

Genesis – Rock Solid

A Biblical View of Geology



By Patrick Nurre

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Title page: Grand Canyon of the Yellowstone, Yellowstone National Park. Photo by Patrick J. Nurre.

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Introduction

My Story

I grew up in a very cool state – Montana. How many people do you know who are from Montana? We are a treasured few! I lived just a stone's throw (no pun intended) from Custer Battlefield and the old Fort Custer. I spent my weekends digging for 7th Cavalry treasures and collecting fossils from the bluffs of the Big Horn and Little Big Horn Rivers. What an exciting time for a young boy!



The rugged Montana I grew up in, along the Big Horn River

As with most young children today, I was fascinated with rocks as a kid. The area I grew up in is rich with geological features and fossils – The Big Horn Mountains and Big Horn Basin. I took every chance to collect and admire the precious treasures of these beautiful places. I was probably the only junior high kid to hang out with the Montana Historical Society – a large group of old women (to me they must have been at least 100 years old) who knew the secrets of the high prairie. By the time I was in high school, I had an extensive collection of interesting artifacts, rocks and fossils that I had collected on many of these trips.

My mom and dad enthusiastically encouraged their young scientist son. Truth be known, they were probably glad that I was not getting into trouble like a number of my peers. My dad would drive me and another

friend out to a deserted area of the Big Horn bluffs and drop us off. All day long we would dig for marine fossils, watch for rattlesnakes and listen to the Big Horn River as it gently flowed by our location. What fun days!



The Big Horn Canyon, just 40 miles from where my home was: I hiked this canyon many times as a young child.

As with most families in those days, my parents were careful to instill certain moral values in me. I grew up in a large Catholic family, devoted to the Catholic Church and its teachings. As a young Catholic boy, the nuns impressed upon me the Biblical thought that Adam and Eve were our first parents. I was taught that God had originally created man and woman and that they fell through disobedience to God. I was also taught that Noah was a real person and that the Flood of Genesis destroyed the earth and the sinners.

During these young formative years, I spent hours at the local Carnegie Library, listening to the banging steam pipes, enjoying the smell of old books and devouring every book I could on the subject of geology, fossils and dinosaurs. Little did I realize, however, that along with my scientific curiosity I was being indoctrinated into a particular viewpoint that was not science. Almost without realizing it, my religious beliefs were being torn down and replaced with something else. Slowly but surely my belief in Adam and Eve, the Fall and the Genesis Flood were replaced with an evolutionary view of life. And although I struggled with this for a while, by the time I entered college, I found myself mocking Noah and his tiny boat as just a myth. My new intellectual belief in evolution, long ages of earth history and chance processes was exciting. I believed that I understood things that my peers did not....

Chapter Two

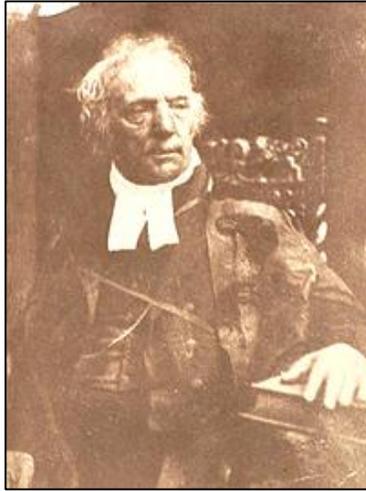
From There to Here!

Many today do not realize that evolutionary thinking started in the late 1700s with a particular philosophy of earth history, not with biology. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) was written after the idea of an old earth was firmly in place in the field of geology – by 1830. The developments in modern geology drove the development of modern biology that expanded greatly after Darwin.

The main battles within the church today are not fought over the issue of evolutionary biology. Most Christians today think that the idea of frog to prince is a silly one anyway. No, the real battles within the church are being fought over the age of the earth and the legitimacy of a global flood – the domain of geology! My observation has been that the majority of the modern church now drifts toward the side of secular geology when they want answers to questions such as, “How old is the earth?” and “Was there a worldwide flood?”

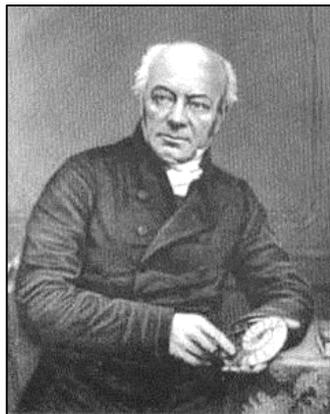
Oddly, it was clergymen who first began to rely upon science and geology to furnish us with the answers to the age of the earth and the formation of its landforms. Notice the following examples:

- One of the earliest of clergymen to preach that the earth was millions of years old was a young preacher named Thomas Chalmers (Free Church of Scotland, 1780-1847). He is credited with creating the “Gap Theory” – that the long ages of earth history occurred between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. This was intended to be an encouragement to the church, but in reality was a compromise position, harmonizing the Biblical position with secular geologists' views. Although highly imaginative, it is rather a ridiculous idea, as there is absolutely no evidence, Scriptural or otherwise, for this view. Yet it has influenced millions of Christians to compromise and to embrace the position of modern geology.



Thomas Chalmers

- One of the key figures of the early 1800s was an extremely influential Episcopalian clergyman and geologist by the name of William Buckland (1784-1856). He was Dean of Westminster and a member of the Royal Society. He tutored many of the scientists of the 1800s, including Charles Lyell. Lyell was perhaps the most influential person in modern geology. Buckland became outspoken in his belief that the book of Genesis was not to be taken literally and that the earth was formed over very long ages.



William Buckland

- Other clergymen included Anglican theologian, George Faber (1773-1854) who formulated the “Day/Age Theory” (the day in Genesis is equal to millions of years) and Congregationalist and geologist John Pye Smith

(1774-1851) who argued for a localized and tranquil (no worldwide upheaval or catastrophic geology) flood of virtually no geological significance. This of course is quite a bit different than the picture of a violent upheaval of earth's foundations as painted in Genesis, as we will see in chapter three. These two views are still advocated today by many evangelicals as reasonable explanations of the Scriptures in light of the findings of modern geology.

- Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892), that great Baptist preacher, accepted an old-earth view of geology.



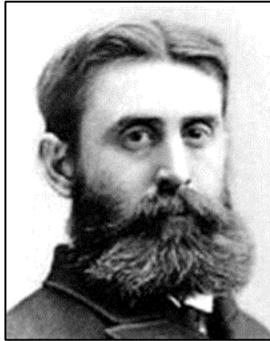
Charles Spurgeon

- I have personally used the commentaries by the great Bible scholars, Charles Hodge (1797-1878) and his son A.A. Hodge (1823-1886). Although these men adamantly rejected evolutionary theory, they advocated an old earth view based, not on the Scripture, but on the findings of secular geologists.



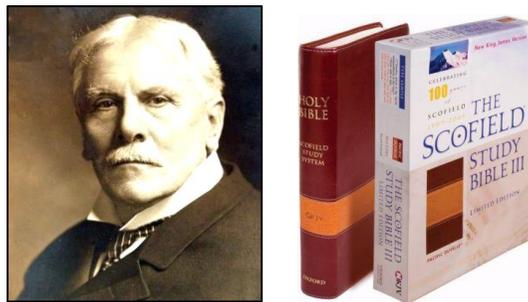
Charles Hodge

- B.B. Warfield (1851-1921) in the late 1800s followed A.A. Hodge as lead theologian at Princeton University. Curiously Warfield and Hodge aggressively defended the inspiration of the Scriptures in the late 1800s. But, throughout his career, Warfield went back and forth on his views of Genesis. Many historians have labeled him as a “theistic evolutionist” and with good reason.



B.B. Warfield

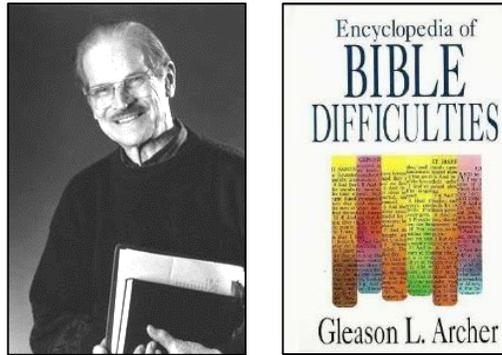
- C.I. Scofield (1843-1921) probably did more to encourage the reading of the Bible in the first part of the 20th century than any other man through his Scofield Study Bible. Yet, this well-known Bible scholar advocated the Gap Theory of Thomas Chalmers (mentioned above) when it came to interpreting Genesis chapter one.



Cyrus Ingerson Scofield

- Closer to home, the late Gleason Archer (1916-2004), apologetics giant to the church, believed that although a straight-forward reading of Genesis gave the picture of a young earth and universe created over six 24-hour days, yet, expressed that this kind of reading of Genesis ran counter to modern scientific research. He believed that the earth and

universe were billions of years old.



Gleason Archer

- InterVarsity Press, for years known as a publisher of fine Christian literature, publishes the works of Hugh Ross (b. 1945), an astronomer, who, although a Christian, advocates an earth and universe billions of years old. His view of the flood in Genesis is that it was a local, tranquil flood of very little geological significance. Hugh Ross is highly influential with many evangelicals today.

The list goes on and on. These men compromised, not because of a lack of clear teaching from the Bible on this issue, but rather in spite of it. They fell victim to pressures from what were supposedly scholarly, scientific facts. In reality these “scientific facts” were really philosophical shifts developed by esteemed intellectuals. Such preaching and teaching from highly influential Bible scholars has gained a following against those who believe that Genesis teaches a young earth. Is it time for us to admit our error and join their numbers?