

Age of the Earth - 6000 Years or Much Older?

The first time that I was found myself in a discussion over how old the Earth is according to the Bible was when I was a teenager and a Protestant minister was giving a religious instruction class at the high school that I was attending.

I grew up a Catholic but never had read the Bible. My understanding of the Bible was limited to what I learned from Bible movies and from what I learned in primary school when one of my teachers would start the day with reading a chapter from a Children's Bible. I had a healthy respect for the Bible's history back to about Abraham but before then I felt that, while there were moral lessons that could be drawn from them, the stories before that were mythical.

My religious instruction teacher made a comment that the Bible says that the earth and universe was only 6000 years old. I had a keen interest in astronomy so I objected to this and said that the vast majority of stars are well over 6000 light years away and there's no way we could see them if the universe was only 6000 years old because there wouldn't have been enough time for their light to reach us.

My religious instruction teacher went on to say something about a time dilation theory as a workaround to this problem but, to me, it didn't quite make sense that we were in a some sort of time bubble, outside of which, time was running millions of times faster for the rest of the entire universe. At this stage, I couldn't honestly say that I had studied the Bible to see what it actually said about this subject.

Not long after this I started to read a magazine called the Plain Truth and was convicted by many of the doctrines that it addressed. When it started talking about Adam and Eve clearly as historical figures the credibility of the Bible came into question for me if the Bible said that the earth and universe was only 6000 years old.

I then went back over that first Plain Truth I picked up from a newsstand and found an article called "For Evolutionists Only..." which discussed what they felt was a common misinterpretation in the first chapter of Genesis by both creationists and evolutionists. In the article the author wrote:

Where most "creationists" err is that they assume the Bible places the creation of the universe at a point in time about six or so thousand years ago. The Bible, however, says nothing about such an idea. Genesis 1:1 states, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Those words describe a complete episode in the prehistory of the universe. There follows a time lapse of indefinite length between this verse and the verse that follows...

As verse two of Genesis 1 opens, we are confronted with a totally different scene. We now see an earth that had come to be in ruins, in darkness and covered with water. Some great disaster had befallen the earth.

The English word was in this verse is better translated "became" or "came to be." "Now the earth became without form, and void; and darkness came to be upon the face of the deep." (See the New International Version rendering and footnote)...

From verse two the Genesis account goes on to describe a re-creation, how God reshaped and refashioned, nearly 6,000 years ago, the already existing, but now desolate earth (Plain Truth, Nov-Dec 1983, Clayton Steep, p.19).

I read that and thought, "Hey, that makes a whole lot of sense!" It seemed to reconcile what the Bible says and what astronomy and geology says about how old the Earth is. It also raises the question of

what caused this destruction between verses 1 and 2. There would be further challenges regarding this subject as I learned about a couple of other verses which seemed to say the opposite.

As I began to study the Bible it was very clear, without any shadow of doubt, from the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 10 and the genealogies of Jesus Christ in the gospels that the Bible says that Adam and Eve were created around 6000 years ago. Scientists say that mankind is a million or so years old using inexact dating methods which allows for the possibility of error. Recorded verifiable history, though, is no older than what the Bible says.

Jesus Christ quoted the Garden of Eden story in Matthew 19:4-5 when He spoke about marriage and two becoming one flesh. He acknowledged the real existence of Adam's first son, Abel, who was murdered (Matthew 23:35). Adam is included in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Luke 3:38) and the apostle Paul spoke of Adam as a real person (1 Corinthians 15:45).

How could I believe Christ was my Saviour if He was lying about Adam and his son Abel being real people?

For the remainder of part one of this blog I'd like to explore the pros and cons of the three main verses that are used in the debate between those who believe in a young earth and universe and those who believe in the "gap theory" or gap viewpoint as put forth in the magazine I quoted from earlier. In part two we will look at the pros and cons of several other verses in the Bible that relate to this question of how old the Bible says the earth and universe are.

Genesis 1:2 in most translations says "And the earth was without form and void and darkness was on the face of the deep". Arthur Custance in his book "Without Form and Void" says the following:

In the Masoretic Text in which the Jewish scholars tried to incorporate enough 'indicators' to guide the reader as to correct punctuation there is one small mark which is technically known as Rebhia, ...In short, this mark indicates a "break" in the text. Such a mark appears at the end of Genesis 1.1....It is one indication among others, that the initial waw which introduces verse 2 should be rendered "**but**" rather than "and", a dis-junctive rather than a con-junctive (p.5).

According to Custance, verse two should read "**But the earth became without form and void**". If "but" is the way it should begin then clearly something happened in opposition to God's original design in verse one.

Next, we need to find out whether the Hebrew word "hayah" in verse 2 should be translated as "was" or "became". If it should read "the earth was without form and void" neither case for a young earth nor old earth is affected. If, however, it should be translated "the earth became without form and void" this greatly hurts the case for a young earth.

On this point the evidence is divided. According to the KJV Old Testament Lexicon "hayah" means "was, come to pass, came, has been, happened, become, pertained, better for thee". This word is translated "became" in Genesis 2:7 [and man **became** a living soul], Genesis 9:15 [the waters shall never **become** a flood to destroy all flesh] and Genesis 19:26 [she **became** a pillar of salt]. There are also other instances where it is better translated "was" such as Genesis 3:1 [Now the serpent **was** more subtle than any beast of the field]. This same word "hayah" is also used in God's famous reply to Moses as to what His name is when He said "I AM [Heb: hayah] that I AM [Heb: hayah]".

Genesis 1:16 is one of two pivotal verses used to support the young earth and universe viewpoint. On day four of Creation week it says: "And God **made** two great lights: the greater light to rule the day and the smaller light to rule the night, and the stars *also*."

Young earth creationists say on day four God created our sun, the moon and all the stars in the universe. Before we look at the Hebrew word translated “made” there are a couple of other things to question that viewpoint. While God is all-powerful and can do it, doesn’t it seem a little unbalanced that God would fashion the earth on 5 of the 6 days of creation but do the infinitely greater universe in just one day? Another point is, if God didn’t create our sun until day four then what was the light He used on day one when He said “Let there be light”? The KJV Commentary offers the following possible answer to the dilemma:

“This light is not the sun, which was created on the fourth day according to verse 16, it must have been some fixed light source outside the earth [The one referred to by God’s words “Let there be light.”] In reference to that light, the rotating earth passed through a day-night cycle.”

Now let’s look at the Hebrew word translated “made” in Genesis 1:16. The Hebrew “bara” is used for create in Genesis 1:1. A different Hebrew word, “asah”, is used in Genesis 1:16. While it can be correctly translated as “made” in the present tense, it can also be correctly translated as “had made” in the past tense. In Genesis 1:31 we read “And God saw everything that He **had made** [Heb: asah], and behold, it was very good.” Strong’s Concordance also notes that one possible meaning for “asah” is “appoint” or “appointed”. This meaning would fit well in Genesis 1:16.

This same Hebrew word “asah” (not “bara” for create) is used for made in the next proof text used by young earth creationists.

In **Exodus 20:11** where God gives the Ten Commandments and spells out the fourth commandment, the sabbath, we read “For *in* six days the LORD **made** [Heb: asah] the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day.”

According to the Blue Letter Bible Lexicon this is how the Hebrew “asah” is translated in the King James Version:

“The KJV translates Strong’s H6213 in the following manner: do (1,333x), make (653x), wrought (52x), deal (52x), commit (49x), offer (49x), execute (48x), keep (48x), shew (43x), **prepare** (37x), work (29x), do so (21x), perform (18x), get (14x), **dress** (13x), maker (13x), maintain (7x), misc (154x).”

Some other synonyms that it can be translated into according to Strong’s Concordance include “bring forth”, “fashion”, “furnish” and “prepare”. The Hebrew “bara” used in Genesis 1:1 is used for create as in creating something from scratch. The Hebrew “asah” translated as “made” has a much more broader meaning.

If I say that I have “made my bed” does it mean that I have built it from scratch? We can “fashion” or “prepare” our house for a guest arriving but that does not mean we have just created or built it from scratch. Our English word “made” doesn’t always mean create from scratch just as “asah” doesn’t always mean create from scratch either.

The Hebrew “shameh” is translated as “heaven” (NKJV) in Exodus 20:11. While it is translated more often as heaven it also translated as **sky** or air in Genesis 1:20, 1:26, 1:28 and 1:30 in reference to the birds in the sky. If we paraphrase Exodus 20:11 with what we have learned about the Hebrew words it can just as easily be translated the following way:

“For in six days the LORD prepared (or fashioned) the sky and the earth, the sea and all things in it.”

We’ve looked at the three key scriptures used in this discussion over the age of the earth and the universe. If we are truly honest with those scriptures we can find support for either a young earth or old earth position in each of those. By and of themselves, if we are really honest, there is not enough

evidence to nail the case one way or the other. We need to look carefully at more scriptures to shed further light on this question of how old the earth is according the Bible. In part two of this blog, we'll look at several more scriptures used by supporters of both positions and see if we can come to a definitive answer.

Age of the Earth – 6000 Years or Much Older? [Part Two]

In part one of this blog we looked at the pros and cons of three key scriptures used in this discussion over the age of the earth and the universe – Genesis 1:2, Genesis 1:16 and Exodus 20:11. My conclusion was that, by and of themselves, if we are really honest, there is not enough evidence to nail the case one way or the other and that we need to look carefully at more scriptures to shed further light on this question.

In this part two we'll look at several more scriptures used by supporters of both positions and see if we can come to a definitive answer. Before we do, I'd like to briefly go back to the young earth/universe creation dilemma about how we can see stars from galaxies millions of light years from us if the universe is only 6 000 years old?

In part one of this blog I mentioned time dilation as one workaround proposed by young earth/universe creationists. Others claim that the speed of light has been decreasing since creation. If so, the laws of physics would demand that the speed of light be many MILLIONS of times faster in the past than its already incredible speed to account for us seeing those stars.

Another view is that God has miraculously transported to us the light of all these far off galaxies. The main objection to this idea is that we are seeing events happening in "real time" with very distant stars. One example is the many nova and supernova explosions that have been observed in "real time".

The Crab Nebula was created as a result of a supernova witnessed and recorded by Chinese astronomers in the 1300's. The Crab Nebula has been accurately measured by astronomers to be 6500 light years away. To this figure we have to add 700 since the supernova happened that many years ago. This means that the supernova occurred 7200 years ago. Another recent supernova witnessed as it happened is that of 1987A which went supernova in 1987. This one is far more distant. It has been measured at 185 000 light years away.

Romans 5:12 is one verse used by young earth creationists to say that there wasn't a world before creation week and that all fossils date from Adam on. The verse is used as a proof text to say that there was no death before Adam, including any animal deaths in the fossil record. The verse says:

"Therefore, even as through **one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin**, and so death passed on all men inasmuch as all sinned."

1 Corinthians 15:21 says a similar thing. Does this rule out all death, BOTH human and animal, prior to Adam?

Romans 6:23 tells us that the wages of sin is death. Animals operate by pre-programmed behaviour and instinct, not choice in the same way that humans choose their behaviour for good or evil (that is, sin). The death being spoken of is not animal sin but human death earned as the punishment for sin.

God never designed animals to live forever. There still would have been animals dying even if Adam had not sinned. Their death is not a result of sin but by design, being only made as temporary creatures.

Job 40:15-24 is another passage used by young earth creationists to support their view that all the dinosaurs lived in the time of man before Noah's flood and not before Adam. They say the behemoth with its massive tree-like tail is a dinosaur. This is a red herring. Assuming this beast was a dinosaur it only proves that at least one type of dinosaur lived in the time of man. It does not disprove that they existed before Adam.

Psalm 104:30 is one verse used to support the view that Creation week was a restoration of the earth after a previous destruction. It says “You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You **renew** the face of the earth.”

The Hebrew word used for “renew” is “chadash” which means “**rebuild, renew, repair**” according to Strong’s Concordance which definitely fits a restoration rather than original creation. Verses 5, 19 and 20 speak of events during the creation week implying that time period for this renewal.

Hebrews 11:3 is a particularly interesting verse in relation to this subject. It reads: “By faith we understand that the worlds were **framed** by the word of God”.

The word translated here as “framed” is an interesting one. It is the Greek word “katartizo”. Let’s look at two other places where it is used in the New Testament. In Galatians 6:1 we read: “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who *are* spiritual **restore** [Greek: katartizo] at such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.”

Another place where it is used is Matthew 4:21 where we read: “Going on from there, He saw two other brothers, James *the son of* Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, **mending** [Greek: katartizo] their nets.” Now if we paraphrase Hebrews 11:3 with these other possible translations it would read as follows:

“By faith we understand that the world was **restored / mended** by the word of God”.

These last two verses do give support to the gap viewpoint but there is still some doubt. Let’s now look at a critical verse in this discussion that answers the question of how the earth “became” waste and void if the gap viewpoint is correct.

Isaiah 14:12-14 is almost universally understood by Bible scholars, both young earth creationists and those who believe in the gap viewpoint, as referring to the fall of the archangel Lucifer who turned on God being filled with pride and became Satan the Devil, the great adversary of God and inspiration for Darth Vader, only a whole lot nastier.

“How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *How* you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt **my throne** above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend **above the heights of the clouds**, I will be like the Most High”.

There are two key points to note here regarding the rebellion of Lucifer (Hebrew: Heyl-el). First, he was given **a throne and a dominion** to rule and second, he was **below the clouds** before he ascended and tried to unseat God “on the mount of the congregation on the **farthest sides of the north**”.

As an aside, this location of God’s throne is echoed in many pagan religions which have borrowed this concept. Pagan gods such as Ra, Shamash, Kronos and Saturn were also said to dwell there (The Tree at the Navel of the Earth, E.A.S. Butterworth & Paradise Found, William F. Warren). This is also why Santa supposedly comes from the North Pole as many Christmas customs originate from the Roman festival, Saturnalia.

Lucifer was given a throne and dominion. He was below the clouds, which are only found on physical planets, when he rebelled against God. Satan’s rebellion could not have happened before the earth was created because he was on earth when he rebelled.

It makes little sense he was given this throne at the time of Creation week since the same dominion over earth was given to Adam (Genesis 1:26). Not only that, Adam and Eve’s Creator, was on earth mentoring them prior to their sin in the Garden **so what would be the point of giving Satan a throne here on earth after the start of Creation week?**

John 8:44 says "He (Satan the Devil) was a murderer from the beginning". This beginning appears to be no later than Creation week. This runs counter to what Genesis 1:31 says that God pronounced everything very good after His week of creation.

Satan has already rebelled and is evil when he tempts Eve in the Garden of Eden.

Most Bible scholars believe that Lucifer took a third of the angels with him in his great rebellion (Revelation 12:3-9) and there are at least 100 million angels (Daniel 7:9-10, Revelation 5:11). If the earth was only 6000 years old we are led to believe that Satan not only became dissatisfied and rebelled but also poisoned the hearts of **OVER 30 MILLION** angels all within a very short space of time before Adam and Eve's sin.

This seems highly unlikely to me. It is more logical to believe that God gave him his throne and authority on earth in the time before Adam and that it was Satan's rebellion and destruction that caused the earth to become "without form (or waste) and void".

An earth age of undefined length prior to the "re-creation week" would also reconcile with the laws of physics that tell us we shouldn't even be seeing the light of galaxies millions of light years away if the earth and universe was only 6000 years old.

It is my personal conclusion that there is more evidence in the scriptural record for an earth age before the week man was created and that this is the time period in which Satan was given his throne and authority and ultimately the age in which he rebelled against God. His anger against God was manifested in destruction to this planet which God cleaned up and began a new creation 6000 years ago culminating in creating man "in His own image and likeness" (Genesis 1:26), the start of a marvellous plan to reproduce His own kind.