

## WHEN WAS THE EARTH CREATED?

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This study is not directed to evolutionists; it is not an argument as to the relative validity of the evolutionary and creationistic philosophies. It is addressed to those who believe that the earth was created by the fiat of Almighty God. Its purpose is to discuss the question of the *time* when that event took place.

If we read the record of creation in Genesis One without bias of preconceived ideas as to time, we will find the following points:

- (1) The earth was created, not evolved. Vs. 1.
- (2) When it was created, it was in an unorganized state. Vs. 2.
- (3) This unorganized mass was processed into a habitable globe, — the Spirit of God *moved* upon it. Vs. 2.
- (4) This process took six literal days, — evenings and mornings.

Now, if we look for the time element, we find the beginning of the chronology in Chapter 5. Putting this with other Bible chronologies, we arrive at the date of creation as somewhere about 4000 B. C. We will find that some genealogies are obscure, so that the date of creation cannot be set exactly; nevertheless, it is a matter of a few hundred rather than millions of years that is involved.

Some theorists, with certain preconceived opinions regarding time, have attempted to separate verses 1 and 2 from the rest of the chapter, and to insert here long ages of time. We are not concerned now with the validity of any of these theories, but will merely state that as far as the record itself goes, it neither affirms nor denies such interpretations.

What is the source of the idea that the earth is older than about 6000 years?

Most, if not all, ancient cosmogonies attributed great age to the earth. Matter was assumed to be eternal, and to have gone through long processes of development. Without doubt some of these notions influenced the Hebrew people during the periods when they accepted pagan worship. However, we find little if any influence of these ideas on Christianity until about the 4th century A. D.

Augustine, who died in 430 A. D., was the leading theologian of the West, and he was one of the principal agents in introducing Greek philosophical concepts into Christianity.

"Plainly as the direct or instantaneous Creation of animals and plants appeared to be taught in Genesis, Augustine read this in the light of primary causation and the gradual development from the imperfect to the perfect of Aristotle." — Osburn,

H. F. *From the Greeks to Darwin*, page 287. Macmillan, 1922.

"In the beginning, God created all the elements of the world in a confused and nebulous mass . . . and in this mass were the mysterious germs . . . of the future beings which were to develop themselves, when favorable circumstances should permit." — Catholic Encyclopedia, 1907. Article: *Augustine*.

When modern geological study began to develop, this teaching of Augustine's was so firmly entrenched in scientific thought that practically all scientists took for granted that the earth was very old. This attitude created a conflict between science and theology, but it was not many years before theology surrendered to the scientific philosophy of long ages. Before the close of the 19th century nearly all churches had incorporated the "long-age" viewpoint into their theology.

Within the past century various schemes have been proposed in an attempt to prove scientifically the approximate age of the earth, but none of them successful. Nevertheless, the fact that the stratified rocks apparently involved long periods of time for their deposition, led to a general acceptance of the theory of geological ages.

In recent years, however, one method has come forward with claims to a high degree of accuracy, and that is the radioactive theory, or the theory that the disintegration of uranium to lead and certain intermediate elements gives a true time scale for the rocks. I shall not describe the theory in detail, as I assume that all my readers are familiar with it. Rather, I wish to discuss some of its philosophical and logical implications.

In the first place, this, as well as other dating methods, is based on the Hutton-Lyell hypothesis of uniformitarianism. While the rate of disintegration of uranium is uniform as far as we can observe, there is no basis for the assumption that primordial uranium was created in a pure state, without any intermediate products between it and lead. It therefore follows that the various series of radioactive elements that eventually result in certain isotopes of lead cannot be proved to have come about by normal disintegration of primordial uranium, or any other substance.

It is impossible to prove the absence of these intermediate elements in the original substance of the earth. In fact, it may be that they were a natural product of the creative process.

How much does the record tell us of what was going on during the first day of creation? Practically nothing. All that it says is that "there was

light.” Whether this light was reflected sunlight from the surface of the newly created earth or whether it was due to certain processes of creation, we have no way of knowing. However, certain ideas may be worthy of consideration.

For one, I have never had much use for the idea that there were six instantaneous creative acts. That is, it does not seem reasonable to believe that God should have commanded a certain thing to take place and then to have waited 23 hours, 59 minutes, and 59 and a fraction seconds before giving another command. Rather, I have thought of creation week as a continuous series of events. This is, I think, supported by the record. In Verse 4 we read that God *divided* the light from the darkness. In Verse 9 it says: Let the waters . . . be *gathered*. Verse 11 says: Let the earth *bring forth*. The same expression is used in Verses 20 and 24. All of these are indications of processes.

Now if we apply this idea to the record of the first day of creation, what do we have? The creative process was such that the writer of Genesis could understand nothing of what was taking place. All he could record was the presence of light. Perhaps if we, with our knowledge of atomic physics, had viewed the scene, we might have been able to give a more complete description.

The Creator, from all that we know of natural phenomena, uses orderly processes to accomplish His purposes. Why not in creation? Might it not be possible, or even probable, that the events of the first day involved a series of complex building processes of the elements and compounds?

With this idea in mind, what would we expect to find taking place when these building processes reached the higher and more complex elements? Might not some of them, because of the very nature of their composition, prove to be unstable? At least, this is what the books on atomic physics assert to be the reason for atomic disintegration, — that is, the nature of their composition.

One more question: If the complex and intricate structure of a world could be accomplished in the course of a day, would it not involve vastly accelerated speeds beyond any ordinary chemical

processes? It seems to me that changes taking place while the material substances were being organized would correspond to the speed of changes in atomic explosions of our day, — extremely short fractions of seconds. Now, with these changes taking place, would there not be a correspondingly rapid accumulation of disintegration products, until the creative process was completed and the material had reached a state of comparative stability?

If this were true, the result would be a series of disintegration products that would give the “appearance of age.” That is, any physicist, examining the accumulated products and studying them in the light of the present rates of disintegration, would decide that it had taken billions of years for their production. On the other hand, the truth would be that they had been produced in one day.

Now all this may be regarded as pure speculation, and I must admit that it is. However, it is a possibility, and there is a rule of scientific interpretation, and that is that no conclusion can be considered as established as long as there is at least one other possible interpretation. It seems to me, therefore, that the theory of long ages of time for the history of this earth cannot be acceptable to the creationist until two criteria have been established, — (1) that there can be no reasonable doubt as to its authenticity, and (2) that there can be no other possible explanation.

On this point the words of the Apostle Paul are pertinent:

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit.” — Colossians 2:8.

The rendering in the New English Bible is even more forceful:

“Be on guard; do not let your minds be captured by hollow and delusive speculations, based on traditions of man-made teachings.”

If there is any question at all as to the validity of the two views, billions of years as the earth’s age or about 6000 years, is it not the part of wisdom to hold to the literal and time-honored interpretation rather than to follow the speculations of agnostic science?