

## Article

*Young-Earth Creationism: A Literal Mistake*

# Young-Earth Creationism: A Literal Mistake

Dick Fischer



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*“Biblical literalism” often is blamed when conservative Christians find themselves unable to cope with certain realities of this world and its encompassing universe, specifically, in respect to the great age of our surroundings – around 15 billion years for the universe and about 4.6 billion years for our global habitat. This article endeavors to shift the blame away from the written Scriptures, and place it squarely on the shoulders of those who to this point have been unable to comprehend them. Scribal errors and translation mistakes have led to flawed interpretations, and some of the problem can be traced to those who wrote Bible commentary centuries ago. But the Bible itself can rise above these difficulties. All we have to do is read it, and except in obvious instances, take it literally!*

*“Young-earth creationism” attempts to blend a little scientific learning with a curious style of [biblical] literalism.*

**A** little learning is a dangerous thing” is a time-honored expression my high school geometry teacher would use when one of us misapplied an axiom, postulate, or corollary in an attempt to prove a particular geometric theorem. “Biblical literalism” is a term to describe a movement among conservative Christians who demonstrate a certain lack of acumen in the basic tenets of earth science. “Young-earth creationism” (YEC in the vernacular) attempts to blend a little scientific learning with a curious style of literalism. YECs, who purport to be biblical literalists, actually are not! We will see that a little learning combined with a lack of understanding can still to this day be a dangerous thing.

What YECs assert can be summarized as follows: The earth and the universe were created recently, about six to ten thousand years ago. From the beginning of the cosmos, the little hand of a clock would sweep its face fewer than twelve times before the first human beings were there to enjoy the warmth of a two-day old sun, and could view a nighttime sky complete with two-day old galaxies and stars created on the fourth

24-hour day. The earth on that sixth 24-hour day would be filled with trilobites, brachiopods, dinosaurs, woolly mammoths, and all of the forms of animals that ever lived, dwelling in peaceful cohabitation with Adam and Eve, the first human beings.

There are no biological links between species in young-earth doctrine, and no death of any kind occurred prior to Adam’s fall. All of the animals, and presumably insects, too, would have multiplied and filled the earth without dying had it not been for Original Sin.<sup>1</sup> Representatives of every animal species, including dinosaurs, were loaded on Noah’s ark. A worldwide flood distributed neat layers of incongruous sedimentary materials, gouged out the Grand Canyon over a mile deep, synthesized ice ages, and even moved continents around the globe. The fossil record with complex fossils overlying simple varieties is due to an indescribable sorting action, according to YEC belief.

These beliefs derive directly from Scripture, according to young-earth creationists. It is the unerring, infallible Word of God, they believe, that leads them to advocate a farce of divine deception, disregarding sensible scientific explanation. As Duane Gish put it:

It is this author’s belief that a sound Biblical exegesis requires the acceptance of the catastrophist-recent creation interpretation of earth history.<sup>2</sup>

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Is it possible that the Bible is an unwilling accomplice in a charade of implausibility promoted by unwitting Christians? We have only to read it to see.

## The Days of Creation

Did the days of creation in Genesis 1 last only twenty-four hours, or could these days be long times of indefinite length, such as a few billion years between days one and two, for example? "Evening and morning cannot be construed to mean an age, but only a day," Bible scholar Charles Caldwell Ryrie says, "everywhere in the Pentateuch the word 'day,' when used with a numerical adjective, means a solar day (now calibrated as 24 hours)."<sup>3</sup>

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*We who are bound to a specific place at any given time perceive "evening" and "morning" as synonymous with sunset and sunrise, but God does not see the world from a single vantage point. From God's perspective, the earth is always half in daylight and half in darkness perennially.*

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Yet Moses stated in Ps. 90:4: "For a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or as a watch in the night [three to four hours]." That sentiment is echoed in 2 Peter 3:8: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day."

In other words, God's time and humans' time are dissimilar. The timetable of any moving object in the universe is dictated by the speed of that object according to the Theory of Relativity. Here on earth we enjoy earth time. For astronauts traveling aboard the International Space Station, time compresses slightly such that when they return to earth they are a tiny bit younger than if they had not ventured in space. By the same token, a God of the universe would not be on the same timetable as one of its moving bodies.

Further, God does not live at any particular location. We who are bound to a specific place at any given time perceive "evening" and "morning" as synonymous with sunset and sunrise, but God does not see the world from a single vantage point. From God's perspective, the earth is always half in daylight and half in darkness perennially. We could say God never sees "evening" or "morning," or we could say that God sees an infinite number of "evenings" and "mornings" every single day.

To human and animal observers on the sixth day, "morning" could be thought of as sunrise. But from day one to day four, God's timing alone applied, eliminating the possibility of a 24-hour day. So who should we trust, Bible scholar Ryrie, or Bible writers Moses and Peter? Or Augustine who said that they were "God-divided days," not "sun-divided days"?<sup>4</sup>

## Evening and Morning Defined

"Evening" and "morning" should not be troublesome; these words are clarified in the Old Testament. In Psalm 90, humans are likened to grass. "In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, and withereth" (Ps. 90:6). Perry Phillips comments:

I know of no grass that literally springs up in the morning and then is dead by the same evening. Rather, the psalmist has in mind the life cycle of grass in the Levant, which begins its growth with the November rains and dies with the hot, dry, March, desert winds. In this psalm, therefore, "morning" stands for the period of growth and "evening" stands for the period of death.<sup>5</sup>

## Vegetation Without Sun?

Vegetation appears on the third day. The sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day according to YEC doctrine from what they consider to be a literal interpretation of Gen. 1:14-19. They maintain this belief even though on both the third and fourth day, the Hebrew word for create (*bara*) is absent. On the fourth day, the word is *asah*, often translated as "made." In this case, "ordained," "commissioned," or "permitted to function" would aptly translate *asah*. Gleason Archer comments:

Genesis 1:14-19 reveals that in the fourth creative stage God parted the cloud cover enough for direct sunlight to fall on the earth and for accurate observation of the movements of the sun, moon, and stars to take place. Verse 16 should not be understood as indicating the creation of the heavenly bodies for the first time on the fourth creative day; rather it informs us that the sun, moon, and stars created on Day One as the source of light had been placed in their appointed places by God with a view to their eventually functioning as indicators of time ("signs, seasons, days, years") to terrestrial observers.<sup>6</sup>

On day one, God created heaven and earth, including the sun, moon, and stars. The sun's energy enabled the growth of vegetation on the third day. On the fourth day, he appointed the sun, moon, and stars as timekeepers for the sighted creatures that began to appear on the fifth day. If the sun's appearance is not until the fourth day, it could not have been used to measure the length of that day or any of the previous days. Taken literally, none of the first four days of creation can be a 24-hour period.

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### The Seventh Day of Rest

Even if a 24-hour period could be construed for any one of the first six days of creation, it is impossible for the seventh. God's seventh day of rest says nothing of "evening" or "morning" and continues as in Heb. 4:3: "For we which have believed do enter into rest, as He said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world."

According to Archer: "... that seventh day, that 'Sabbath rest,' in a very definite sense has continued on right into the church age."<sup>7</sup> If the seventh day is a long period of time encompassing thousands of years, then consistency demands that the first six days be given similar treatment—that is, ages or eons, but not 24-hour periods.<sup>8</sup>

### Can One Day Equal Six Days?

Following the six days of creation and God's sanctification of the seventh day of rest, a shift of focus begins at Gen. 2:4: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."

Here the word "day" is used as a coverall to apply to the previous six days of creation. But how can one 24-hour day equal six 24-hour days? This is not a semantics problem, this is a math problem. If a day of creation is a time of indefinite length, then one large time of indefinite length could equal six smaller times of indefinite length. But one 24-hour day cannot equal six 24-hour days.

The word of importance in Gen. 2:4, however, is *toledah*, translated as "generations." According to Hebrew lexicons, this word always pertains to a long time period. Plus, the word is plural. Therefore "generations" refers to numerous time periods, each of which would be longer than one calendar week.<sup>9</sup> If we take Genesis literally, that effectively eliminates the 24-hour day definition from the list of possibilities.

### Planting the Garden

In Gen. 2:8-9: "... the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food."

To read this straightforwardly (the only way YECs say is valid), we would conclude that on the sixth day when Adam was created, the garden of Eden was planted by God. Then Adam was charged to "dress it and to keep it" (Gen. 2:15). The garden grew and matured to the extent that the seedlings which God planted became trees bearing edible fruit whereupon God could command Adam in Gen. 2:16-17: "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it ..." Fruit has now grown on the trees God planted, and this is still the sixth day. And Eve is yet to be created, on the same sixth day!

To insist that day six is a 24-hour day is to argue against the straightforward method of interpretation that YECs claim they follow.

### A Word from Adam

On that sixth day of creation, YECs believe, Adam named all the world's thousands and thousands of animal species, tended the garden a little, and had an operation resulting in Eve—all within a small part of a 24-hour day.

Yet Adam exclaims excitedly in Gen. 2:23, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh ..." The word "now" is the Hebrew *happa'am* usually translated "now at length" or "at last." This Hebrew word is appropriate after a long wait or a lengthy search, but it would be entirely inappropriate had Eve been presented to him only a few hours after he was created. Should we trust YEC doctrine, or take Adam at his word?

### Death Before Sin?

Young-earth creationists maintain the Bible prohibits death, even in the animal world, until Adam commits Original Sin. Gen. 3:17b and Rom. 8:22 are summoned for oblique support, but essentially this idea of no death in the animal kingdom before Adam hinges on their interpretation of about one-half of one verse in Romans.

Citing Rom. 5:12, Henry Morris explains that death "entered into the world" only when sin came by humankind. He continues:

... it is as obvious as anything could be that the fossil record now found in the

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sedimentary rocks of the earth's crust could only have been formed sometime *after* man sinned.<sup>10</sup>

What did Paul say in Romans? "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin ...*" (Rom. 5:12a). Does this mean Adam's sin caused death in the animal world too, and there was no physical death before then?

Notice that Morris did not quote the entire verse. He stopped in mid-sentence, in fact. This is what follows the semi-colon. Rom. 5:12b: "*and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*" So the Bible tells us, "as obvious as anything could be," who or what is affected by Adam's sin—humans, not animals. Additional clarification can be found in verse thirteen: "*For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law.*" Who was under the law, humans or animals? Did animals tithe, fast, celebrate feasts, honor the Sabbath, keep the commandments, or offer up unblemished sacrifices?

Romans 4:13 says: "*For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*" Were animals "through the righteousness of faith" to be joint heirs of the world along with the descendants of Abraham? Who is right on this issue, creationist Henry Morris or the Apostle Paul?

## The Appearance of Age

When they come under a reasoned attack, there is another rationalization young-earth advocates will employ. Flinching under the weight of old-earth evidence, they offer an alternate explanation. The world is young, they claim, but was created to look old.

In 1857, Phillip Gosse wrote *Omphalos* (navel), a book advocating that God created false records in nature to date his recent creation artificially. Just as Adam seems to have been created an adult, Gosse argued, the Creator designed the earth to look old. The earth would be young, but would have the "appearance of age."

The appearance of age argument is similarly flawed. Had Adam been aged artificially in the same sense that the universe and earth bear the undeniable stamp of antiquity, a physical exam would have revealed worn teeth, liver spots, scar tissue, calluses, blood cholesterol, wrinkles, and all the other physical signs of an aging adult.

The notion that the universe was created with an apparent age, or that it looks old but is really young, crumbles under its own weight. How ironic it would have been for God to have commanded in Exod. 20:16, "*Thou shalt not bear false witness,*" and have expected his children to adhere to a criterion that he would have violated from the beginning. From Romans, we are held accountable by the evidence of nature. "*For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the*

*things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse*" (Rom. 1:1:20). Had an artificially-dated planet been palmed off on us by a clever sleight-of-hand artist we would not be without excuse, we would have a great excuse!

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Inherent with the appearance of age argument is a classic "Catch-22."<sup>11</sup> If the world is old, as it looks, then why would God give us a book saying it is young? And if the world is young, then it had to be manufactured deliberately to look old. Thus, YEC orthodoxy poses an insane dilemma: If the world is old, then God would be a fibber, and if young, he would be a counterfeiter! Taking young-earth dogma to its conclusion, we ask: "If we cannot trust God to give us a true history of the world, how can we trust him to give us true history and true prophecy in his Book?" A god who could falsify nature might falsify a resurrection!

Ironically, these implied allegations raised by those who profess to be believers, call God's credibility into question. True words demand true works. "*For the word of the Lord is right and all his works are done in truth*" (Ps. 33:4).

## Scripture Evidence for an Old Earth

Is the earth young or old? Let us thumb through the Bible and see. In Job 15:1, Eliphaz asked Job, "*Wast thou made before the hills?*" Does it seem reasonable that Eliphaz would have used this question of digging sarcasm had he thought the age of the hills and the age of humans were virtually the same, varying by a scant five days?

The intent of Eliphaz in Job is confirmed by Hab. 3:6. The mountains are described as "*everlasting*"; the hills are "*perpetual.*" The Hebrew words '*ad*' and '*owlam*' mean "long duration," "ancient," "forever," and "continuous existence."

Does the Bible comment on the earth-age dispute? Consider Eccles. 1:10: "*Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.*" Could "*any thing*" include an earth, for example?

After Peter declares that false prophets and false teachers will come in the last days, he warns in 2 Pet. 3:5, "*For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the*

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*heavens were of old ...* Who says the earth and heavens are young? Those who are “willingly ignorant.”

### Where Did the Rivers Go?

Because YECs believe the flood was universal and necessarily sequenced what otherwise appears to be a chronologically-sequenced fossil record laid down over millions of years, none of the features of the antediluvian world would be found today. Whatever remnants of the rivers Euphrates and Hiddekel (Tigris) mentioned in Gen. 2:14 that might exist would be buried beneath layers of flood-laid sedimentary rock. The flood would have scrubbed the earth’s landscape. Yet we find the Euphrates thirteen chapters later. When Abraham receives his covenant from God, the Lord himself cites the “*great river, the river Euphrates*” (Gen. 15:18).

Those who purport to take the Bible literally claim that the Euphrates was two different rivers with the same name! Also, if YEC explanations were true, the Hiddekel in Gen. 2:14 could not be the “*great river*” Daniel stood beside in Dan. 10:4. But wait, the Tigris today still arises out of what was once ancient Assyria just as described in Gen. 2:14. “Sorry, different rivers,” according to those who call themselves biblical literalists. And though the Hiddekel and Euphrates join together today just as described in the pre-flood era, they have to be unrelated rivers or the entire YEC scenario unravels. Here is the key. The “straightforward reading” YECs call for is simply cast aside whenever it does not fit their young-earth motif.

### The Great Flood

According to YEC theory, about 5,000 years ago, all of the world’s animals trekked their way from Noah’s Ark and the mountains of Ararat—or maybe even Mount Ararat—to their final destinations in North and South America, and islands like Australia, and Madagascar leaving no traces of ancestors along their courses of migration.

All human life, YECs believe, emanates from Noah and his three sons who must have found ways to alter their skin color, physical features, and even their underlying skeletal morphology in an extremely short period of time. Why do YECs believe this?

The Bible affirms it, they say. Or as we shall see, maybe it does not.

There was no rain on the early earth, YECs will say. A “vapor canopy” surrounded the globe for over 1600 years, and fell as rain during the flood. That is their reading of Gen. 2:5–6: “*And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.*”

Henry Morris argues for a vapor canopy over the early earth, and reasons:

In the original world, however, there was no rainfall on the earth. As originally created, the earth’s daily water supply came primarily from local evaporation and condensation.<sup>12</sup>

Morris reaches this conclusion based solely on his reading of the biblical text, deducing that rain does not come until the flood, notwithstanding that no one has discovered any place in the world where mist or fog oozes naturally out of the ground in sufficient volume to water humans, livestock, and crops. We would also be left to wonder what furnished the rivers in Gen. 2:10–14 with water. Were the Tigris and Euphrates not supplied by snow melt and rainfall as they are today?

In their *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Keil and Delitzsch explain Gen. 2:5 as follows: “The creation of the plants is not alluded to here at all, but simply the planting of the garden in Eden.”<sup>13</sup>

The following is taken from the *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology* pertaining to ancient Mesopotamia, the land of the Tigris and Euphrates:

This area was characterized by the very great fertility of its alluvial soil and—outside local areas of marsh and lagoon where a specialized fishing, hunting and collecting economy could have been practised—an extremely arid environment that necessitated the use of irrigation for successful agriculture.<sup>14</sup>

Could “an extremely arid environment” be described as a place where the “*Lord God had not caused it to rain*”? Could a “*mist from the earth*” that “*watered the whole face of the ground*” refer to a land “that necessitated the use of irrigation for successful agriculture”?

Because YECs believe that the flood was universal, ... [they] claim that the Euphrates [and Hiddekel were] two different rivers with the same name! ... And though the Hiddekel and Euphrates join together today just as described in the pre-flood era, they have to be unrelated rivers or the entire YEC scenario unravels.

Driver suggests Gen. 2:5–6 is about irrigation. He says: “Provision made for the irrigation of the garden. The reference is implicitly to a system of canals, such as existed in Babylonia ...”<sup>15</sup>

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The Septuagint version of the Old Testament offers further assistance. In the Greek text, the word is not “mist,” but “fountain.” The RSV uses “stream.” Could part of an irrigation system be called a “fountain”? Could a canal be called a “stream”? At least could we agree that the words “fountain” and “stream” better describe an irrigation system than a vapor canopy? It seems “*there was not a man to till the ground*” for an uncomplicated reason. No one had irrigated the desert soil. Thus no plowing had been done, so no crops could be grown.

Mist, the Hebrew *’ed*, derives from the Accadian *edu*. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* comments on this word as it appears in Gen. 2:6:

The Akkadian *edu* refers to the annual inundation of Babylon by the Euphrates as well as to irrigation. If Eden was watered by floods and irrigation rather than rain, it may have been located in an area like southern Mesopotamia where it does not rain. Such a location would suggest that the paradisiacal situation was not worldwide but peculiar to Eden’s immediate environs.<sup>16</sup>

## The Great Flood, Global or Local?

If the flood was a Mesopotamian event, what causes YECs to believe that the flood was worldwide? It stems primarily from the King James translators who thought the same thing, and translated Hebrew into English with an erroneous preconception. Note the word “earth” in this passage:

*And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die (Gen. 6:17).*

The following comes from Old Testament scholar Gleason Archer:

... it needs to be pointed out that the Hebrew *’eres*, translated consistently as “earth” in our English Bibles, is also the word for “land” (e.g., the *land* of Israel, the *land* of Egypt). There is another term, *tebel*, which means the whole expanse of the earth,

or the earth as a whole. Nowhere does *tebel* occur in this account, but only *’eres*, in all the statements which sound quite universal in the English Bible (e.g., Gen. 7:4, 10, 17, 18, 19). Thus, Genesis 6:17c can be rendered: “Everything that is in the land shall die”—that is, in whatever geographical region is involved in the context and situation.<sup>17</sup>

The King James Version dates to 1611. This translation was performed without the benefit of scientific and historical knowledge gleaned over the last 390 years, and unfortunately has provoked this common misunderstanding. What the writer of Genesis understood by the word “earth” is an open question.

For us, “earth” could be thought of as synonymous with “globe” or “planet,” from Gen. 1:1 to 2:4, even though this last verse is transitional and shifts focus to the immediate area where Adam was created, and the flood took place. With the possible exception of Gen. 8:22 and 9:13, from Gen. 2:5 to Gen. 12, words such as “land,” “region,” or “territory” fit the context better than the word “earth.” Cain was not driven off “*the face of the earth*” (Gen. 4:14), just out of the vicinity of Eden. Clouds never cover the globe completely (Gen. 9:14), only a segment of land. The planet was not divided in Peleg’s days (Gen. 10:25), simply the immediate region.

## Fountains of the Deep

There are key words and phrases contained in the Genesis text that, properly understood, place the entire text in proper context. Gen. 7:11 says: “*In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up ...*”

The phrase “*fountains of the deep*” has been a major contributor to the global flood concept. Visions of great, oceanic, water-spewing volcanoes have been conjured up to rationalize this phrase, and to account for the enormous amount of water needed for a universal deluge.

Earlier in this article, we looked at the Septuagint version where the word “*fountain*” appears rather than “*mist*” in Gen. 2:6. We saw this referred to an irrigation system in all likelihood. Here “*fountains of the great deep*” again points to irrigation. The Hebrew word for “*deep*” can mean the sea, it can refer to subterranean waters, or it can mean the depths of a river.

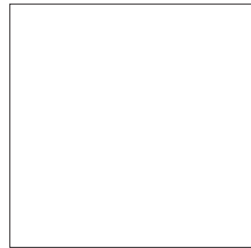
In the Atrahasis epic (an Assyrian flood account that parallels the Genesis flood narrative), the phrases “*fountains of the deep*” or “*fountain of the deep*” appear four times. In all instances, fountain(s) pertain to “*fields*,” as in this example:

*Be[low] the fountain of the deep was stopped,  
[that the flood rose not at the source].  
The field diminished [its fertility].<sup>18</sup>*



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The phrase “fountains of the deep” is defined by Semites, even before it appeared in the Genesis flood narrative, as overflowing rivers that caused the dams, dikes, and irrigation canals to burst open, flooding the land. [Thus] we can interpret “fountains of the deep” as a reference to the irrigation systems constructed in southern Mesopotamia ...

From the consistency in usage, we can see these were canals or levies used for irrigation. In the eleventh chapter of Gilgamesh (an Accadian flood account), the name “Ninurta” appears. He was the “lord of the wells and irrigation works.”<sup>19</sup> So, the phrase “fountains of the deep” is defined by Semites, even before it appeared in the Genesis flood narrative, as overflowing rivers that caused the dams, dikes, and irrigation canals to burst open, flooding the land. With the assistance of this historical information, we can interpret “fountains of the deep” as a reference to the irrigation systems constructed in southern Mesopotamia, which clearly mandates a local flood.

### Making Mountains out of Hills

“And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered. Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered” (Gen. 7:19, 20).

Some Genesis commentators have seized on these passages to assert that the high mountains were covered to a depth of fifteen cubits (about twenty-two feet). Where the water would have come from is problematical, as well as what became of it.

As with the Hebrew word common for both earth and land, the word for “mountains” and “hills” is the same. If the flooding was restricted to the Mesopotamian plain, then the “mountains” submerged by the flood could have been the lower mountains of the surrounding region, or it may signify the lower foothills at the beginning of a mountain range.

If one is tempted to believe that the flood encompassed more than just Mesopotamia, the last phrase, “of all that was in the dry land, died” should provide perspective. Mesopotamia, present-day Iraq, is a desert, and a desert is a “dry land.”

### All and Every

“Bring forth with thee every thing that is with thee, of all flesh, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth ...” (Gen. 8:17).

It is a great temptation to take ancient Hebrew words, translate them directly into English, and then make an interpretation

based upon what modern English-speaking peoples might have meant had they used such words. There are many instances where this technique will generate an erroneous result.

In Gen. 41:41,47, Pharaoh set Joseph “over all the land of Egypt,” and there were seven plentiful years. “And he gathered up all the food of the seven years, which were in the land of Egypt ...” (Gen. 41:48). All the food? The resident Egyptians ate none of it in seven years?

“And the famine was over all the face of the earth ...” (Gen. 41:56). Were the Americas similarly affected? Australia? China? “And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn ...” (Gen. 41:57). That would be a long trip for someone living in Scandinavia.

Let us use sense interpreting these verses. There were seven years of bountiful harvest followed by seven lean years. Food was stored up during the first seven years so that enough would be available for the following seven. They were so efficient that even surrounding countries could draw on their stores. It would be unreasonable to suggest that the Egyptians ate not a morsel for seven years because, “he gathered up all the food of the seven years.” It would be senseless to think the rainfall in Peru was deficient because “famine was all over the face of the earth,” or that Aztec Indians lined up behind Australian Aborigines at the gates of Memphis because “all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn ...” By the same token, the Genesis flood narrative does not require a worldwide catastrophe because “all flesh died” in it.

Another example of Hebrew terminology is found in Psalm 22. This is a psalm of David, yet a prophecy of the crucifixion: “... they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22:16). Matthew harkens back to David, “the prophet,” and quotes Ps. 22:18 in his account of the Roman soldiers casting lots for Jesus’ garments (Matt. 27:35). Yet, David also wrote: “... and all my bones are out of joint” (Ps. 22:14).

For those who think that “all” in the flood narrative demands that every human and every animal died in the flood, let them explain how 206 bones can get out of joint! The word “all” in the flood account is entirely consistent in Hebrew usage.

## Scope of the Flood

A local flood with unaffected animal survivors throughout the world gives rise as to whether there were human survivors. Realizing there were animal survivors is one more basis for acknowledging human survivors as well. It may not be as evident, but when we focus on what the Bible says, and not on what we have been told it means, we can see there were human populations living outside the flood zone.

Bernard Ramm emphasized this point:

The flood was local to the Mesopotamian valley. The animals that came, prompted by divine instinct, were the animals of that region; they were preserved for the good of man after the flood. Man was destroyed within the boundaries of the flood; the record is mute about man in America or Africa or China.<sup>20</sup>

In ignorance, we could think all animals and all humans perished in the flood. In light of general revelation, we can say that some animals and some humans perished in the flood. It would be entirely inconsistent, however, to assert that only some animals died in the flood, but all humans perished.

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On the question, did Noah's flood cover the entire world? Donald Boardman answered "no," and concluded:

There is little evidence from the Scriptures concerning how God was dealing with people in other parts of the earth. It seems logical in the light of these evidences that, in the case of the Noahic society, God was dealing with a local society and that his punishment was upon a limited number of persons at the time.<sup>21</sup>

## Reflection on an Olive Leaf

Those who argue for a worldwide flood not only have disregarded geological evidence, they have ignored the Bible's evidence. Had the entire earth been submerged in salt water for over nine months, plant life would have perished.

Seven days after the dove returned to the ark without finding land, Noah "sent forth the dove out of the ark," and when it returned, "in her mouth was an olive leaf ..." (Gen. 8:10-11). Could an olive tree survive over nine

months covered with salt water? If one did, could it sprout leaves in a week? Or is it more sensible to believe that most of the world, including parts of Armenia from where the leaf was taken was spared the flood?

## Flood Survivors

From *The Cambridge Ancient History*:

Although the Flood was not the universal phenomenon that it has often been claimed to be, there is no doubt that it was exceptional among the long series of recorded Mesopotamian floods and that it overwhelmed parts of various cities in southern Babylonia.<sup>22</sup>

In *The Biblical Flood*, Davis Young concluded:

... archaeological investigations have established the presence of human beings in the Americas, Australia, and southeastern Asia long before the advent of the sort of Near Eastern civilization described in the Bible and thus long before the biblical deluge could have taken place. In the light of a wealth of mutually supportive evidence from a variety of disciplines and sources, it is simply no longer tenable to insist that a deluge drowned every human on the face of the globe except Noah's family.<sup>23</sup>

The Gen. 6:4 "giants" (*Nephilim* in Hebrew) were some manner of men with ancient origins who apparently were in residence prior to Noah, and maybe, Adam. Furthermore, they appear in later chapters. In Num. 13:33, the post-flood "sons of Anak who come of the giants" reflects back to the pre-flood period.

This is from *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*:

On the face of it, the remark presents a problem to the view that only Noah and his sons survived the Flood, since it suggests that the "sons of Anak" were descendants of the "Nephilim" (*min hannepilim*, lit. "from the Nephilim") who lived before the Flood.<sup>24</sup>

How could Nephilim be on both sides of the flood? Because in the post-flood period they were living in what became Canaanite country, the region of Palestine, outside the flood zone.

Noah's Flood, recent in occurrence and confined to the Mesopotamian valley and its inhabitants, was retribution for sin, but as Paul states: "*Sin is not imputed when there is no law*" (Rom. 5:13b). Those civilizations outside the Adamic covenant and outside the immediate area were unaccountable and unaffected by the flood.

Bible translators had a penchant for choosing "earth" over "land," "heaven" rather than "sky," and "mountains" versus "hills." This coupled with the Hebrew usage of "all" and "every" in instances we would say "much" or "many," should give even staunch biblical literalists pause



# Article

## *Young-Earth Creationism: A Literal Mistake*

to consider that a Mesopotamian flood has been misunderstood unfortunately as a global flood.

### **Christians Caught in the Web**

In light of the Scripture passages herein discussed, coupled with voluminous scientific data which is totally one sided, the question is: Why have so many conservative Christians adopted young-earth creationism? The answer lies in this: while YECs can be criticized for using flawed logic in this particular area, in other areas of Christian doctrine, in general, their theology is quite sound.

This makes the poisoned pill easier to swallow for eager evangelicals, hungry for the Word, and angered by the popularity of Darwinism. The fallacy of young-earth doctrine would be easier to detect if it was not encapsulated in what is otherwise commonly accepted hermeneutics. If evangelicals cannot get a simple matter right such as the age of the earth, which can be established through an enormous amount of independent scientific discoveries and methods, then how could evangelicals be trusted on the doctrine of shed blood for the remission of sin, for example, where the corroborative, extra-biblical evidence is sparse to say the least?

Therein is the crying shame. The unbeliever remains in unbelief because the Bible is presented as unbelievable from the first chapter. This is the tragic legacy of young-earth creationism: The non-Christian is handed what can appear to be a valid reason to reject the good news of Jesus Christ. And when the fallacies of young-earth creationism are finally discovered, disillusioned Christians may relinquish their faith.

### **Conclusion**

Essentially, YECs do violence to the clear intentions of Scripture. Their insistence on a disharmonious interpretation of Genesis with its bizarre theological and scientific consequences is damaging not only to intellectual and scientific integrity, but even to the Christian faith they claim to be defending.

On the other side of the coin, it has been argued that Genesis was not intended to be

taken literally. But perhaps we have mistaken what was a telling of Semitic history (Gen. 2-11) as a narrative of human history. If that is the case, then YECs are not the only ones to have fallen into that trap. They believe it is true human history, while other Christians consider it a poetic rendition of human history, whereas it may very well be true Jewish history, and can be taken as literally as any other history book.

### **A Course of Action**

Those of us who revere the Bible must work together to exonerate it. Labels themselves can have power and influence, and the label, "biblical literalists" for proponents of young-earth creationism is entirely inappropriate. Distortion is their game in reality, and if the term "biblical distortionism" gains popularity, it might serve as a warning label to conservative Christians.

When we encounter well-intentioned Christians attracted to the young-earth creationist movement, what should we tell them? Should we marshal up an overwhelming mountain of scientific data and evidence, and heap it on them?

We could talk about the rate at which coral can grow found on coral atolls thousands of feet in depth; overlapping tree rings showing continuous forests that are many thousands of years old; radiometric decay rates that are unique to each element, yet correlating to the same age in the billions of years; sedimentary rock miles in thickness containing not a single fossil bone indicating a long period of earth history devoid of animal life; galaxies that can be seen today billions of light years away; billions upon billions of tons of petroleum and coal in the earth's surface taking hundreds of millions of years of vegetation to produce; and much more. But YEC advocates teach their gullible followers to distrust science and the scientists who use it.

We need something better. We must show them the Book they revere. "It is good you take the Bible literally," we can say. "Let's search it together." If they wish to argue, let them argue against prophets and apostles. We have a wonderful tool to reach them, and they probably have it already in their hands. ★

*This is the tragic legacy of young-earth creationism: The non-Christian is handed what can appear to be a valid reason to reject the good news of Jesus Christ. And when the fallacies of young-earth creationism are finally discovered, disillusioned Christians may relinquish their faith.*

Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Dick Fischer, "The Bible Proves That Creationism Is Wrong," *The Washington Post* (August 17, 1986): C1.
- <sup>2</sup> Duane Gish, *Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record* (El Cajon: Creation-Life Publishers, 1985), 52.
- <sup>3</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), 7.
- <sup>4</sup> Dick Fischer, *The Origins Solution* (Lima: Fairway Press, 1996), 161.
- <sup>5</sup> Perry G. Phillips, "Are the Days of Genesis Longer than 24 hours? The Bible Says 'Yes!'" IBRI Research Report No. 40 (1991): 3.
- <sup>6</sup> Gleason Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: The Zondervan Corporation, 1982), 61.
- <sup>7</sup> Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, 62.
- <sup>8</sup> Fischer, *The Origins Solution*, 160.
- <sup>9</sup> Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God* (Orange: Promise Publishing Co., 1989), 151.
- <sup>10</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 79.
- <sup>11</sup> *Catch-22* was a classic book and film about an Army Air Corps navigator named Yossarian who sought to get out of World War II by claiming insanity. Army doctors explained that since war itself was insane, his wanting to escape it showed he was sane. Those who were truly insane were those who preferred to fight the war, but they stayed in. The only way he could prove himself insane was to stay in the war which thwarted what he was trying to do—namely get out. Thus the "catch 22."
- <sup>12</sup> Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record* (San Diego: Creation-Life Publishers, 1976), 84.
- <sup>13</sup> C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1989), 77–8.
- <sup>14</sup> Andrew Sherratt, ed., *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Archaeology* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1980), 113.
- <sup>15</sup> S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1938), 39.
- <sup>16</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 38.
- <sup>17</sup> Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 210.
- <sup>18</sup> Albert T. Clay, *A Hebrew Deluge Story in Cuneiform* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1922), 63.
- <sup>19</sup> Knut Tallquist, *Addadische Gotterepitheta* (Helsinki: 1938), 424–6.
- <sup>20</sup> Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 169.
- <sup>21</sup> Donald Boardman, "Did Noah's Flood Cover the Entire World?" *The Genesis Debate*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 227.
- <sup>22</sup> I. E. S. Edwards, C. J. Gadd and N. G. L. Hammond, eds., *The Cambridge Ancient History* Vol. I, Part 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 243.
- <sup>23</sup> Davis A. Young, *The Biblical Flood* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 242.
- <sup>24</sup> Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Bruce K. Waltke and Ralph H. Alexander, eds., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 79.