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A Look at Old Earth Creationism

Kurt Simmons



The web-site “About.com” lists Old Earth Creationism (“OEC”) under the heading of Agnosticism/Atheism, reflecting the apparent judgment that site that OEC belongs to a branch of skepticism, which is unwilling to accept the Biblical account of creation. Indeed, no one ever became an Old Earth Creationist (“OEC”) from reading Genesis. The sole impetus of OEC is to reconcile the Bible to the theoretical claims of atheistic science by reinterpreting it in a way that is consistent with naturalistic and evolutionary models. Atheistic evolution posits that the earth is approximately 4.5 billion years old, and that life developed slowly from simple to more complex forms over the last 100 million years. An old earth is therefore essential to naturalistic and evolutionary models. Although rejecting purely naturalistic theories of origin, OEC nevertheless accepts the claims of atheistic science regarding the age of the earth and cosmos. Confronted with the inconsistent claims

of atheistic, theoretical science and the Bible, OEC re-writes the Bible.

Traditional Interpretation of Genesis

OEC denies the creation account of Genesis as understood for four thousand years, first by the Jews, and then by the church. The Biblical account of creation is simple and straightforward: The cosmos and all that is in it were created in the space of six days: *In six days, the Lord God made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is.* (Ex. 20:11) Numerous chronologies have been done over the centuries by men of faith: Eusebius, Julius Africanus, Ussher, *et alia*, and all date the creation to within about seven thousand years of our time. **Demetrius** and **Eupolemus** place the creation at

5507 B.C.¹ **Julius Africanus** places the birth of Christ 5499 years from creation.² **Hyppolytus of Rome** places the birth of Christ 5502 from creation. **Hyppolytus of Thebes** places it 5500 years from creation.³ **Eusebius** reckons from creation to Christ 5199 years.⁴ **Archbishop Ussher** places the birth of Christ 4000 years from creation.⁵ We know of no chronologies before the modern era that date Biblical creation into the millions or billions of years.

Jewish authors and the Church fathers uniformly interpreted the creation account literally, as consisting of six, twenty-four hour days.

Philo Judaeus – “And he said that the world was made in six days, not because the creator stood in need of a length of time (for it is natural that God should do everything at once, not merely by uttering a command, but by even thinking of it); but because the things created required arrangement...And he allotted each of the six days to one of the portions of the whole.”⁶

Flavius Josephus – “Accordingly Moses says that in just six days the world and all that is therein was made; and that the seventh day was a rest, and a release from the labour of such operations; - whence it is that we celebrate a rest from our labours on that day, and call it the

Sabbath; which word denotes *rest* in the Hebrew tongue.”⁷

Epistle of Barnabas – “The Sabbath is mentioned at the beginning of the creation: ‘And God made in six days the works of His hands, and made an end on the seventh day, and rested on it, and sanctified it.’”⁸

Justin Martyr – “The first day which was created along with the heavens constituted the beginning of all time (for thus Moses wrote, ‘In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,’”⁹

Theophilus – “Of this six days' work no man can give a worthy explanation and description of all its parts, not though he had ten thousand tongues and ten thousand mouths; nay, though he were to live ten thousand years, sojourning in this life, not even so could he utter anything worthy of these things, on account of the exceeding greatness and riches of the wisdom of God which there is in the six days' work above narrated.”¹⁰

Clement of Alexandria – “For the creation of the world was concluded in six days. For the motion of the sun from solstice to solstice is completed in six months--in the course of which, at one time the leaves fall, and at another plants bud and seeds come to maturity.”¹¹

Origen – “Such is the objection which they are accustomed to make to our statement that this world had its beginning at a certain time, and that, agreeably to our belief in Scripture, we can calculate the years of its past duration. To these propositions I consider that none of the heretics can easily return an answer that will be in conformity with the nature of their opinions.”¹²

“After these statements, Celsus, from a secret desire to cast discredit upon the Mosaic account of the creation, which teaches that the world is **not yet ten thousand years** old, but very much under that, while concealing his wish, intimates his agreement with those who hold that the world is uncreated. For, maintaining that there have

¹ Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Hendrickson, 1998), p. 145.

² Ibid, 158; cf. Munsel, *Every Day Book of History and Chronology from Creation to the Present Time* (Appleton & Co. NY, 1858), p. 344.

³ Ibid, 159.

⁴ Ibid, 190; *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (London, 1880), Vol. II, pp.348-350, William Smith DCL, LLD and Henry Wace DD, editors

⁵ James Ussher, *Annals of the World*, § 6059.

⁶ Philo, *De Opificio Mundi*, III. Philo is sometimes cited by OEC's as proof that the days of creation may be understood other than literally, but this is wrong. Philo was from Alexandrian school of interpretation, which treated the scriptures allegorically. In the allegorical part of his work, he gives the creation a mystical sense. For example, the mind he says is referred to under the image of heaven, and the senses under the image of the earth, and so forth. When he says, therefore that it is “a sign of great simplicity to think that the world was created in six days, or indeed in time at all,” he is not denying the literal days, anymore than time or the literal heavens and earth. Rather, he is to be understood as attempting to make a clever point that time exists only in relation to the world, hence the world could not be made in time, but it is the world that in a sense made time: “Time is a thing posterior to the world...the world was not created in time, but that time had its existence in consequence of the world.” *Legum Allegoriae*, II. In no event can Philo be cited on the side of OEC.

⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities*, I, i, 1; Whiston ed.

⁸ Epistle of Barnabas, XV

⁹ Justin Martyr, *Horatory Address to the Greeks*, XXXIII

¹⁰ Theophilus, *To Autolytus*, II, xii.

¹¹ Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata*, Bk. VI, *The Fourth Commandment*.

¹² Origen, *De Principiis*, III, v, 3.

been, from all eternity, many conflagrations and many deluges, and that the flood which lately took place in the time of Deucalion is comparatively modern, he clearly demonstrates to those who are able to understand him that, in his opinion, the world was uncreated.”¹³

Julius Africanus – “For the Jews, deriving their origin from them as descendants of Abraham, having been taught a modest mind, and one such as becomes men, together with the truth by the spirit of Moses, have handed down to us, by their extant Hebrew histories, the number of **5500 years** as the period up to the advent of the Word of salvation, that was announced to the world in the time of the sway of the Caesars.”¹⁴

To this short list may be added many dozens of others,¹⁵ all testifying to the traditional (historical) teaching from the time of Moses until now, that the chronology of Genesis is to be read literally. This does not prove the traditional interpretation is correct, but it does demonstrate circumstantially that the motive for reinterpreting Genesis stems from the claims of modern science, and not the scriptures themselves; for if the idea that billions of years had elapsed from the beginning was truly in the text, men would not have waited eighteen hundred years to discover it, but the idea would have been present with men from the start.

Adam – The Biological Parent of all Mankind

I Corinthians 15:45 states, "The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit." This verse plainly names Adam as the "first man." Gen. 3:20 calls Eve "the mother of all living." There is no room for postulating the creation of other men based upon the Biblical record. The obvious and irrefutable teaching of scripture is that *all men* derive their ancestry from the common parentage of Adam and Eve. This is the basis of Paul's argument in Romans that the whole race of mankind is descended from Adam, and made heir of his fallen nature. "By one man's disobedience many were made sinners." (Rom. 5:19) If all men do not trace their ancestry to the common parentage of Adam and Eve, there is no way to account for

the inherent fallenness of the race, and Paul is guilty of teaching error, for he has said that through *one man's* disobedience all men were brought to ruin, not by the transgression of unnamed others. Indeed, the notion that God created other men than Adam and that Adam was merely the first man with whom God entered a covenant of works would mean that other asserted men were exempt from the possibility of the fall; for the fall applied only where there was law, but if other men were not under law and covenant, then they could not be chargeable with transgression. This would seem to open the door to Universalism via antinomianism. However, these considerations aside, the historical position of the church has always taught that Adam and Eve were the common parents of all mankind.

St. Irenaeus - Having become disobedient, [Eve] was made the cause of death for herself and for the whole human race; so also Mary, betrothed to a man but nevertheless still a virgin, being obedient, was made the cause of salvation for herself and for the whole human race....Thus, the knot of Eve's disobedience was loosed by the obedience of Mary. What the virgin Eve had bound in unbelief, the Virgin Mary loosed through faith. ...But this man [of whom I have been speaking] is Adam, if truth be told, the first-formed man....WE, however, are all FROM him.¹⁶

Tertullian - "Because by a man came death, by a man also comes resurrection" [1 Cor 15:21]. Here, by the word MAN, who consists of a body, as we have often shown already, I understand that it is a fact that Christ had a body. And if we are all made to live in Christ as WE were made to DIE IN ADAM, then, as in the flesh we were made to DIE IN ADAM, so also in the flesh are we made to live in Christ. Otherwise, if the coming to life in Christ were not to take place in that same substance in which WE DIE IN ADAM, the parallel were imperfect.¹⁷

Origen - EVERYONE in the world FALLS PROSTRATE under SIN. And it is the Lord who sets up those who are cast down and who sustains all who are falling [Psalm 145:14]. IN ADAM ALL DIE, and THUS the world FALLS PROSTRATE and requires to be SET UP

¹³ Origen, *Against Celsus*, I, xix.

¹⁴ Julius Africanus, *Fragments of the Chronography*, I.

¹⁵ For a more complete compilation on-line, see <http://www.creationism.org/articles/EarlyChurchLit6Days.htm>

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 3:22:4; 3:23:2; 5:16:3.

¹⁷ Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 5:9:5.

AGAIN, so that in Christ all may be made to live [1 Cor 15:22].¹⁸

St. Athanasius - Adam, the first man, altered his course, and through sin death came into the world....When Adam transgressed, SIN reached out TO ALL MEN.¹⁹

Augustine - But why does St Matthew reckon in a descending, and Luke in an ascending order?...Matthew descends through his generations, to signify our Lord Jesus Christ descending to bear our sins, that in the seed of Abraham all nations might be blessed. Wherefore, he does not begin with Adam, **for from him is the whole race of mankind**. Nor with Noe, because from his family again, after the flood, descended the whole human race. Nor could the man Christ Jesus, as descended from Adam, **from whom all men are descended**, bear upon the fulfillment of prophecy; nor, again, as descended from Noe, from whom also all men are descended; but only as descended from Abraham, who at that time was chosen, that all nations should be blessed in his seed, when the earth was now full of nations.²⁰

These are but a few of the many citations that could be produced demonstrating that the church has historically upheld the common parentage of Adam and Eve to all men, and that this is an *essential tenant* of the Christian faith inasmuch Paul teaches it to be the source of mankind's inherent fallenness.

Re-writing Genesis

The Gap Theory

OCE has two ways by which it seeks to avoid the simple language of Genesis: the "gap" theory and the "day-age" theory. For hundreds of years, science had operated on the premise of a six thousand year old earth, based upon the chronology of Genesis. However, beginning in the early nineteenth century, naturalistic theories about the origin and age of the earth began to grow in popularity. Theologians, pressured by

the alleged "scientific" evidence of an old earth, re-interpreted the scriptures to accommodate scientific theory. Thus was born the "gap" theory. Originally formulated in the early 19th century by Scottish theologian, Thomas Chalmers, the theory was conceived as a way to reconcile the Bible to naturalistic theories about the geologic age of the earth. The gap or "ruin-reconstruction" theory asserts that there is a time-gap between the first two verses of Genesis. It is based on the supposition that earth was already here (but in a ruined state) before the creative process of the seven days began. According to the gap-theory, II Pet. 3:5-7²¹ refers not to Noah's flood, asserting instead that it refers to the world before the beginning of creation:

*"If 2 Peter 3:5-7 is a cross-reference to Genesis 1:2, then the Holy Spirit is calling your attention to something very significant that millions of 'Young Earth' Creationists are blindly overlooking. Specifically, that a glorious ancient world that God created in the distant past (Genesis 1:1), had long since been utterly destroyed, plunged into deep darkness, and overflowed by a raging flood of great waters on a universal scale at the time of Genesis 1:2."*²²

By removing these verses from Noah's flood (which they admit was universal) and applying them instead to an imaginary world of which the Bible is silent, they hope to extend indefinitely earth's existence to conform with atheistic notions about its geologic age:

The geologic and fossil records are the surviving evidence that God preserved for us to testify to the truth that the Earth is very old and was inhabited for a long period before the seven days of Genesis chapter one. Those records, written in stone, also provide evidence of a long reign of Death upon the old Earth and the sudden end of

¹⁸ Origen, *Homilies on Jeremias*, 8:1

¹⁹ St. Athanasius, *Discourses Against the Arians*, 1:51

²⁰ Augustine, *Sermon 1 on the New Testament, Of the agreement of the evangelists Matthew and Luke in the generations of the Lord*, **Benedictine Edition**.

²¹ "For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." (2 Pet 3:5-7)

²² Gaines R. Johnson, *The Gap Theory and Beyond, A comprehensive study of Creationism for Bible Believers: Rightly-Dividing Genesis and Geology*: http://www.kjvbible.org/gap_theory.html

*the old world order by a universal destructive event.*²³

Proponents of the gap theory admit that the Genesis creation occurred about six thousand years ago:

"The Earth is "without form and void" at Genesis 1:2 and in darkness. There is no indication of anything being alive on the surface of the Earth, at this time, and that time is roughly about 6,000 years ago...Clearly, if we believe the literal wording of the Bible, there was indeed a universal creative event during the seven days of Genesis, about 6,000 literal years ago."

This admission notwithstanding, they argue there is a gap preceding the instant creation consisting in hundreds of millions of years:

*The Bible gives no specific time when God first created the heaven and the Earth (Genesis 1:1), but it does give the time when the Earth is found in this desolate condition and for the start of the seven, literal, 24 hour days. That time was, indeed, geologically very recently [sic]. In this respect, only, is the Young Earth Creationist fully correct. This is the context for the "gap" on which Ruin-Reconstruction doctrine is based. Exactly how long that time gap represents nobody can say for sure, but it most certainly could accommodate hundreds of millions of years, or less, but a gap is most certainly there.*²⁴

Advocates of this view attempt to strengthen their position by arguing that the Hebrew word "tohu" is mistranslated, and should read, not that the heavens and earth "were without form and void", but "became" void. They also point to the use of the plural in Gen. 2:4, "These are the generations [plural] of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens," inferring from this evidence of two creations:

"The Creation account contains the story of two creative events. Only the latter event, the seven days, is outlined in great detail."

According to gap-theorists, this pre-Adamic world was filled with "Mammoths, Mastodons, giant ground sloth, woolly rhinos, and even a

"pre-Adamic race of hominoids" whose remains are found in the fossil record.

Most gap-theorists believe that the physical universe was committed to the charge of a cherub named Lucifer, who was the heavenly choir master:

"Lucifer was second only to the throne of God and was the choir leader of the universe in the day when the Lord God first made all things...The whole of the physical universe was under the direction of Lucifer: Physical matter and spirit were one under the stewardship of Lucifer, this anointed cherub. He was second only to the Lord God in power and authority over the realm of the whole Kingdom."

Proponents of the gap-theory assert that, about 750 million years ago, Lucifer rebelled and transgressed against God, thus becoming the first created being to sin. Lucifer's sin caused death to pass upon all things, bringing the "pre-Adamic" world to destruction:

"With his initial act of sin and rebellion, Death and corruption, like leaven, began to permeate the physical cosmos that was under Lucifer's stewardship to rule. It started in Eden, the Garden of God on the Earth, and spread like a cancer. Because Lucifer was the steward of the whole creation under heaven when he fell, all things under his rule were also subjected to corruption."

One can only comment at this point how much gap-theorists presume upon the silence of the scripture, finding lost worlds, species of animals, and races of men all in the silent space between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2! If all this is possible from silence, then truly "nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do." (Gen. 11:6) The whole theory is loosely strung together upon fantastic and highly improbable interpretation of scripture. Suffice it to say, that no one ever found the gap in scripture before the false assertions of science required they find one. The assertion that II Pet. 3:5, 6 refer to a pre-Adamic world cannot be proved. Peter refers twice before to Noah's flood specifically. (I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:5) It is therefore natural that we understand him as speaking to this well known event, and not as alluding to a pre-Adamic flood about which the Bible is silent. Men could not be "willingly ignorant" about this flood, for it is nowhere so much as once described. Hence, the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

only Biblically defensible view is that it is Noah's flood Peter's has in mind.

The Day-Age Theory

As already seen, the Biblical account of creation indicates that God called the universe into existence and arranged it into orderly parts over the space of six days. Lest these be misconstrued as something other than twenty-four hour days, they are expressly defined as consisting of "an evening and a morning," or one revolution of the earth upon its axis. "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." (Gen. 1:4, 5) According to Genesis, God rested the seventh day from his work of creation. In testimony of the creation week, God established the seventh day as a ceremonial rest for the Jewish nation in token of their redemption from slavery. They were to remember that they were once servants and looked for weekly rest from their labors, but were given none by the Egyptian masters. Therefore, they were to give their servants and handmaids rest one day each week throughout their generations. (Ex. 20:10, 11) The literalness of the creation week is affirmed by the writer of Hebrews, who saw in the weekly Sabbath the promise of heavenly rest: As God rested in heaven from his work of creation upon earth, so he has promised a heavenly rest to those that believe and obey him. (Heb. 4:3-9) The creation week thus became the basic standard of measure underlying the calendar year. Fifty-two cycles of seven fulfill one solar year.

Notwithstanding the obvious intention of Genesis to communicate the idea of six literal days, "day-age" advocates argue that the days of creation should be interpreted as long eons of geologic time, reaching into the millions of years. Arguments in favor of the day-age theory include:

1 – Use of the term "generations" in Gen. 2:4 implies long ages in earth's history and creation. However, this is wrong. There are two Hebrew words rendered generations: *Dowr* (Strong's 1755) and *toldah* (Strong's #8435). Only the former carries the sense of time, the latter carries the sense of source. *Dowr*: A revolution of time, i.e., and age or generation. *Toldah*: Descent, i.e., family; (fig.) history: - birth. It is this latter word that occurs in Gen. 2:4. It is used to show the

origins or sources of the heavens and earth, not the time in which they were made.

2 - The Hebrew word *yowm* (day) can mean long period of time.

The Hebrew word *yowm* (Strong's #3517) is defined as derived from an unused root meaning "to be hot; a day (as the warm hours), whether literal (from sunrise to sunset, or from one sunset to the next), or figurative (a space of time defined by an associated term)." As with all words, the meaning intended must be taken from the context. As we have already shown, the context of Genesis one clearly contemplates a literal day, and even defines it as consisting of a period of time marked by the presence of light between morning and evening.

3 – There are explicit statements of the Earth's antiquity found in scripture.

Habakkuk 3:6 (NIV) - "He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal."

However, this verse bears its own refutation, for the shaking of the earth, and the "everlasting mountains" (AV) are poetic expressions for God's shaking of the world's kingdoms and nations by his providential presence, as the context plainly shows. The passage says nothing about the age of the earth. It is God whose ways are everlasting, not the earth.

The exegetical hurdles one must clear in order to maintain the view that the days of creation are actually geologic ages are, perhaps, its own best repudiation. The word "day" occurs through Genesis chapter one. In Gen. 1:3-5, God called into existence the light of the sun to shine upon the face of the unformed earth. The light he called "day" and the darkness he called "night." And the evening and an morning was "one day." Here we have two occurrences of the word "day." Are both figurative? If not, what is to distinguish them? In Gen. 1:14-18, God arranged the lights of the firmament so as to provide for the orderly arrangement of days, weeks, months, and years, saying, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years." (v. 14) OEC's like to argue that since God made the sun,

moon, and stars on the fourth day, the evenings and mornings of the first three days cannot be taken literally. However, this is mistaken. The fourth day did not bring these lights into existence, but merely established their relationship to the earth and each other so as to provide for the revolution of the seasons, and enable man to mark the regular passage of time, etc. But the point remains, if “day” means geologic age in other places, what does it mean here? What is there in the context here that signifies a literal day that is not present elsewhere, which allows us to make one literal and other figurative? The sort of exegetical gymnastics necessary to obviate these objections has caused many day-age advocates to abandon their theories and return to the simple Bible. Dr Davis Young a former day-ager commented to a science symposium at Wheaton College:

Genius as all these schemes may be, one is struck by the forced nature of them all. While the exegetical gymnastic maneuvers have displayed remarkable flexibility, I suspect that they have resulted in temporary damage to the theological musculature.²⁵

Hermeneutically Unsound

The exegetical difficulties facing OEC lead to another, more basic problem: OEC violates the most fundamental rule of hermeneutics, which requires that a writing be interpreted according to the intent of its author. No interpretation is valid merely because it is made to sound plausible; to be valid it must be the meaning the author *intends*. Imagine the horror of a last will and testament that was interpreted according to the court’s desires, rather than honoring the intent of the decedent. That is precisely the case with OEC; it completely disregards the obvious and intended meaning of the text in an attempt to accommodate the assertions of naturalistic science. This causes OEC not to be taken seriously by world class scholars. The April 23, 1984, letter of then Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University makes the point:

*I have thought about your question, and would say that probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that **the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story (c) Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguish all human and animal life except for those in the ark. Or, to put it negatively, the apologetic arguments which suppose the `days' of creation to be long eras of time, the figures of years not to be chronological, and the flood to be a merely local Mesopotamian flood, are not taken seriously by any such professors, as far as I know.***

Professor Barr states that OEC is not taken seriously. Why? Because the writer of Genesis intended to convey to the reader the idea of six literal, twenty-four hour days. This is the more telling in that Professor Barr reportedly does not himself accept the Genesis account of creation, yet does not attempt to wrest the text to accommodate his belief in naturalistic models. OEC’s should follow his example in honoring the intent of the author and stop pretending that the gap or day-age theories are hermeneutically acceptable and sound. They should either openly reject the Bible in favor of an old earth, or accept the Bible as it was intended to be read.

The Unsubstantiated and Discredited Scientific Basis of an Old Earth

We now come to the scientific claims for an old earth. It is indeed unfortunate that OEC’s feel the need to reinterpret the Bible to accommodate science, for even naturalistic scientists affirm that the dating methods are unsound. There is an abundance of material available demonstrating the unscientific basis for claims of an old earth, but these few will make the point.

Evolutionist William Stansfield, Ph.D., California Polytech State, has stated:

*It is obvious that radiometric techniques may not be the absolute dating methods that they are claimed to be. **Age estimates on a given geological stratum by different radiometric***

²⁵ Young, D., *The harmonization of Scripture and science*, science symposium at Wheaton College, 23 March 1990.

methods are often quite different (sometimes by hundreds of millions of years). There is no absolutely reliable long-term radiological 'clock'.²⁶

Evolutionist Frederick B. Jueneman candidly summarizes the situation:

*The age of our globe is presently thought to be some 4.5 billion years, based on radio-decay rates of uranium and thorium. Such 'confirmation' may be shortlived, as nature is not to be discovered quite so easily. **There has been in recent years the horrible realization that radio-decay rates are not as constant as previously thought, nor are they immune to environmental influences. And this could mean that the atomic clocks are reset during some global disaster, and events which brought the Mesozoic to a close may not be 65 million years ago, but rather, within the age and memory of man.***²⁷

With these sorts of statements coming out of the atheistic scientific community, one wonders what motivates Christians to jettison their Bibles in favor of an old earth. Geologist Andrew Snelling thus states:

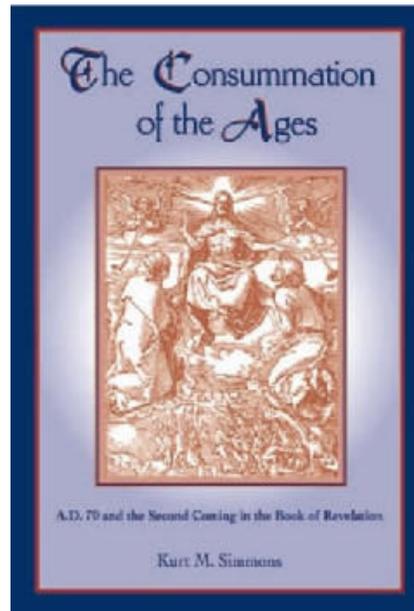
"It is special pleading on the part of geochronologists and physicists to say that the radioactive decay rates have been carefully measured in laboratories for the past 80 or 90 years and that no significant variation of these rates has been measured. The 'bottom line' is really that 80 or 90 years of measurements are being extrapolated backwards in time to the origin of the earth, believed by evolutionists to be 4.5 billion years ago. That is an enormous extrapolation. In any other field of scientific research, if scientists or mathematicians were to extrapolate results over that many orders of magnitude, thereby assuming continuity of results over such enormous spans of unobserved time, they would be literally 'laughed out of court' by fellow scientists and mathematicians. Yet geochronologists are allowed to do this with impunity, primarily because it gives the desired millions and billions of years that evolutionists

require, and because it makes these radioactive 'clocks' work!"²⁸

Conclusion

OEC is an unhappy attempt to reconcile the Bible to the discredited claims of naturalistic and evolutionary science. Let Christians stand courageously by their Bibles; all else is sinking sand.

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²⁶ William D. Stansfield, *The Science of Evolution* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1977), p. 84.

²⁷ Frederick B. Jueneman, "Secular Catastrophism," *Industrial Research and Development*, Vol. 24 (June 1982), p. 21.

²⁸ Andrew A. Snelling, "Radioactive Dating Method 'Under Fire'!", *Creation: Ex Nihilo*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Answers in Genesis, March-May 1992), p. 44 (emphasis added).

Why Two Millennia?

By

Kurt Simmons

A caller recently asked about why we hold that Revelation twenty contemplates two millennia; we answer that question briefly here.

The Models of Other Writers Also Produce Two Millennia

Initially, it should be noted that we are not alone among Preterist authors in holding to a two (bi-) millennial model. The models set forth by King, and I believe Preston, Stevens, and others also produce two millennia. They operate on the *assumption* of a single millennium, but analysis of their models will show that, *in fact*, two come forth. King was the first to commit his model to writing and it has served as the model followed by others. So, let us begin by demonstrating that King's system produces two millennia, before explaining our own.

The basic framework of King's model has it that the millennium refers to the period from Christ's ministry to the Jewish war with Rome. King equates the binding of the dragon in Rev. 20:1-3 with the binding of the strong man in Matt. 12:29. King appears to borrow this interpretation from Postmillennialism. In fact, his system essentially mirrors Postmillennialism, except that where Postmillennialism traditionally extends the "thousand years" into the indefinite future, King foreshortens it to accommodate Christ's AD 70 return. According to King then, the beginning of the millennium is Christ's ministry, which began in A.D. 30.²⁹ He next has it that the millennium ends approximately A.D. 67 when the war with Rome begins. In Rev. 20:7-10, the dragon is loosed for the battle of Gog and Magog, which King equates with the Jewish war with Rome. The millennial binding of the dragon therefore looks like this:

Thousand Year Binding of the Dragon

(Rev. 20:1-3 = Matt. 12:29)

AD 30 _____ AD 67
Ministry of Christ _____ War with Rome

So much for the binding of the dragon; let us look at the reign of the saints. According to King, the millennial reign of the saints in Rev. 20:4-6 refers to the participation of the church in Christ's resurrection by baptism. This begins on Pentecost A.D. 33 and ends at the resurrection in A.D. 70. I believe this is the position of Preston, Stevens, and many others. (If not, I welcome their correction.) Thus the millennial reign of the saints looks like this:

Thousand Year Reign of the Saints

(Rev. 20:4-6)

AD 33 _____ AD 70
Pentecost _____ General Resurrection

A cursory look at these two timelines shows that they do not match. The one begins and ends earlier than the other. If they do not begin and end at the same time, it is obvious that they cannot represent the same events, and that a single millennium cannot embrace them both.

The discrepancy noted in King's system is inherent to the single millennial model. It results from the fact that *two millennia* are contemplated by the text, though men often confound them for one. This discrepancy was noted long ago by Augustine, the father of Postmillennialism:

"This last persecution by Antichrist will last for three years and six months, as we have already said, and as is stated both in the Apocalypse and by the prophet Daniel. Though this time is brief, it is rightly debated whether it belongs to the thousand years during which it is said that the devil is bound and the saints reign with Christ, or whether this short span is to be added to those years and is over and above them. For if we say that it belongs to the thousand years, then it will be found that *the reign of the saints with Christ extends not for the same length of time as the binding of the devil, but for a longer*

²⁹ Christ was born in 2 B.C.; he was baptized in the 15th of Tiberius when he was not yet thirty, which translates to the fall of A.D. 29. (Lk. 3:1, 23)

time...How, then does Scripture include in *the same limit of a thousand years* both the binding of the devil and the reign of the saints, if the binding of the devil is to cease three years and six months *before* the reign of a thousand years of the saints with Christ?³⁰

The importance of this admission can hardly be overstated. Here we have the great Augustine, who is called the father of Postmillennialism, admitting that the single millennium model is inherently flawed and that reign of the saints cannot be brought within the thousand-year binding of the dragon! Although Augustine recognized the discrepancy inherent in the single millennium model, he did not see his way clear how to reconcile it. Returning now to King's scheme, it is plain that two millennia are produced by his model. In fact, King all but admits there are two millennia when he states:

"The time of the scene in verse four of our text is after the Neronian [sic] persecution...It corresponds to the time when Satan was bound a thousand years. Satan is bound *a thousand years* and the saints lived and reigned with Christ *a thousand years*...*These two one thousand year terms* are like the North and South Poles."³¹

There you have it. King actually articulated the fact of two millennia! "*These two one thousand year terms*" he said! Unfortunately, King did not grasp the full implications of what he said or the meaning of the text, and continued to operate on the mistaken assumption of a single millennium. If he had only stopped to put his dates down on paper, the fact that his system produces two millennia would have become immediately apparent. But, as it is, it was left for us to point this out.

Other Commentators

At his point, let us pause and notice that there have been others who noticed two millennia in the text before either King or myself (though King did not fully realize what he was seeing).

John Albert Bengel - *A thousand years* - Two millennial periods are mentioned in this whole passage... The confounding of the two millennial periods has long ago produced many

³⁰ Augustine, *The City of God*, XX, xiii; Loeb ed.

³¹ Max R. King, *The Spirit of Prophecy* (Warren OH, 1971), p.347.

errors, and has made the name of Chiliasm hateful and suspected.³²

John Wesley - "*A thousand years* — It must be observed, that two distinct thousand years are mentioned throughout this whole passage. Each is mentioned thrice; the thousand wherein Satan is bound, verses 2, 3, 7; the thousand wherein the saints shall reign, verses 4-6. The former end before the end of the world; the latter reach to the general resurrection. So that the beginning and end of the former thousand is before the beginning and end of the latter. Therefore as in the second verse, at the first mention of the former; so in the fourth verse, at the first mention of the latter, it is only said, a thousand years; in the other places, "the thousand," verses 3, 5, 7, that is, the thousand mentioned before. During the former, the promises concerning the flourishing state of the church, shall be fulfilled; during the latter, while the saints reign with Christ in heaven, men on earth will be careless and secure."³³

Others seeing two millennia include Daniel Steele and John Owen.³⁴ The idea of two millennia, therefore, does not originate with us, but boasts prominent scholars from earlier days.

Bimillennial Preterism

Having, I think, established the presence of two millennia in the text, let us briefly give our view of the matter. We hold that the binding of the dragon points to the period from the collapse of the persecution that arose over Stephen until the persecution under Nero. It is symbolic of the restraint upon the world civil power during much of the reign of Claudius when the Jews were prohibited to get up a persecution in Palestine, Asia, and the world. The dragon acts through the beast to make war against the saints and persecute the church. Both symbolically went down to the bottomless pit when the persecution

³² Jno. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, in loc.

³³ John Wesley, *Commentary on Revelation*, in loc.

³⁴ Dandiel Steele, S.T.D., *A Substitute for Holiness or, Antinomianism Revisited*, Chapter XIV, Difficulties in the Thousand Years. http://www.gospeltruth.net/Antinomianism/antinom_toc.htm

over Stephen collapsed. This is portrayed by the wound to the beast's head (Rev. 13:3, 14) and referred to in saying *it was, is not, and was about to ascend out of the bottomless pit*. (Rev. 17:8) That is, the persecuting power of the world civil power (the dragon) was symbolically slain in the collapse of the persecution, but was about to revive and persecute the church anew (*viz.*, the wound to its head would heal). The beast is loosed when the dragon is loosed, for the beast acts only by the authority of the dragon. (Rev. 13:2) Both would ascend from the bottomless pit for the final eschatological battle under Nero (the battle of Gog and Magog/Armageddon).

The reign of the saints points to the victory of the martyrs and their reign in paradise with Christ pending the general resurrection. *Their reign* begins where the binding of the dragon ends. This is *opposite* of most commentators, who assume that the reign of the saints is defined by the binding of the dragon. But a close reading gives the lie to this scheme. *The saints do not reign until they suffer martyrdom under the beast and dragon*. Hence, it is not until the dragon and beast are loosed for the battle of Gog and Magog (Armageddon) that they suffer martyrdom and obtain the martyr's crown. In Rev. 14:9-13, a blessing is pronounced upon those that are faithful unto death and martyrdom under the beast. "Blessed are the dead that die from henceforth." Those referred to here are the same portrayed victorious in Rev. 20:4-6; the blessing pronounced in Rev. 14:13 is received by the martyrs in Rev. 20:4-6. What is that blessing? They are participants of the first resurrection; they live and reign with Christ in Hades Paradise pending the general resurrection. Technically, all the saints share in this reign. I do not believe that the martyrs received a special resurrection. The point of the passage seems to be to fortify their faith against the coming crisis by showing that they will receive a thorough reward from God.

The common symbol of a thousand years points to the fact both are in Hades – the dragon symbolically in Tartarus (the bottomless pit), the saints actually in Paradise. The point of the symbol is to show that both are among the dead, beyond the realm of earthly time and space. The binding of the dragon finds its parallel in II Pet. 2:4 where the "angels that sinned" were bound with chains in Tartarus until the judgment of the great day. Hence, Matt. 12:29 is not the source

of the imagery. It is also Peter who tells that the realm of the spirit does not measure time as we do on earth, and that one day is as a thousand years, and so forth. (II Pet. 3:8; cf. Ps. 90:4) Also, it is more than a little interesting that according to Greco-Roman notions of Hades, the dead inhabited Hades (Elysium for the good, Purgatory/Tartarus for the evil) for a thousand years before they returned to earthly life.³⁵ Revelation was addressed to the Greek and Roman speaking peoples of Asia Minor who would suffer martyrdom under Nero and the Jews. The symbol of a thousand years would likely have been easily recognized by them as a reference to their blessed state in Paradise, so they could bravely face death for the name of Christ.

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³⁵ Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. VI, 734-769; C. Day Lewis ed (1952, Hogarth Press, London. Cf. Plato, *Republic*, Bk. X, 315-320; Ben. Jowett ed; Justin Martyr, confusing Virgil's account with Plato's, equates Purgatory with Tartarus. See Justin Martyr, *1st Apology*, VIII, Ante-Nicene Fathers, p. 165, where he attributes Virgil's description of Rhadamanthus punishing the wicked to Plato. For a fuller account, see our article "Revelation's Millennia and Greco-Roman Notions of Hades."

Dogmatizing About Eternal Conscious Torment In Hell

Kurt Simmons

We were recently forced out of the Mathison Response (together with several other writers) in a power play that attempted to compel all contributors to sign a doctrinal statement affirming their belief in Eternal Conscious Torment (ECT). We have made it our policy for years not to be drawn into this debate. We have regularly turned away inquiries with the answer that we are not expressing opinions on the topic. It is Preterism we are preaching and would prefer not to be distracted with this question, or see the movement further divided by it. Our conviction is that this is not an essential of the gospel and should not be made a test of fellowship or orthodoxy. We believe that every man should be persuaded in his own mind and conscience, without fear of reprisal or retaliation. We want to maintain our policy of not being identified with either camp in this issue. However, in order to demonstrate the weakness of ECT and why it should not, indeed, *cannot* be made a test of fellowship, we offer the following points in evidence:

1 – There are only about 4-6 passages in the New Testament that directly speak to the idea of ECT. Of these, FOUR occur in Revelation amongst much symbology. (Rev. 14:10; 19:3, 21; 20:10) Sound principles of hermeneutics prohibit establishing any essential teaching of the church upon difficult or obscure passages, which cannot first be demonstrated elsewhere in passages that are obvious or plain. Because the symbolic language of Revelation is “difficult and obscure,” it cannot properly serve as the foundational source for the idea of ECT. That leaves only about two passages outside of Revelation that suggest the idea of ECT. The first is Matt. 25:46, where the Lord says that the wicked would go away to “everlasting punishment.” This passage is susceptible of numerous interpretations and we feel it is sufficiently ambiguous to prohibit serving as a dogmatic basis of ECT. Heb. 6:2 speaks of “eternal judgment.” The same word occurs in both places (*aionion*). The sense of *aionion* in Heb. 6:2 is “irreversible;” the judgment happens once for all. It is not pronounced again and

again for all perpetuity. Likewise, the execution of a criminal happens once for all; it is eternal (*aionion*). This appears to be the meaning of *aionion* as used in Matt. 25:46; the translation there of *aionion* as “everlasting” punishment probably reflects the doctrinal bias of the translators. The sense and import of the term is eternal, not ceaseless or perpetual. The other passage is Jude 7 where Sodom and Gomorrah are said to have suffered the vengeance of “eternal fire.” Again, the same word is used (*aionion*). We ask “are the fires that enveloped Sodom and Gomorrah still burning?” Obviously not; the language is plainly poetic, like we see in so many passages of the prophets. Besides, even if it were granted that the fire is somehow eternal and unquenchable this would not be evidence that those it consumes are eternal and suffer endlessly. Concerning Rev. 19:3, David Chilton said: “The phrase [her smoke rises up forever and ever] cannot be pressed into service as a literal description of the eternal state of the wicked in general. The actual flames that consumed ‘Babylon’ burned out long ago; but her *punishment was eternal*. She will never be resurrected.”³⁶ We think this is equally true of Matt. 25:46 and Jude 7 – the idea is that the punishment is eternal, not ceaseless or perpetual. Perhaps there are one or two verses more the advocates of ECT can marshal. However, these are the main texts and, as we have seen, at best they are questionable. Can we in good conscience make ECT an “essential” of the gospel upon such equivocal evidence?

2 - The verses for annihilation are at least equal, if not greater in number and strength, than those for ECT. We will only point to two. Rom. 6:23 says the wages of sin is *death*. Death, not ECT, was what God warned our first ancestors would be the penalty for their sin. Death is the absence of life (*psyche*). The concept of death and ECT are mutually exclusive by any normal usage of logic and grammar. When men exact the death penalty for crimes, they do not keep the criminal

³⁶ David Chilton, *Days of Vengeance*, p. 472, cf. 365, 534; emphasis added.

in torment for eternity, but bring his life to a full end. If ECT is taught in scripture, it is not in the warning God gave our first ancestors. Matt. 10:28 says we are not to fear them that can kill the body and then can do no more, but that we are to fear him that can destroy both body and soul (*psyche*) in hell (Gehenna). The word “destroy” is *apollomi* Strong’s (#622), and is defined as “*a) to put out of the way entirely, abolish, put an end to, ruin b) render useless, c) to kill.*” Thus, *apollomi* = destroy, abolish, put an end to, kill, etc. (A = B) The word “abolish” is defined by the New Riverside University Dictionary as “*To put an end to; annul; to destroy completely; ANNIHILATE.*” The Random House College Dictionary gives as synonyms for “abolish”: *Suppress, nullify, cancel; annihilate, obliterate, extinguish, exterminate, extirpate.* The same is true for the word “destroy.” Synonyms of “destroy” include *annihilate, extirpate, uproot, etc.* Thus destroy/abolish = annihilate/exterminate, etc. (B = C). But if A = B and B = C, then A = C. Hence, *apollomi* = annihilate, extirpate, etc. Simple logic. The concepts of annihilation and extirpation are thus *inherent* in the word *apollomi* and included in the range of accepted meanings. Some examples where the thing destroyed no longer exists include the following, all using the Greek *apollomi*:

Matt: 5:29 - *Better that one of thy members should perish* – The idea here is the complete loss and extinction of the member, which corrupts and returns to dust and ashes.

Jno. 11:50 - *That the whole nation perish not* – The idea here is the utter annihilation of the nation and its political institutions by the hand of Rome, which, in fact, occurred in A.D. 70.

II Cor. 4:16 - *But though our outward man perish* – This verse is particularly on point. The outward man will utterly perish, and molder in the grave, and be no more. This is the basic idea underlying the imagery of Gehenna when the Lord talks about the worm that dieth not and the fire that is not quenched. (Mk. 9:45, 46, 48; cf. Isa. 66:24) Gehenna was the city dump; it lay in the valley of Tophet where the Jews had buried and cremated 185,000 Assyrians smitten by the angel of the Lord, whose bodies were eaten of fire and maggots. (Isa. 33:31-33; 37:36) This became typical and parabolic of the ultimate fate of the lost in hell (Gehenna). In connection with Matt. 10:28, the idea appears to be that the soul

of the lost will be utterly consumed in Gehenna in the same manner as the bodies of those eaten by fire and worms.

Col 2:22 - *Which perish with the using* – This is a reference to the consumption of foods; nothing is left.

Jam. 1:11 - *The grace and fashion perisheth.* – As the beauty of a flower passes completely away and is no more, so the glory of the flesh is consumed and withers, corrupts and returns to dust.

I Pet. 1:7 - *Gold that perisheth* – When gold can be shown to suffer ECT, then the soul in Matt. 10:28 can be shown to as well.

If annihilation is not inherent in Matt. 10:28 or other instances of *apollumi*, it is because the context contemplates something less is intended. However, eternal consciousness is a concept that is absolutely NOT inherent in the meaning of *apollomi*. The whole idea of eternal consciousness must be imported from *outside the text*. The question is, where must we go to get it? Proponents of ECT will point to Rev. 20:10, which says the devil is tormented for ever and ever in the lake of fire. *But proof that the devil is tormented for ever is not proof that men are.* There is not a single verse we know of that states men are tormented for ever. If we put a circle upon this paper and ask proponents of ECT to place therein each verse that expressly states men suffer eternal conscious torment, we suspect that at the end of the day that circle would still be empty. Why not take the challenge yourself?

Conclusion

It is not our intention to become a proponent for annihilationism, but to resume our policy of avoiding this divisive issue. We have written this merely to demonstrate that the case for ECT is not the “open and shut” case some would like us to think. However near and dear it may be to some people’s hearts that God torments men in hell fire for eternity, any objective assessment of the evidence must own that the case for ECT is equivocal at best. Christian charity and an honest weighing of the evidence requires that men be allowed to decide this question for themselves without fear of reprisal, and that men abstain from dogmatizing upon an issue of such attenuated proofs.