

Theological Implications of Deep Time

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Abstract

The age of the earth and universe beyond continues to generate lively discussion, including among theists. The recent creation view is often held up as an object of ridicule and caricature. However,

those who promote a vast time scale, sometimes called deep time, must address several serious theological issues. Six implications of deep time are discussed here.

Introduction

One tenet of the Creation Research Society is that the earth and universe beyond are thousands of years old rather than billions. Some have wondered how strongly a recent creation should be defended. Are we unnecessarily *marginalizing* ourselves? After all, the age issue seldom arises in the current Intelligent Design Movement. Furthermore, most church denominations, Christian colleges, and parachurch ministries readily accept multi-billions of years of history, sometimes called “deep time.” However, ideas have consequences, and this is especially true for the age issue.

The following section reviews six implications of deep time as promoted in *progressive* or *old-earth* creation. This view of Genesis does not accept macroscopic evolution. Instead, at various stages of history, God is said to have stepped in and created various kinds of life. Progressive creation also accepts a literal Adam and Eve, though at a very late stage of history. In this view the earth and solar system are thought to be about 4.6 billion years old in agreement with naturalistic or secular geology. Furthermore, a big bang origin for the universe is assumed to have occurred between 8-16 billion years ago (12 billion years will be used in this paper). It is my belief that many progressive creationists have not thought through the serious consequences of the deep time assumption.

Six Implications

1. Mankind is limited to the last 0.001 percent of universe history.

This small percent derives from the popular assumption of a big bang occurring 12 billion years ago, and modern man

existing *only* during the last 120,000 years or so. To illustrate this incredibly small percentage, let a person’s outstretched arms represent 12 billion years of history. Then one stroke of a fingernail file across a fingernail would completely eliminate the era of mankind.

The Creator certainly *could* have spread out prehuman physical history in this way. However, scripture indicates otherwise. Jesus refers to our first parents in Mark 10:6, “But at the beginning of creation God made them male and female.” See also the similar statement in Matthew 19:4. In both cases the word *beginning* is αρχη (archē). The meaning is from the very beginning, the absolute start of all things (Bauer, p. 112). The origin of mankind clearly fits a literal, supernatural creation week. Those who accept deep time necessarily place humanity as a tag-end afterthought to history.

2. Ninety-nine percent of animal and plant life was extinct long before mankind arrived on the earth.

For example, geologists describe the Permian extinction 245 million years ago when 95 percent of earth’s life some-

Table I. Summary list of assumed geologic mass extinction events (MYA: millions of years ago).

Extinction Event	MYA	Comment
Ordovician	440	85% of all species lost
Devonian	365	75% of species lost, especially marine animals
Permian	250	90-95% species loss
Triassic	208	75% species loss
Cretaceous	65	80% species loss, including dinosaurs and flying/marine reptiles
Today	0	An assumed current major species loss due to habitat destruction

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how was wiped out. Six assumed major historical mass extinction events are listed in Table I. Catastrophic collisions between the earth and extraterrestrial objects are increasingly offered as explanations for these extinctions. The picture presented is that the Creator experimented with animal and plant life over a vast prehuman time scale. For example the entire dinosaur world, extending over 200 million years, was in a *Land Before [human] Time*. Now the Creator surely *could* have organized a long prehistory of animal life and death in this way. However, scriptural evidence is completely lacking. In fact, Genesis 2:20 explains that Adam gave names to “all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.” One wonders how this was possible if nearly all the animals were already extinct by the time Adam appeared on earth.

3. The Genesis Flood was a local event that left little or no physical evidence.

This implication necessarily follows because the earth’s geologic strata are interpreted as chapters of deep time rather than Flood deposits. Progressive creationist Hugh Ross is consistent in his conclusion that “No viable scientific evidence has ever been found for a recent global Flood” (Ross, p.157). However, Ross ignores 40 years of Flood research by the Creation Research Society. In fact, the CRS has published nearly 5,000 pages of material favoring a global Flood. This evidence may be largely ignored today but it is no less significant. Furthermore, Genesis 7:23 clearly describes a worldwide Flood, “Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.”

4. The Bible does not mean quite what it says.

With deep time the days of Genesis One must be interpreted as non-literal or at least non-sequential. However, Exodus 20:11 teaches that our calendar week is modeled directly upon the creation week. After all, there is no known object in astronomy with a seven-day period from which the week could have originated independent of creation. Certainly the word *day* has multiple meanings in scripture, both 12 hours and 24 hours in Genesis 1:5, and an entire week in Genesis 2:4 (KJV). However, every word in any language similarly can assume multiple meanings. Try this with any word that comes to mind. The context must determine word meaning, and the Genesis creation account most clearly describes literal days.

Sometimes 2 Peter 3:8 is used to promote the idea of non-literal creation days. The verse states that “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” But this verse, a quote from Psalm 90:4,

does not refer to the creation week. Instead it teaches that God is above time and sees all of history simultaneously. The verse also fails to satisfy the long age view. If the assumed 12 billion years of universe age are divided into six long creation days, each day must then be two billion years old. This is certainly an extreme stretch of both Exodus 20:11 and 2 Peter 3:8.

5. Animal death, disease, pain, and predation existed long before the curse of Genesis 3.

However, Romans 5:12 teaches that death first began at the time of the Fall. There is the counter argument that the death of Romans 5:12 was limited to spiritual death of humanity only and did not apply to animals. However this argument is weak and unconvincing (DeYoung, 1997). After all, the very first biblical reference to death is Genesis 3:21, when the Lord made garments for Adam and Eve from animal hide. This particular implication concerning death may well be the strongest and most fatal blow to the deep time concept. There are enormous theological consequences to an assumed history of death and imperfection before Adam.

6. End-time events will likewise require billions of years for their completion.

This implication follows from a consistent application of the big bang theory, an integral component of deep time. In the big bang theory, light from distant galaxies requires billions of years to reach the earth. What will then happen when God someday forms a new heavens and earth? Old light still in transit, giving a picture of the former heavens, must continue to strike the earth for billions of years. But this idea contradicts 2 Peter 3:10 which describes the heavens as disappearing with a mighty roar. The problem here is the direct connection of deep space with deep time, required by the big bang theory. In the creation view, without the constraint of big bang expansion, time and distance are entirely separate quantities. Space is indeed vast in size but not necessarily great in age. And when God reprograms the cosmos, the results will be obvious to earth immediately, just as the sun, moon, and stars were seen immediately upon their creation on the fourth day (Genesis 1:16).

Conclusion

An acceptance of deep time into one’s worldview reveals two basic errors. First, the authority of current *science* is *overestimated*. The existence of deep time is taken as absolute proven fact, but this is not the case. The deep time concept is simply imbedded in big bang and evolutionary

theories as a presupposition. Thousands of scientists and millions of others instead prefer a recent creation. The same data is available to all, whether radioisotope dating results or stellar distances. The age interpretation of this data varies greatly.

A second basic error of deep time acceptance is that the *Bible* is *underestimated*. Biblical truth is placed at a lower level of authority than current science. But our scientific understanding continues to change while the Bible does not change. This inspired book truly has stood the test of time.

Those who have bought wholesale into an ancient earth and cosmos are respectfully asked to consider the implications. The belief in deep time is an unnecessary complication to one's worldview. In another sense, however, it is not nearly long enough. The current physical creation is a

brief interlude, thousands of years in length, between eternity past and future. Therein lies the true concept of *deep time*.

References

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Book Review

Handbook: Creation, the Flood and Historical Dating by John G. Read
Apocalypse Press. * 2000, 206 pages, \$12.95

Read's book (not to be confused with CRSQ geology editor John K. Reed) is ambitious, dealing with geology, radiometric dating, astronomy, geophysics, biblical chronology, and other subjects. His geology presentation (pp. 23–32) deals with the supposed Keystone overthrust, near Las Vegas, where evidence for overthrusting is absent. He contrasts that with Amargosa overthrust, Death Valley (CA), where there is evidence for overthrusting, including a buckling of the overthrust section (from pressure when the thrusting occurred), and broken, fragmented breccia on the surface where thrusting occurred. Pictures illustrate the author's claims.

The radiometric dating chapter (pp. 33–60) was valuable for an overview of the history of the subject, explaining how calculated age discrepancies for terrestrial igneous samples were blamed on contamination. That led to the search for lunar rocks that were thought to be uncontaminated. However, the lunar U-Th-Pb and K-Ar dates did not match those determined by the Rb-Sr method (p. 52). Therefore old-earth scientists theorized that Rb-Sr isochron dating was the most accurate. However, Read (pp. 48–50) summarized Gill's (1996) work pointing out that Rb-Sr isochron dating uses a faulty mathematical mode.

Read believes that a planet formerly existing between Mars and Jupiter was destroyed, resulting in the asteroid belt currently located there. He believes (p. 127) that the Bible uses the name "Daystar" for that planet. On p. 169 he suggests it was a geographical separation of the earth,

with rapid geophysical changes that occurred when the earth was divided in the days of Peleg (Gen. 10:25). However, Old Testament scholar Dave Fouts (1998) argues that a worldwide cataclysmic continental separation when Peleg was born is not suggested by the context.

Read's Old Testament chronology presents some interesting data, though the reader may also want to consult McFall (1991) or Thiele (1983) for other evangelical perspectives. On p.107 he suggests that the biblical Assyrian king Pul (2 Ki. 15:17–19) was *not* another name for Tiglath-pileser III, an idea which numerous historians would disagree with (the present reviewer among them). He acknowledges Tiglath-pileser III had the name Pul, though he suggests the biblical Pul was another otherwise unknown person with the same name. He thinks (p. 105) the solar eclipse during the reign of Assyrian king Assur-dan III was in 809 BC instead of the very widely accepted 763 mentioned by the Assyrian eponym canon. Because of this, his chronology will not permit the Assyrian synchronism's for Shalmaneser III's sixth and eighteenth years with the Israelite Kings Ahab during 853 BC and Jehu in 841 (contrary to Thiele (1983), McFall (1991) and many others). Read must postulate the very unlikely occurrence of 46 missing eponyms from the Assyrian calendar between his revised eclipse date for Assur-dan during 809 BC [continued on page 52].

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