

God has chosen to reveal Himself to man through various means that can be divided into two categories: general and special revelation. General revelation consists of

⁹⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing 1997) Gen. 2: 4 note.

⁹¹ The first day appears with a cardinal number. Days two through six are paired with ordinal numbers.

⁹² Russell Grigg, “How Long Were the Days of Genesis 1? What Did God Intend Us to Understand from the Words He Used?” *Creation* 19: 1 (December 1996) pp. 23 – 25.

⁹³ *Ibid.* This article is also available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/creation/v19/i1/days.asp#r4>.

information that has been available to all people throughout all time.⁹⁴ God's creation is often cited as a source of general revelation.⁹⁵ Special revelation is made up of Scripture and God the Son when He walked the earth. According to Romans 1: 20, general revelation can provide enough information to condemn a person. Only special revelation can provide the information necessary to save a person. Obviously, both are helpful tools in evangelism but Christians must be careful to keep them in proper perspective.

Some OECs are guilty of elevating general revelation to the same level as special revelation. Dr. Ross wrote:

God's revelation is not limited exclusively to the Bible's words. The facts of nature may be likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible....Some readers might feel that I am implying that God's revelation through nature is somehow on an equal footing with His revelation through the words of the Bible. Let me simply state that truth, by definition, is information that is perfectly free of contradiction and error. Just as it is absurd to speak of some entity as more perfect than another, so also one revelation of God's truth cannot be held as inferior or superior to another.⁹⁶

Even though Ross attempts to deny that he is placing general revelation on par with special revelation, he is doing exactly that. Ross also errs in what he calls general revelation as he confuses his interpretation of nature with fact.

An important distinction must be made. God's creation is suffering from six thousand years of the Curse while Scripture is "God-breathed" and therefore inerrant (2 Tim. 3: 16). General revelation cannot be "likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible" because it is fallible. This does not mean that it cannot provide man with accurate information but it does mean that it is not of the same caliber as God's Word. One of Dr. Ross' favorite Bible passages unmistakably illustrates this point. Psalm 19: 1 pronounces, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork." The psalmist is speaking of general revelation here and reiterates that it testifies to the existence and majesty of the Creator. Nevertheless, a few verses later, the psalmist reveals that God's Word is superior. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul" (Psalm 19: 7). Notice it is special revelation that is capable of converting the soul.

Creation of Adam and Eve

As stated above, YECs often cite Jesus' statements on marriage as solid evidence in support of their view. Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus' exchange with the Pharisees. When questioned about marriage and divorce, Jesus replied, "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female...'" (Matt. 19: 4; cf. Mark 10: 4 – 9). Few OECs seem willing to comment on this argument.

⁹⁴ Dr. Ross incorrectly claims that modern scientific discoveries are a source of general revelation. However, since this information was not readily available to all people in history it cannot be considered as general revelation.

⁹⁵ Human conscience is sometimes considered to be general revelation as well.

⁹⁶ Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 56 – 57.

Wayne Grudem did not favor one view over the other in his systematic theology; however, he did attempt to offer an OEC's response to this argument.

[The YEC] argument also has some force, but old earth advocates may respond that Jesus is just referring to the whole of Genesis 1 – 2 as the “beginning of creation,” in contrast to the argument from the laws given by Moses that the Pharisees were depending on.⁹⁷

This interpretation is certainly not the natural reading of the text since Jesus said that male and female were created “at the beginning.” It is highly unlikely that the Lord would call the first 10 – 20 billion years “the beginning” when He knew there would only be thousands of years left before the consummation.

Norman Geisler also addressed this argument but focused on Mark's recording of the conversation. Mark wrote, “But from the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female” (Mark 10: 5). Geisler offered three arguments to refute the YEC position.

First, Adam was not created at the beginning but at the end of the creation period (on the sixth day), no matter how long or short the days were.

Second, the Greek word for “create” (*ktisis*) can and sometimes does mean “institution” or “ordinance” (cf. 1 Peter 2: 13). Since Jesus is speaking of the institution of marriage in Mark 10: 6, it could mean “from the beginning of the institution of marriage.”

Third, and finally, even if Mark 10: 6 is speaking of the original creation events, it does not mean there could not have been a long period of time involved in those creative events.⁹⁸

These arguments will be discussed in the order presented. In the first argument, Geisler strains at a gnat to swallow the proverbial camel. From this response, if Jesus was referring to the creation of man and woman then He lied whether it was billions of years after creation began or only on the sixth literal day. It seems that Geisler probably opts for the second argument in which he claims Jesus was simply referring to the “creation” or “institution” of marriage. Of the nineteen times *ktisis* appears in the Bible, only once is it translated as “institution” or “ordinance” but is translated as “creation” or “creature” seventeen times. Geisler is correct that it could be translated as “institution” or “ordinance” although it is rarely used this way. However, Geisler's argument fails because the parallel passage in Matthew does not use this word at all. Instead, Matthew uses *arche*, a Greek word that, in this context, cannot be referring to anything but the creation event. Finally, Geisler's third argument shows a complete misunderstanding of the young earth position. If Mark, and Matthew, were “speaking of the original creation events” it absolutely means there could not have been a long period of time involved in those creative events. For example, even if hundreds of years elapsed before Adam and Eve were created, there is no possible way for Jesus to be correct in His assertion that God made Adam and Eve “at the beginning.” Notice that this becomes a major problem

⁹⁷ Grudem, *ST*, p. 297.

⁹⁸ Geisler, *ST II*, p. 642.

when one adds hundreds of years. How much more severe is the problem if the desired billions of years are added?

The Length of the Seventh Day

The final argument to be critiqued is commonly cited as evidence that the first six days could have been longer than ordinary days. Again, Geisler's comments summarize this contention:

Everyone agrees that it has been at least thousands of years since the time of creation, yet the Bible declares that God rested on the seventh day after His six days of creation (Gen. 2: 2 – 3). According to the book of Hebrews, God is still in His Sabbath rest from creation (4: 3 – 5); hence, the seventh day has been at least six thousand years long, even on the shortest of all the chronologies of humankind.⁹⁹

Although his logic is typically very sound, it escapes Geisler here. Hebrews 4: 3 – 5 actually states:

“For we who have believed do enter that rest, as He has said: ‘So I swore in My wrath, ‘They shall not enter My rest,’ although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He has spoken in a certain place of the seventh day in this way: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all His works’; and again in this place: ‘They shall not enter My rest.’”

First, notice that the text does not say that the seventh day of the creation week is continuing to the present day. It merely reveals that God entered His rest on the seventh day. As *The Revised and Expanded Answers Book* aptly points out, “If someone says on Monday that he rested on Friday and is still resting, this would not suggest that Friday continued through to Monday!”¹⁰⁰ This popular OEC argument creates a theological problem as well. John Whitcomb illustrated this problem over thirty years ago:

... We must assume that the seventh day was a literal day because Adam and Eve lived through it before God drove them out of the Garden. Surely, he would not have cursed the earth during the seventh day which he blessed and sanctified (Gen. 2: 1 – 3; Exod. 31: 12 – 17).¹⁰¹

OECs also point out that the seventh day does not contain the familiar “evening and morning” phrase. As such, the seventh day must be a long period of time in accordance with their interpretation of Hebrews 4: 3 – 5. If the seventh day can be a longer period of time then surely the first six days could be as well. This argument actually proves too much. If the exclusion of the phrase “evening and morning” allows the seventh day to be longer then this is really unintentional admission that the first six days were literal twenty-four hour days.

⁹⁹ Geisler, *ST II*, p. 643.

¹⁰⁰ Batten, ed., *The Answers Book*, p. 49.

¹⁰¹ John C. Whitcomb, Jr., “The Science of Historical Geology,” *Westminster Theological Journal*, Volume 36, 1974, p. 68.

Finally, one should not press the idea of God's rest from His creative works too far. The author of Hebrews used it as an analogy of the spiritual rest offered to those who trust in Christ. Also, to believe that God is still resting seems to run contrary to all of the miraculous events in Scripture. Some of these miracles involved the creative works such as the Lord's feeding of the five thousand (Matt. 14: 21) and the four thousand (Matt. 15: 34 – 38). Jesus declared, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John 5: 17).

Recommendations for Improving the Debate

Debate can be healthy for the Church. Because of man's fallibility it is guaranteed that differences of opinion will arise. It is in these moments that the Church must show the world how to behave properly. Unfortunately, believers often allow their emotions, biases, and pride to get the best of them. There are three major areas that must be worked on from both sides of this debate. Only then can "iron sharpen iron" (Prov. 27: 17).

First, both sides need to practice academic integrity. For the young earth position, this would entail applying rigorous discipline to scientific endeavors. Rather than making spectacular claims based on sketchy evidence¹⁰² or searching for the "magic bullet" that "proves" a young age of the earth, YECs need to continue to develop scientific models that fit the evidence. The past decade has witnessed a great deal of progress for YECs but there is still work to be done.¹⁰³

For the OEC this will be a tougher pill to swallow. It will require an abandonment of the weak and misleading arguments critiqued in this paper. It will also necessitate that OECs stop using arguments that have already been answered by mainstream YEC organizations. Finally, this will demand that OECs stop attacking the arguments made by those on the fringe of YEC and deal with those from the leading YEC organizations.¹⁰⁴

Second, personal attacks are unnecessary and unbiblical.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps the most frustrating part of any debate occurs when one or both sides resort to ad hominem attacks to advance their particular agenda. Once again, both sides of this particular debate are guilty of this. In his debate with Dr. Ross on the John Ankerberg Show, Dr. Kent Hovind repeatedly wondered aloud whether or not Dr. Ross was a cult leader and worshipped a different god. Even though he defined "cult" as a group that needs a guru to explain the

¹⁰² These are precisely the types of arguments that Dr. Sarfati sought to eradicate in "Moving Forward: Arguments We Think Creationists Should Not Use." Still, some YEC speakers tout questionable evidences in support of YEC. While some may turn out to be right, caution is advised to diminish the likelihood of future embarrassment.

¹⁰³ For example, Dr. Russell Humphreys white hole cosmology uses the scientific data available today to construct a viable framework that is consistent with the evidence. Dr. John Baumgardner has used computer modeling to demonstrate rapid plate tectonic movement after the flood. Further developments in cosmologies and flood geology can only help the YEC movement.

¹⁰⁴ The leading organizations would include Answers in Genesis, The Institute for Creation Research, and the Creation Research Society.

¹⁰⁵ Paul reminded the Corinthians that he was in the business of "casting down arguments" not people (2 Cor. 10: 5).

meaning of a text, the emotions engendered by his terminology unnecessarily hurt the debate.

In the same way, OECs must refrain from labeling YEC as unscientific and on a level of those who hold to geocentricity and a flat earth. While demonstrating Martin Luther's belief in the scientific accuracy of Scripture, Dr. Geisler sought to lump Luther's views on geocentricity in with his belief that the days of Genesis were literal twenty-four hour days.¹⁰⁶ Logic once again escapes Geisler as he commits the fallacy of distraction known as bulverism.¹⁰⁷ These accusations from both sides do nothing to encourage honest discussion of the views. They are designed merely to warrant an emotional response from the other side. Christians should be above this type of argument.

Finally, OECs must develop a coherent theological position that is supported by Scripture. It is not enough to reinterpret every major passage used by YEC and claim that since it might be possible to interpret a passage in a particular way it must be the right way to interpret it. For example, if OECs are forced to adopt a questionable interpretation on several, if not all, of their points then this does not strengthen their position. In fact, with the addition of each questionable interpretation, their position weakens.

OECs must be able to conclusively demonstrate that Scripture repeatedly not only allows for but also implies an age of the earth in excess of 10,000 years. For example, 2 Peter 3: 5 reveals that "the heavens were of old." From Peter's perspective, 4,000 years would have been a long time especially when one considers that Peter's society knew nothing of the idea of billions of years. What the OEC has to be able to show is that the Bible speaks clearly for their position and at the same time conclusively against the YEC view. This has never been accomplished.

A major rule in hermeneutics is that Scripture cannot contradict Scripture. Only one of these two views can be correct, although it is logically possible that they are both wrong.¹⁰⁸ Based on this overview of the biblical and theological arguments used by the OECs it seems that YEC is the correct position.

Conclusion

The Lord holds Christians to a high standard and so does the world. The use of uninformed and misleading arguments does not bring honor and glory to the name of Christ. Only when fellow believers are treated with respect and dignity will progress be made in this important debate.

Most importantly, God will be glorified when His followers seek to honor His Word from the very first verse to the very last verse. Christians have no need to compromise the Word of God with the opinions of man. When science can help clarify gray areas of Scripture then it should be used cautiously; however, it should never be set up as equal to Scripture. In addition, Christians can trust the Word of the One who was

¹⁰⁶ Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology, Volume I* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House 2002) pp. 300 – 301.

¹⁰⁷ Bulverism was given its name by C. S. Lewis and occurs when a person attempts to prove a conclusion false by identifying its source. Although Luther was ignorant concerning heliocentricity it does not follow that he was ignorant concerning the age of the earth. Nevertheless, it seems that Geisler is implying this.

¹⁰⁸ For example, perhaps Augustine was correct and the creation week was instantaneous, although this idea is not found in the text.

there “in the beginning” and chose to reveal His works to His people. It is sad that so many believers place more trust in the opinions of fallible men than in their omniscient and holy God. Charles Spurgeon spoke so eloquently about the danger of compromise when he stated:

Neither may we hope to gain by being neutral, or granting an occasional truce. We are not to cease from conflict, and try to be as agreeable as we can with our Lord's foes, frequenting their assemblies, and tasting their dainties. No such orders are written here. You are to grasp your weapon, and go forth to fight.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Spoken by Charles Spurgeon in a sermon entitled “The Sword of the Spirit” delivered on April 19, 1891 at the Metropolitan Tabernacle.