

# Age of the Earth

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Secular scientists think the earth is approximately 4.5 to 5 billion years old. Depending upon whether one uses the Septuagint or the Masoretic Text, the Bible teaches that at least life has only been on earth for roughly 6,000 to 10,000 years. There is no possibility to reconcile these two positions unless one assumes that the Creation account in Genesis 1 refers only to the present state of this planet, and that the structure of the earth was here long before life or at least before the present state of life. There are Christians who believe this theory, and they have postulated a gap of long ages between Genesis 1:1 and verse 2. This is known as the gap theory or the “ruin and restoration” theory and was developed in the early nineteenth century by Thomas Chalmers (d. 1847), Scottish theologian. It spread in its popularity until by the turn of the twentieth century it had even become popular among some conservative Protestant scholars.

The gap theory states that Genesis 1:1, *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*, refers to the original creation of the earth. Then, because verse 2 speaks of the earth being *without form, and void*, the idea is that that were one or more catastrophes that killed off all life and rearranged the earth’s surface. In other words, they read *the earth was without form, and void* to mean that the earth was *caused* to be without form and void. Some see a confirmation of this in Genesis 1:28’s command to Adam and Eve to *replenish* (King James’ Version) the earth, indicating that life had been previously destroyed. Thus, God had to recreate it, which is what He allegedly did in the Creation week.

The problem with this theory from a linguistic perspective is two-fold. First, there is no verb for *caused* in verse 2; it simply describes the *state* of the earth at the beginning of Creation week. Second, the Hebrew word for *replenish* in the King James’ Version is a mistranslation; it actually means *to fill* without reference to a repeated filling. In fact, most modern translations use the word *fill* in that verse (e.g., NKJV, RSV, NASB, NIV, ESV, HCSB).

There are also at least two unsurmountable Biblical obstacles to accepting the gap theory besides that of the language in Genesis 1. First, Hebrews 4:3 declares that *the works* [Creation as per v. 4) *were finished from the foundation of the world*. The Greek word for *foundation* there means in this context the *foundation or fundamental structure that was laid down* before things and life were created on it. So if the entire creation of the earth was finished at the same time as the earth’s foundation was laid down, then evidently the very sphere of the earth was created at the beginning of Creation week. Second, the Bible is very clear that death came as a result of sin, and that was the sin of Adam (Romans 5:12-17; 6:23; I Corinthians 15:21-22). But the gap theory involves one

or a series of destructions of the earth and its inhabitants long before Adam was created in Genesis. Therefore, we reject the “ruin and restoration” gap theory as unwarranted by the language of Genesis 1 and contrary to the direct teachings of the Scriptures.

Contrary to the traditional gap theory, some Creationists believe that God created the actual earth with water covering it at some unknown past time before Creation week. Then in Creation week He formed some of the water into an atmosphere, kept some water as ocean, and created all life on it in addition to the sun, moon, and perhaps the stars. Although this concept has none of the problems associated with the “ruin and restoration” theory, we do not accept it partly because of the language in Genesis.

Genesis 1:1 says that *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*. The same Hebrew word for *heavens* is used in verse 8 to describe the firmament, or atmosphere, of the earth. [Note: The actual Hebrew text has the word *heavens* as plural in both verses (although not always translated as plural) as it does throughout the Old Testament even when it obviously is talking about a particular heaven; see Psalms 11:4 for just one of numerous examples.] This means that in the beginning God created the actual structure of the earth and everything associated with it—its atmosphere, land separated from water, all life on it, and the sun and moon (possibly the stars too) in relation to it as its permanent light sources. This, in turn, means that God created the actual sphere of the earth covered in water and immediately created light—probably from His own glory since the sun and moon were not created until the fourth day—all on the first day of Creation week. Therefore, by using the chronology provided in the Bible, we can conclude that the Bible teaches the entire earth—its structure and life on it—to have been created between almost 6,000 and 7,500 years ago (depending on whether you accept the chronology of the Masoretic Text or that of the Septuagint).

In support of the latter position is Hebrews 4:3, which we saw above requires the conclusion that the very structure of the earth was created at Creation week. Therefore, we conclude that there is no gap of time, either of the “ruin and restoration” *or* of the static kind, in any part of the Creation story in Genesis 1.

Some Creationists in each of the latter two camps believe the inclusion of the stars in the fourth-day language (Genesis 1:14-18) means they were created before Creation week, so that Creation week in Genesis 1 refers only to the earth and its own solar system. The reason for this belief is that the cryptic reference to *the stars also* (literal Hebrew) of verse 16 sounds like a parenthetical statement. Unfortunately, the ancient Biblical manuscripts had no punctuation of any kind, so it is impossible to know for certain. But if it is a parenthetical statement, then the stars would have been created earlier than Creation week and reference made to them only because the fourth day was discussing light sources for the earth. If it is not a parenthetical statement, then the stars were

created on the fourth day, and Genesis 1:1's reference to the *heavens* would include almost the entire universe and not just the earth's atmosphere.

One thing that seems evident is that this would *not* include the heaven where God and His angels dwell because Job 38:4-7 says that the morning stars and sons of God rejoiced when God created the earth. Since everything God created is physical in nature (including all forms of energy), the existence of other intelligent beings means that God had already created time and space in addition to the heaven where He and His angels dwell. Reference to *all the sons of God* in Job 38:7 might include intelligent beings on other worlds in addition to angels because God's followers on earth are often referred to as His sons and daughters or children. If Job 38:7 includes intelligent beings on other worlds, then the entire universe outside of heaven and the earth's solar system must have been created before Creation week, in which case *the heavens and the earth* (Genesis 1:1) would be a reference only to the earth and all things closely associated with it. Biblically speaking, both options concerning the stars of Genesis 1:16 are possible, and we cannot know for certain which view is the correct one. In either case, since time itself had been created before Genesis 1, the phrase *In the beginning* cannot refer to the beginning of time itself.

From a scientific viewpoint, there is more than sufficient evidence to believe in a young earth. First, as we have already shown, all of the geological features on earth, including the existence of all the fossil fuels, petrified wood, and great canyons, can be accounted for by one global Flood described in Genesis 7-8. Second, the older readings from the carbon-14 dating technique are probably due to the fact that the water canopy and stronger magnetic field probably would have meant less carbon-14 levels before the Flood. Moreover, the great pressures and heat from a global Flood probably corrupted the igneous rocks so that they read older than they are by radiometric dating techniques. In other words, the principle of uniformitarianism is an unproven assumption. Third, the hypothesis of the red shift, in which distant galaxies are moving away from us because the wavelength of their lights is lengthened and thus appear redder, is also an assumption, although secular scientists speak of it as a fact. The red shift may be due to the travel of light over great distances rather than to any movement away from us. We just do not know with certainty. But at least it is plausible that the red shift does not therefore support an old age for the universe.

On the positive side of scientific evidence, there are several lines of evidence for a young earth. First, there is far too little top soil if the uniformitarian principle underlying much of the so-called evidence for a very old earth were true. Scientists estimate that it takes anywhere from 5,000 to 20,000 years, depending on varying conditions, for erosion and plant growth to make six inches of top soil. If life has existed on this planet for several million years, there should be much more than the average seven or eight inches of topsoil that exists now. Second, space dust actually lands on planetary bodies, including the earth and its moon. With no erosion on the moon, experts say that at the rate that space dust accumulates today, if the moon is really 4.5 to 5 billion years old like the earth, there should be more than 50 feet of dust on the moon. Astronauts that went to the

moon were surprised to find that that the highest levels of top-dust was no more than three inches, and that was only in places—which would have taken fewer than 8,000 years to accumulate. Third, we know that virtually all sedimentary rock is somewhat porous. Oil trapped beneath layers of sedimentary rock are under enormous pressure. Because sedimentary rock is partially porous, after millions of years the pressure should have forced the oil to carve through that rock and burst into the air much like an oil geyser does when oil is struck. This indicates the oil has not been there very long at all.

Creationist scientists cite several other lines of evidence, although there is more controversy over some of them than others. Nevertheless, the weight of the evidence appears to be actually greater for a young earth than for the evolutionary view of a very old earth. At the very least there is sufficient evidence and rational thought that the Creationist does not need to feel that his views are less scientific than those of the evolutionists.