

The discrepancies begin concerning **when** the Bible says this beginning was. Here is a brief summary of the most popular beliefs: Some Creation Scientists maintain, by a strict interpretation of Biblical chronology, that the earth is very young – thousands, not billions of years old. Others agree with secular scientists concerning the antiquity of the earth. Their stand is that the days of the creation week in the Bible were not literal earth days, but days on God's clock, encompassing billions of years; i.e., the geologic ages, or the **day age theory**. Then there are theologians who believe there is a time gap between Genesis 1:1, and Genesis 1:2 that allows all the time scientists need for an old earth. This **gap theory** projects an original *perfect creation* in Genesis 1:1, a *chaotic earth* in Genesis 1:2, flooded because of judgement when Satan fell and lost his place in God's kingdom, and then *re-created* in the verses that follow.

Are any one of these beliefs critical to the earth age question? From a Biblical perspective, possibly not. Kenneth S. Kantzer writes in an article titled *Guideposts for the Current Debate Over Origins*:

As biblical students, therefore, we must remain agnostic about the age of the earth. We have no biblical warrant for ruling out the validity of the commonly accepted geological timetable. Let scientists battle it out on the basis of the scientific evidence, but we should not bolster weak scientific positions with misinterpretations of the Bible conjured up for that purpose. God rarely sees fit merely to gratify our curiosity.

This may well be the safest position for Christians to take. And, even though biblical believers need not be necessarily scientifically ignorant, scientific doctrines may not always be accurate, either. From a scientific perspective, science simply discovers and confirms what was there all along, and is perpetually open to new observations and testing. According to Victor A. Schmidt:

Maybe science can lead us toward the Truth about how the universe works,

but the trouble is we can never be certain that we are all the way there. If the statement of the scientific method is meaningful, then as long as there are still new observations to be made, the nature of scientific truth is always subject to change. If the scientific method is to be followed, then absolute or dogmatic Truth cannot be part of science.

So, scientists are not always right. And the problem with the Bible does not stem from what it says, but how it is interpreted.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, the following facts are evident: If the earth had a beginning, then it **has an age**. In order to determine its age, the evidence needs to be interpreted correctly, but we may not know all the facts.

Scientifically and theologically, the argument about the true age of the earth could continue for a long time. But from a Biblical position, since the Bible does not contain dates; and therefore it is not specific about the age of the earth: **It does not incriminate itself in light of the evidence!**

NOTES

- *Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan, *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (New York: Random House, 1992), p.45, p.11.
- *Victor A. Schmidt, *Planet Earth and the New Geoscience* (Dubuque, IA.: Kendall/Hunt, 1986), p.16, p.17.
- *Professor Edward Hull, *The Wall Chart of World History* (London: Studio Editions, 1988).
- *George Gaylord Simpson, *Fossils and the History of Life* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1983) p.206.
- *Hugh Ross, *The Creator and the Cosmos* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1993), p.19, 20.
- *Robert Jastrow, *God and the Astronomers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), p.12.
- **Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Chicago: G. & C. Merriam), 1970.
- *Stephen W. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988), jacket cover, p.117, p.12.
- *James S. Trefil, *The Moment of Creation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1983), p.12.
- *Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Guideposts for the Current Debate Over Origins" (Christianity Today, Oct. 8, 1982), p.23, p.26, quoted by Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe* (Wheaton: Victor, 1987), p.103.

The AGE of the EARTH



Does the Bible Conflict with Modern Science?

by John Locke



One of the greatest indictments against the Bible pertains to the age of the earth. Biblical critics frequently accuse the Bible of attesting to the wrong age of the earth, and thus render it untrustworthy. “You can’t believe the Bible,” is often implied. Does the Bible speak regarding the age of the earth? Interpretations of Biblical content greatly differ on this issue.

One school of thought, made by scientists and theologians alike, is that the Bible dates the earth very young (by its chronological records), about 6,000 to 10,000 years. Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan reason that “*the Bible’s six days of Creation, and the age of the Earth deduced by adding up the ‘begats,’ were somehow in error*” (with modern science). Geologist Victor A. Schmidt calls it “*the Biblical span of 6,000 years...*” But someone else claims: “*Moses assigns no date to this Creation. How long after this ‘beginning’ before the advent of Man is unknown.*” Paleontologist George Gaylord Simpson readily agrees: “*Incredible as it may seem, even today there are chronophobiacs who maintain that the age of the earth is only 10,000 years. Asked for evidence, they usually refer to Genesis, which in fact gives no such figure.*”

What does the Bible really say? We will investigate to see. But first, what does modern science tell us about the age of the earth? According to Sagan:

There was once a time before the Sun and Earth existed, a time before there was day or night, long, long before there was anyone to record the Beginning for those who might come after.

Most modern scientists believe that the universe had a beginning, which they call the “**Big Bang**,” and that it came into existence 10 to 20 billion years ago, and the earth afterwards, about 4 1/2 billion years ago. What is generally accepted as proof of the Big Bang theory was the discovery of cosmic background radiation in 1964 by two scientists, Robert W. Wilson and Arno A. Penzias. This discovery was further confirmed and refined when results from the Cosmic Background Explorer Satellite (COBE) were announced in 1992, which, according to astrophysicist Hugh Ross, offers “stunning confirmation of the

big bang creation event.” Other universe models, such as the steady state universe, are now mutually abandoned by the majority of modern scientists. Astronomer Dr. Robert Jastrow writes:

But adverse evidence has lead to the abandonment of the Steady State theory by nearly everyone, leaving the Big Bang theory exposed as the only adequate explanation of the facts.

The first verse of the first chapter of the New King James version Bible, Genesis 1:1 reads: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*” The first three words, though theological in principle, can be interpreted as a type of scientific declaration: **There was a beginning.** Genesis means *beginning* or *origin*. The rest of the verse states that God created the universe from nothing. According to the dictionary, to create means “*to bring into existence*” Creation literally is *something from nothing*. Theologian Hans Kung in *Does God Exist* further explains:

To say that God created the world “out of nothing” does not mean that nothing has a kind of independent existence before or alongside God, but is a theological expression of the fact that the world and man, together with space and time, owe their existence to God alone and to no other cause.

To this assertion can also be added: “*Every single thing that exists in the entire universe, known and unknown, is a result, whether directly or indirectly, of what we call the First Cause of all things, namely – God.*” (This is the position assumed by most Bible believers, who maintain their belief by faith.)

The idea that the universe came from nothing or practically nothing is not contrary to modern scientific thinking. Stephen W. Hawking, who is called “*the most brilliant theoretical physicist since Einstein*” says: “*At the big bang itself, the universe is thought to have had zero size, and so to have been infinitely hot.*” **Zero** and **nothing** are synonymous. Other descriptions of the initial size of the universe

are “*infinitesimally small*” (Webster’s Dictionary defines infinitesimal as “a function that can be made arbitrarily close to zero”), “*all matter was in a highly condensed state,*” and “*very much smaller than the period at the end of this sentence.*”

Since scientists think the evidence shows us that all matter in the universe was one time highly condensed to such an immeasurably small size, why not take one more very small but certain step and suggest that it did actually come from nothing? Then it could have been at the beginning:

When God spoke in the beginning, He began His miraculous creation of the Universe. From absolutely nothing He created everything we know (and don’t know) that exists – billions of stars, galaxies, planets, moons, comets, and life itself!

Even though it really is a very small step, don’t hold your breath waiting for scientists to concede to it. (Although some already have!)

Proverbs 8:22 and 23 speak of a **time** existing before the beginning of the earth: “*The Lord created me (wisdom) at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts long ago. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth.*” The phrase “*before the world began*” also appears in II Timothy 1:9 and Titus 1:2 in the King James Version.

There is harmony then between most modern scientists and the Bible on the following points:

- 1. The universe had a beginning**
- 2. The earth had a beginning.**
- 3. All matter came from virtually nothing.**
- 4. Time existed before the beginning of the earth.**

