

**Genesis One and the Age of the Earth: Is This Passage Evidence of the
Fallible Human Character of the Bible or Does it Reveal the Inerrant Divine Nature
of the Bible?**

A piece of evidence that may indicate a supernatural element to the Scriptures should be evaluated concerning the revelation of the past in Genesis. Many people, preceding and following Rudolph Bultmann's attempt to demythologize the Bible, have attacked the Genesis account of creation. They claim that the Bible advocates a young earth created between 8000-10000 years ago, which contradicts modern astronomical and geological research. Psalm 19:4b-6 and Joshua 10:12 seem to indicate that the sun rotates around the earth. Job 9:6, 1 Samuel 2:8 and Psalm 75:3 portray the earth on pillars. Job 38:13 speaks of the "ends of the earth" as if it were flat. Job 38:22, Psalm 135:7 and Jeremiah 10:13 describe storehouses for weather up in the heavens, seemingly holding to a three-tier view of the universe where God is in heaven, below heaven is the earth and under the earth is sheol in the depths (Psalm 55:15; 63:9); this three-tier cosmology becomes nonsensical when the earth is understood as a sphere.¹ The four corners of the earth are mentioned in Isaiah 11:2, Revelation 7:1, and 20:8. Genesis one describes creation as taking six days with humans appearing on the sixth day, which would demand a fairly young earth comparatively speaking. These verses are very difficult for non-Christian scientists to relate to. For those of us who believe the Bible is without error when properly understood, there must be a better answer than that given by

¹ "Some have held that [Isa 40:22](#) implies the sphericity of the earth. It may, but it may refer only to the Lord enthroned above the earth with its obviously circular horizon." TWOT for חוּג (hûg) circuit, circle, compass or vault. Job 26:7 states God hung the earth on nothing, which is a remarkable statement in a time where most believed the earth was founded on something else. These may be descriptions from a divine perspective, but it still seems to contradict the other passages that describe a flat earth founded on pillars.

Bultmann and others who simply claimed the writer of Genesis was wrong. There are four major Evangelical interpretations of Genesis chapter one, one of which may give evidence of the divine makeup of the Bible.

Each of the evangelical interpretations of Genesis attempts to reconcile the Bible and science. The first view of Genesis is the Young Earth theory. Those holding this perspective agree with the liberal scholars that the Bible teaches a recent creation, but give evidence that the universe is of recent origin. They would say that the discrepancy between the Bible and science stems from a faulty interpretation of science. The Old Earth or Day-Age theory explains the apparent contradiction between the Bible and science by stating that the Bible agrees with the astronomical data that postulates the age of the universe at between twelve and eighteen billion years old. When Genesis chapter one describes the “days” of creation, it uses the Hebrew word Yom (יֹם), which can be used to refer to an age as well as a twenty-four hour period.² The third view is called the Gap or Restoration theory. Those holding the Gap theory believe the seeming incongruity between science and the Bible can be explained by proposing a gap of potentially billions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. During this gap Satan fell and wreaked havoc on the earth. Verse two reflects God’s restoration of the earth after Satan’s fall.³ The fourth view is the Literary Framework theory, which states that it was not Moses’ design to describe a scientific elucidation of creation, but rather a theological explanation and therefore yields no real contradiction to science.⁴

² Hugh Ross gives a thorough presentation of the day-age theory in *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994).

³ For a refutation of this view see Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 Part II: The Restitution Theory,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975), 136-144.

⁴ For a good unbiased summary of the four views see Gregory Boyd and Paul Eddy, *Across the Spectrum* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 50-73.

The Young Earth theory has serious problems it must overcome in order to be a viable theory scientifically.⁵ Church history has not proven favorable concerning the credibility of the theologian when confronted by the scientist. In the time of the early church Fathers, including Augustine, the church rejected the Greek philosophers' astronomical observations that the world was not flat.⁶ In the sixteenth century theologians in both Catholic and Protestant circles, including Martin Luther, rejected the findings of Copernicus that the earth circled the sun. Joshua 10:12-13 seemed irrefutable in its declaration that the sun and moon were stopped, rather than the earth, so that Joshua could complete his campaign. Even after the invention of Galileo's telescope, the church found it difficult to reconcile the Bible and science. Alan Hayward remarks:

The early Fathers thought they were defending the Bible when they argued that the world must be flat. But in fact they were only defending their own wrong interpretations of the Bible. And in the long run they harmed their own cause, by giving people the impression that Christianity was opposed to the scientific method of seeking knowledge. Luther and his contemporaries also meant well when they opposed Copernicus and Galileo because 'the Bible said' the sun goes round the earth. But they, too, had mistaken their own interpretation for Bible teaching. Thus they, too, made many people think that Christians were prepared to hide their heads in the sand.⁷

Are the Young Earth proponents making the same mistake? We know that many of the stars are millions and even billions of light years away, which means the light we are seeing today actually occurred millions of years ago, but took this long traveling to get here. Some have suggested that God made the earth to appear old, but the evidence does not support this. A supernova explosion took place, forming what we now call the Crab Nebula. Measurements of the size and expansion rate of this cloud indicate the date of

⁵ For a devastating critique of the Young Earth theory by a scientist who is also opposed to evolution see Alan Hayward, *Creation and Evolution* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995), 67-157.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 70. The Greek Philosophers actually calculated the earth's diameter fairly accurately.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

explosion was 1054 AD. Chinese astronomers recorded seeing the explosion in exactly 1054 AD. But using the same measurement tools, scientists have estimated the date of the Cygnus Loop to be about 60,000 years ago, which is much too old to fit a Young Earth theory. Why not just accept the astronomical evidence of an old earth?

Sedimentary rocks also give clues for an old earth. There are layers of fine sediment hardened several miles thick with granite boulders on top of them. If all the layers were formed at the same time, the heavier boulders would have sunk through the fine sediment before it hardened. The boulders themselves have fossils inside of them too. The Young Earth proponents usually rely on flood geology for their explanation of the layers, but it simply cannot answer all the evidence. Listen to Hayward's observations concerning the thousands of layers we see in the earth's crust:

The Flood lasted about a year, but during the first part of it the flood waters were building up, so only a portion of the year would have been available for the deposition of sediments. Let's allow 9 months, which is probably over-generous. 80,000 strata in 9 months works out at 5 minutes each. In each 5 minutes, then, the Flood had to bring in a particular kind of sediment, distribute it fairly uniformly over a wide area – often over many tens of square miles – and deposit it on top of the previous layer. The two layers might sometimes be similar in composition, but would often be quite different. The Flood would have had to deposit the upper layer so gently that the layer deposited in the previous 5 minutes was not disturbed, so that no mixing of the two layers could occur. And it would have had to be so firmly in place at the end of the 5 minutes that the next layer could then safely descend upon it – and so on, *every 5 minutes for 9 months*. Then there is the observation of geologists that the upper surfaces of strata often have fossil limpets or barnacles on them. This shows that those layers had time to harden into rock and attract rock-clinging shellfish before the next stratum was laid down; this is hardly likely to happen in 5 minutes!⁸

The number of fossils is also a major embarrassment to a Young Earth view. In one place alone at the Karroo Beds in Africa there are over 80 billion vertebrates. If spread over the entire land mass of the planet this would make 21 animals per acre. If all the

⁸ Ibid., 124. Not to mention boulders settling on top of them already having fossils in them.

fossils in the world that we have found are put together “A highly conservative estimate leads to 2100 animals per acre.”⁹ This doesn’t take into consideration that most animals do not become fossils when they die. A uniformitarian view makes much more sense in light of the layers of rock and the fossils found in the earth’s crust.¹⁰ These are just a few of the many confirmations for an old earth.¹¹ Young Earth believers have pointed to a few evidences for a young earth, but all of these have been debunked by scientific evidence.¹² Finally the Young Earth theory suggests that if you hold to an old earth you give credence to evolution. This is simply not the case. The age of the universe and the origins of humanity are two separate issues. The other three views stated do not uphold evolution and most of the supporters of these views are adamantly opposed to evolution.¹³ The Young Earth warning that any view that holds to an old earth is a slippery slope to embracing evolution is a straw man that is not fair to the other views; putting words into their mouths that they specifically reject is unethical.

The second view is the Day-Age theory. Many hold to this view because it interprets the Bible in harmony with the scientific evidence. The same Moses who spoke of six days or ages also wrote in Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night,” which is similar to 2 Peter 3:8: “...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” The Bible does not demand a literal interpretation of Genesis one, and some evidence would lean toward a more figurative reading. The events on the sixth day would have

⁹ Ibid., 125.

¹⁰ Ibid., 120-124.

¹¹ We could also mention the vast coal seams and coral reefs that demand an old earth, limestone, mud on the ocean floors, among others.

¹² Ibid., 135-157. See also Van Till, Howard J.; Young, Davis A.; Menninga, Clarence, *Science Held Hostage: What’s Wrong With Creation Science and Evolution?* (IVP, 1988).

¹³ For an excellent book against evolution by an Old Earth believer see Philip Johnson, *Darwin On Trial* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993).

taken longer than a 24-hour period. Naming all the animals would have been a very long affair. The sun was not created until the fourth day so the question should be asked, “Where did the evening and morning come from the first three days?” Evening and morning can refer to the beginning and ending of an age. The last day is not over yet since God is still resting and even invites us to enter his rest (Hebrews 4:1-11; Psalm 95:7-11). Genesis 2:4 uses the word “day” to refer to all six days, stating that multiple generations had passed in that day as well. This view corresponds with science well and the biblical data does not conflict with it. Some have suggested that this view holds that there are errors in the Bible, but that is simply not true. It is a matter of interpretation rather than rejection of the text. There are many solid evangelicals that hold to the inerrancy of Scripture that are open to an old earth cosmology and do not believe it is an issue worth dividing over, including John Ankerberg, Gleason Archer, Michael Behe, Chuck Colson, Paul Copan, William Lane Craig, Norman Geisler, Hank Hannegraff, Jack Hayford, Charles Hodge, Walter Kaiser, C.S. Lewis, Paul Little, J.P. Moreland, Mark Noll, Hugh Ross, Francis Schaeffer, C.I. Scofield, Chuck Smith Jr., Lee Strobel, and B.B. Warfield.¹⁴

The third view is the Gap theory. This view suggests that there could be millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. The difficulty with this view is that the text does not say this is the case. An alternative view is that in between each day there could be millions or billions of years. In the Hebrew it does not actually say “the first day, the second day, etc.” with an article that would include succession. Instead, rather unusually, the article is absent and therefore a more literal translation would say, “a first day...a

¹⁴ <http://www.reasons.org/notable-christians-open-old-universe-old-earth-perspective>.

second day, etc.” This view would allow for harmony with the biblical text and modern scientific understandings of the universe.

The fourth view is the Literary Framework theory. Those holding this view point out that Genesis one, along with many other passages of the Bible, are poetic in nature and describe observations from a phenomenal perspective rather than scientific. When the Bible speaks of pillars and storehouses, these are to be understood as imagery exalting the creative power of God, rather than exact descriptions of reality. Genesis one uses numbers in a literary fashion throughout, especially the numbers three, seven and ten. The first three days correspond with the last three days in a poetic manner easily noted by the ancient near eastern reader. Day one’s light matches with day four’s sun, moon and stars. Day two’s separation of the waters in the sky and sea is compatible with day five’s creation of birds (sky) and fish (sea). Day three’s land and vegetation corresponds with animals and humans. Timothy Pierce suggests that the purpose of Genesis one, in view of its poetic form and opposition to other ancient near east cosmologies, is for worship.

Such a conclusion lends itself strongly to the supposition that the first chapter of Genesis is a liturgical work of some sort that finds purpose within the worship of Israel. Perhaps identifying it as liturgical poetry that functions as a confession is the best approach to its genre category because it admits its liturgical and didactic purpose yet maintains its historical reflection. In any case, that the biblical record begins with a text designed to incite, inform, and increase worship is telling in and of itself.¹⁵

It would seem from Moses’ perspective, the Literary Framework theory is correct, and so there is no real contradiction between science and Scripture. The *Etz Hayim* commentary agrees:

¹⁵ Timothy Pierce, *Enthroned on Our Praise* (Nashville: B and H, 2008), 16.

The opening chapters of Genesis are not a scientific account of the origins of the universe. The Torah is a book of morality, not cosmology. Its overriding concern, from the first verse to the last, is our relationship to God, truth about life rather than scientific truths. It describes the world God fashioned as “good,” a statement no scientific account can make.¹⁶

On the other hand, if I am correct in my understanding of the inspiration of Scripture, then there are two authors to consider, human and divine. It is doubtful that Moses was even attempting to give a science lesson, but God certainly knew more than Moses how he actually created the universe and may have indicated this in chapter one. Is it possible that circumscribed in Moses’ literary masterpiece (the fourth view), God made sure an accurate account of creation was relayed (the second view)? If the Day-Age theory is correct, then we not only have accurate information, but also proof of supernatural origin.

In his book *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis*, Hugh Ross asserts that Genesis should be subjected to rigorous investigation to test its claims.¹⁷ A comparison of Genesis chapter one with the latest scientific theories will help in this test. If the Day-Age view does not coincide with the scientific evidence, then it should be abandoned; this does not prove the Bible to be errant because the Literary Framework theory still explains Genesis chapter one well. If it stands up to the test, then the Bible’s supernatural authority is established because no pre-scientific writer could have guessed accurately the details of creation.

Genesis 1:1 says, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

בְּרֵאשִׁית (*Bereshith*) is translated as “in the beginning” in most English translations; JPS translates it, “when God began;” some use this translation to avoid the concept of *creatio*

¹⁶ David Lieber, senior editor, *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary*, 3. I would add that it is a book of morality and theology and where it pronounces scientific or historical truths as the purpose of the author (both human and divine) it is inerrant.

¹⁷ Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 10.

ex nihilo (creation out of nothing). The Midrash suggests that because the first letter in the Torah is the second letter of the alphabet “ultimate origins are hidden from view” and “we cannot begin at the very beginning.”¹⁸ However the prefixed preposition **ב** (*bet*) usually means *in*, *at*, or *with* rather than *when*; *bereshith* is in the absolute state, so “verse one is best construed as an independent clause,”¹⁹ and ultimate origins of the universe are precisely the concern of the text.²⁰ Other religions proposed theories of creation where the earth was made from the corpse of a god (Germanic *Elder Edda*) or mud put on a turtle’s back (Iroquois myth). The *Enuma Elish*, which many suggest the writer of Genesis borrowed from, is strikingly different from the Genesis account, especially in its depiction of the material used to create the world.²¹ Ross points out the differences revealing the inferiority of the *Enuma Elish* and where it “departs from fact”:

1. It places the creation of man before the creation of the animals, large and small.
2. It tells of both a saltwater ocean and a freshwater ocean coexisting (that is, in contact with one another) prior to the creation of land.
3. The material comprising celestial bodies, land, and human bodies comes from one source: the corpses and blood of gods killed in combat with each other.²²

The other ancient accounts of creation do not fit modern scientific explanations of creation, but Genesis is remarkable in that it does correspond with what we know today.

Contrary to the debunked steady state hypothesis or the Hindu belief that the universe is eternal, the most popular scientific theory today is the Big Bang theory.

¹⁸ *Etz Hayim*, 3. See also Gunther Plaut, *The Torah*, 5.

¹⁹ Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975), 222-226.

²⁰ Bruce Waltke draws a similar conclusion from the Hebrew word *bara* for created: “the Hebrew term *bara*, meaning ‘to create,’ only refers to a completed act of creation (cf. Deut. 4:32; Ps. 89:12; Isa. 40:26; Amos 4:13), so it cannot mean that, in the beginning, God *began* the process of creating the cosmos.” Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58 n. 15.

²¹ For a good translation of the *Enuma Elish* see James Pritchard, editor, *The Ancient Near East Volume 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton University Press, 1958), 31-39.

²² Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question*, 60-61.

Based on the Law of Redshifts, the Second Law of Thermodynamics and the observation of background radiation throughout the universe, the Big Bang theory suggests that there was a beginning to the universe between twelve and eighteen billion years ago. Einstein theorized that time was also created when the universe came into existence. Genesis agrees with this theory, boldly proclaiming that prior to creation only God existed. In the Hebrew Bible **בָּרָא** (*bara*) is used only in reference to God's creative activity because only he can do such extraordinary work. Bruce Waltke notes, "His creation reveals his immeasurable power and might, his bewildering imagination and wisdom, his immortality and transcendence, ultimately leaving the finite mortal in mystery."²³ Is it coincidence that Genesis one doesn't make the blunders other creation accounts make? Is it happenstance that it proclaims the world came into existence a finite amount of time in the past in agreement with modern explanations?

Verse two is just as remarkable as verse one: "The earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." Unlike other creation myths there are no battles between the gods and no struggle observed in creation. The rest of the account simply states that God spoke and then the creative act took place. Ross points out an important element, found in verse two, in understanding the rest of Genesis chapter one. The observer's vantage point is from the surface of the earth rather than from above the earth. The position of the onlooker is on "the surface of the deep" also referred to as "the surface of the waters." This fact explains the apparent discrepancy where light is created on the first day, but the sun, moon and stars appear on the fourth day. The initial condition of all planets is an

²³ Bruce Waltke, *Genesis*, 59.

opaque atmosphere. Genesis 1:2 says darkness covered the earth and it was “formless and void.” תְּהוֹ וָבֹהוּ (*tohu wavohu*) describes a wasteland, an uninhabitable place;²⁴

this concurs with modern science:

The “formless” and “empty” conditions of Earth would be expected, given the initial opaque atmosphere and interplanetary debris. Without light, photosynthesis could not occur. The large pieces of interplanetary debris crashing onto Earth’s surface at that time would generate catastrophes no life could survive. We can easily understand why no evidence of life on Earth dates earlier than four billion years ago.²⁵

How did the writer of Genesis know?

In Genesis 1:3 we have the first “day” or age of creation where from the perspective of the earth’s surface the atmosphere becomes translucent. Most planets the size of Earth remain opaque. Venus, which is nearly the same size as Earth, is covered with dense clouds of carbon dioxide. The best theory of the origin of the moon is that an object at least the size of Mars had a head-on collision with Earth, and most of it was absorbed into the earth. This exploded the original atmosphere out into space, and the debris from the collision coalesced into the moon. The new atmosphere was translucent rather than opaque, which allowed light to come in, and then plant life was possible (third day-age). In just this one event that caused the moon’s formation, several things were brought about that were absolutely necessary for life to exist, including increased mass of the earth to just the right size to retain huge quantities of water vapor but not large amounts of ammonia and methane, increased measures of iron necessary for ocean life,

²⁴ Waltke states, “The concern of the narrative is for life: birds, animals, and vegetation. The negative state of the earth reflects a situation in which the earth is not producing life.” *Ibid.*, 60.

²⁵ Hugh Ross, *The Genesis Question*, 27.

and an enormous abundance of radioisotopes.²⁶ Ross puts into perspective the beneficial nature of this collision:

In fact, the number of conditions that must be fine-tuned – and the degree of fine-tuning needed for each of these conditions – for life to possibly survive that is manifested in this single event argues powerfully on its own for a divine Creator. Even if the universe contains as many as 10 billion trillion (10^{22}) planets, we would not expect even one, by natural processes alone, to end up with the surface gravity, surface temperature, atmospheric composition, atmospheric pressure, crustal iron abundance, tectonics, volcanism, rotation rate, rate of decline in rotation rate, and stable rotation axis tilt necessary for the support of life. To those who express the desire to see a miracle, we can assure them they are looking at one whenever they gaze up at the moon.²⁷

Genesis chapter one is obviously not describing all the events that took place in the creation process, but what it does describe agrees perfectly with modern science. “Let there be light” was no mere coincidence.

Day two describes the water cycle with the formation of the troposphere above the ocean. Day three explains the formation of land through plate tectonics and volcanic activity. The wording in Genesis 1:9 allows for the idea of one large landmass, a supercontinent that science textbooks refer to as Pangea.²⁸ Day three also included the creation of plant life. Through the process of photosynthesis, oxygen was produced which eventually contributed to the ozone layer and a transparent atmosphere. Day four depicts the observation of the sun, moon and stars. The use of the word עָשָׂה (*asah*) rather than בָּרָא (*bara*) may indicate that they previously existed (Genesis 1:1), but at any rate, from the perspective of the surface of the earth, they appeared after the atmosphere thinned out enough for visibility. Day five we see most of the animal life created, a Cambrian explosion of life forms. On the sixth day mammals and humans are

²⁶ Ibid., 32. The collision also slowed the rotation and stabilized the tilt of Earth’s axis.

²⁷ Ibid., 33.

²⁸ Ibid., 38.

created. Ross argues for the חַיָּה (*hayya*), the בְּהֵמָה (*behema*) and the רֶמֶשׁ (*remesh*) to refer to wild long legged, tame long legged and short legged mammals such as rodents respectively.²⁹ The last things created were humans. Ross notes,

Although bipedal, tool-using, large-brained primates roamed Earth for hundreds of thousands (perhaps a million) years, religious relics date back only about eight thousand to twenty-four thousand years. Thus, the anthropological date for the first spirit creatures agrees with the biblical date.³⁰

What are the odds of someone in the Ancient Near East guessing accurately the sequence of creation without any modern scientific knowledge? Genesis chapter one could have been written only by someone who was there at creation. It summarizes accurately and sequentially the big events that especially pertained to the existence and sustenance of humans, God's crowning achievement.³¹

Could God have made the universe in six literal days? Of course! Is the Young Earth theory possible? Certainly. Science is always tentative and new finds may change the way we think, but the overwhelming consensus today is that the universe is very old. From an evangelistic standpoint this is very important. If people won't even consider what we have to say because we hold to a Young Earth perspective, then we are hindering evangelism unnecessarily. We should learn to choose our battles. The Big Bang theory actually supports the beginning of the universe and therefore demands something or someone outside the universe to exist in order to create the universe. The effect of the universe demands an uncaused cause. We should also be people of integrity

²⁹ Ibid., 52-53. See also R. Laird Harris, editor, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:850-851; "It appears that *remes* means not only small mammals such as rodents but the small reptiles common in the gravel and rocks of Palestine." Moses does not mention all types of creatures, being selective in his account. It is reasonable to assume the sixth day is only referring to small mammals by the term *remes*.

³⁰ Ibid., 55.

³¹ Ross goes on to explain the other events in Genesis chapters 1-11, revealing their scientific relevance when properly interpreted.

and honestly admit the evidence leans heavily toward an old earth. This does not mean we have to accept the findings of evolution. The Intelligent Design movement has seriously challenged the theory of macroevolution and can be used effectively in evangelism. If we tear away the atheists only support for a closed system, we help the design argument considerably. The design of the universe suggests a Designer. But the age of the universe is a completely separate issue that only hinders progress with the dialogue between Christians and unbelievers. The Bible and science do not conflict when both are properly interpreted.