

Did Jesus Declare the Age of the Earth?

By Jack W. Langford, June, 2012

A FAULTY EXTRAPOLATION

Young Earth Creationists have produced a recent article entitled *Jesus on the age of the earth*. A subtitle exclaims, “*Jesus believed in a young world.*” This article was written by Dr. Carl Wieland and posted on the Creation Ministries International website—creation.com/jesus-age-earth (May 7, 2012).

Of course, there is a variety of references in the New Testament to the creation subject as expressed in the first chapter of Genesis. To substantiate the claim of the title, *Jesus on the age of the earth*, and that “Jesus believed in a young world” Dr. Wieland quotes two verses of Jesus as saying—

“But **from the beginning of the creation**, God made them male and female.”
(Mark 10:6).

“That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed **from the foundation of the world**, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zacharias” (Luke 11:50–51).

Admittedly, a superficial reading of the passages with the idea implanted in our minds that Jesus is speaking about *the age of the earth*, these verses may appear to indicate that Adam and Eve and Abel came to be present during the original creation of the heavens and the earth as recorded in Genesis 1:1. However, to an honest investigator, who obeys the command for believers to “prove all things” (1 Thess. 5:21), upon closer examination of this claim, red flags of caution go up and wave vigorously.

In reality we shall find that this is a classic example of Young Earth Creationists transposing their theological position upon statements in the Bible, in this case statements made by Jesus Christ, Himself. True enough, to any Bible student who takes the Scriptures literally, Christ lived and spoke some 4000 years after the creation of man. This is true according to the Biblically revealed chronology of man’s history. However, the real question is, does this automatically mean that the *age of man* actually tells us *how old the earth is?*

Quite frankly, in neither of these two verses does Jesus specifically discuss the *age* of the earth, or how *young* the world is in the sense of its original creation of Genesis 1:1. In all honesty, it is only an *assumption* that these statements made by Jesus tell us *how young or old the earth is*. This assumption is based upon the *extrapolation* that the age of man equals the age of the earth. In the first verse cited, Jesus was specifically talking about the beginning creation of man and woman on the sixth day as recorded in Genesis 1:27. In the next verse Jesus was talking about the murder of Abel at the foundation of the present world system as recorded in Genesis 4:8. The undisputed fact is that *the age of the earth* is the last thing on the mind of Jesus Christ in either of these two passages. Furthermore, any serious reader of the book of Genesis should realize that this is a hasty *extrapolation* placed upon the words of Jesus by the YEC.

Such an extrapolation totally ignores three basic issues:

First of all, we shall find that it actually violates the *literal interpretation and perspective* of the first chapter of Genesis, and in particular the first few verses. No one doubts that the first chapter of Genesis consists of the theme of the beginnings of the creation of this whole universe and also that of mankind. The theme of what was involved in the beginning and creation of this physical universe is all compacted into the first chapter of Genesis. And yet all serious students of the Bible also recognize that this chapter can be *sub-divided* into separate parts or units. The nature of the first chapter of Genesis is like that of a telescope all condensed together, and yet it can be pulled out in segments so as to give greater magnification.

All expositors, including those who fathered the Young Earth Creationist movement,¹ recognize that in Genesis 1:3-31 we have the largest segment of this chapter which consists of a very carefully given outline of the “six-day” activity of God in preparing the earth for man’s habitation. And right here is where the YEC make their first blunder. They make the faulty assumption that, though it is not stated as such, the “first day” must be understood to have begun in verse one. Consequently, they never get the full value of the telescope nor the reality of the revelation. In fact, they ignore the literal interpretation of the text. The first “day” does, in fact, begin in verse 3 with the introduction of light—*the reality is, you cannot have a first day without light*. Light must be in existence for 24 hours while the earth is in rotation in order to constitute one day in the Scriptural Hebrew reckoning. All admit there is obviously no light in verse two. In verse two the whole earth was smothered in total darkness. Where there is only total darkness surrounding the whole earth, it could not possibly be a part of the first day.

Now we also know this simple fact has been recognized throughout the centuries by the Hebrew people, themselves. For instance, two thousand years ago, in the dispute by Jewish sages with the Gnostics of the first century over this subject of creation, the Jewish sages stated on behalf of both sides of the discussion, “*All agree that nothing was created on the first day.*”² All were united in recognizing that the only thing God did on the first day of this week was to illuminate the *already existing earth*! Furthermore, this is the standard manner in which this “week” has been illustrated in pictorial form in Judaism. For instance, on the opening pages of the *Sarajevo Haggadah*³ of 1400 CE are the pictorial panels which depict this “week” of activity by God. The first day consisted of the introduction of light and *nothing else*. The first “day” is preceded by a separate panel depicting the chaos of Genesis 1:2. Genesis 1:2 *was never a part of the first day*!

The chaos of verse two is a separate section of the creation telescope. Unlike the largest section of this telescope (verses 3-31), the earth of verse two is not an orderly earth separated in sections of days. Rather, it is a disorderly world separated by undesirable chaotic conditions and finally moved upon by the Spirit of God. It was literally an “uninhabitable wasteland” submerged under water and smothered in

¹ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record*, Baker Book House, 1976, pages 53-56. In addition, he observed on page 56, “Thus each ‘day’ had *distinct boundaries*. . . .” (emphasis mine, J.L.). See also, his second work *The Beginning of the World*, Accent Books, 1977, pages 22-24.

² *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Macmillan Co., 1971, Vol. 5, Creation, page 1062.

³ *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, Funk & Wagnalls, 1903, Vol. 4, page 337; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Macmillan Co., 1971, Vol. 5, Creation, page 1068; or *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, Macmillan, 1989, page 184.

blackness for an indeterminate period of time. It is only with the beginning of the work of God during the “six Days” that chronicled time for our modern world began. We have the starting time for Adam on the sixth day of this week. However, in verse two there are no days and no time periods indicated whatsoever. How long the world existed in this form we are not told, and this is very significant. For instance, in the *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*,⁴ which is the standard Jewish Law and Commentary distributed in nearly every synagogue in the English speaking world today, this comment is made concerning the second verse—“Ages untold may have elapsed between the calling of matter into being and the reduction of chaos to ordered arrangement.” In other words, in this section of the Genesis 1 telescope, the time period is drawn out indefinitely. That time was involved in verse two there is no question by anyone. When God initially created the universe (v. 1), He created time. All admit to this. What brought the earth to this chaotic condition we are not specifically told in the Genesis record. Nor is there any information as to how long the sphere of earth was suspended within the solar system or the galactic universe in this darkened, uninhabitable condition.

In addition, when one opens up the first section of this creation telescope, which is verse one, there is stated the specific original creation of the whole heavens and earth. Not only are we unable to understand the size of this universe, we cannot even comprehend the depth of “In the beginning God” All admit that often when this expression is made, it is intended to convey the idea of time immeasurable and beyond our comprehension (John 1:1, 2; Prov. 8:22, 23; Rev. 1:8 and 22:13, etc.). So the actual Biblical revelation as to the age of this universe and of our earth is deliberately left open in the Biblical record. God did not intend to put a date upon that stupendous event.

Consequently, by the *literal interpretation* of Genesis (which the Hebrew people took seriously), Moses never made the blunder of saying the earth was only 4000 years old, and of course, *neither did Jesus Christ*.

Second, the next basic issues ignored by the YEC are the principles of hermeneutics in governing the interpretation of this portion of Scripture. To drag verses one and two over into the period of the first of the “six days” is to violate *every hermeneutical law* that would prohibit that particular maneuver. Hermeneutics has to do with the science of Scriptural interpretation. Here are some of the major hermeneutic principles that are violated by the young earth creationists in their effort to make Genesis 1:1 and 2 a part of the “six days” of Genesis 1:3–31:

- 1.) The week of activity of God restoring the earth and the heavens for man’s habitation *begins* with the *moving of the Holy Spirit* over this chaotic scene as described in the later part of verse two. It is the power of God’s Holy Spirit, acting as the Divine instrument, by which the week of activity is carried out (Psalm 104:30). So the week of activity cannot *begin* until the moving of the presence of the Spirit of God—not before. The YEC totally ignore this reality.
- 2.) It follows that each and every day is inaugurated *by the spoken voice of God*—“And God said.” God literally *spoke* each “day” into existence. This is true of all six days (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, and 24). Quite obviously, there is no spoken

⁴ *Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, edited by Dr. J.H. Herte, Chief rabbi of the British Empire, London, 1961 (first edition 1931).

word from God prior to the time of verse three. Again, the YEC totally ignore this.

- 3.) The first thing God speaks into existence is light. As stated previously, there cannot be a *DAY*, according to the Hebrew reckoning, without the existence of *LIGHT*. The light must exist for twenty four hours while the earth is rotating upon its axis. This is marked off by “evening and morning” hours as specified in the inspired text to give the full 24 hours. This was true for the first “day” and for every day thereafter. Obviously, there is no light in verse two. Again, this is totally ignored by the YEC.
- 4.) Each “day” is framed in very carefully. *The formula for framing each and every day is consistently identical*—“And God said,” tells us the beginning of each day; “There was evening and there was morning,” tells us the width of each day; “day one through six,” tells us the number and sequence of each day. Obviously, there is no such formula in verse two. What is described in verse two cannot contextually be a part of the “six days.” Yet again, the YEC ignore the fact that there are no such formula perimeters prior to verse 3.
- 5.) The specifics of the work done on each of the six days is amazingly *simple* and remarkably *balanced*—(day 1) “Light,” dividing day and night—**that is all**; (day 2) an “Expanse” dividing atmospheric waters from the waters below—**that is all**; (day 3) “dry land appearing with vegetation,” and divided from the oceans—**that is all**; (day 4) “luminaries” are made to function in the already “created” heavens—**that is all**; (day 5) “fish and fowl” created—**that is all**; and lastly (day 6), “animals and man” are created—**that is all**. The “six days” are obviously *cosmetic* in nature. The whole created universe already existed before these “days.” To place the whole creation of this incomprehensively massive universe into the “first day” not only violates these hermeneutical principles, but it would be so disproportionate as to throw this whole sequence so far out of balance as to make it absolutely indiscernible and totally incoherent. Of course, the YEC totally ignore this fantastic imbalance.
- 6.) Perhaps the most amazing thing about the “six days” is what God did NOT do. At no time during the “six days” does the inspired text say God “created the heavens and the earth” or the “waters” that covered the earth. As stated earlier, even from ancient times both Jews and Gentile recognized this feature and structure of the “six days” of Genesis 1. It is really not difficult to see. Nowhere during the six days were the earth’s cores or geological foundations created, nor any other part of it. In fact, it has also long been observed that the fourth day does not say that God “created” (*bara*) the sun, moon or stars—He simply “made” (*asha*, to appoint) them to function in the heavens. So it is, that in the same sense that God “made and fashioned” the earth during the six days, so He “made and fashioned” the planetary system to function in relationship to earth on the fourth day.

So, taking the revealed Hebrew text *literally*, and following the *hermeneutical principles* governing its interpretation, nowhere during these “six days” can we chronicle the beginning age of the earth or of the universe. The simple reason is—*they were not initially created during the six days!* The only thing God “created” during the six days

were the living creatures and man. The life principle of the animal world and the spiritual nature of man were said to be created—they came into existence out of nothing. That the heavens and the earth were “made,” formed and fashioned for man’s habitation, and that the animals and man were created during these “six days” no one doubts—Genesis 1:3–31 and Exodus 20:11. That these “six days” were the initial creation of the heavens and the earth, they were not.

Thus, to say that the earth is only 4000 years old is *contextually* impossible!

The **third** issue ignored by the YEC has to do with a careful examination of the Hebrew grammar. Enough has been written about the Hebrew grammar in these first few verses of Genesis 1 from a variety of sources that even a lay person can gather and sort out the complete information in order to see that the grammatical evidence fully supports the contextual evidence which has been given above.

The YEC were very hasty in following the assumptions made in the book *Unformed and Unfilled* (1976) by Weston W. Fields.⁵ He rather pontifically affirmed that the noun clauses of verse two must be connected by the “And” which begins the verse to the verbal-clause of verse one. This would then be saying, in effect, that “God created the heavens and the earth without form and void . . . and God said let there be light . . .” Fields claimed that this makes verses 1 and 2 a vital part of the first day of verses 3–5. Fields confidently claimed that the Hebrew grammar demanded this arrangement. Without any further investigation, other YEC have repeated this position.⁶

Interestingly enough, a decade earlier (1964), and from the same publishing house, an older Hebrew scholar, the distinguished Edward J. Young⁷ explains otherwise. It is a fact that the second verse of Genesis begins with “And” in most all of our English translations. However, in the Hebrew, this particular “And” is designated as a “*waw* disjunctive.” A vital characteristic of the *waw* disjunctive is that it breaks narrative sequence. In other words, it makes a *disconnect* from what preceded in the previous verse. It is better translated as “But” or “Now,” and it actually begins a new thought. This was all carefully explained by Young. He then states that the traditional and orthodox position is that verse one is not a “dependent clause” with the main statement to be found in verse two. On the contrary, from the very earliest translations of the Hebrew text to the modern traditional Masoretic Hebrew texts, verse one constitutes an “independent clause” which is not dependent upon verse two. Young continues to explain that the three circumstantial clauses of verse two are not to be connected to the verb of verse one, but rather they are connected with the verb of verse three—“and God said.” He would paraphrase the passage as saying that a three-fold condition existed at the time “God said ‘Let there be light.’” In conclusion, Young states, “Verse one is a narrative in itself. Verses 2–31 likewise constitute a distinct narrative. In this narrative the first verb is ‘and God said.’ No previous verb in the perfect appears.”⁸ He continues to state, “It is true that the second verse of Genesis does not represent a continuation of the narrative of verse 1,

⁵ Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1976, pages 80-86.

⁶ Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, of Creation Ministries International, 2004, pages 102-105.

⁷ Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, also by the Presbyterian and reformed Publishing Co., 1964, pages 1-14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, page 11.

but as it were, *a new beginning*. Grammatically, it is not to be construed with the preceding, but with what follows.”⁹ (Italics mine, J.L.)

This position has been reinforced by many other Hebrew scholars. Young cites the German scholars Otto Procksch, Karlheinz Rabast and Helmuth Frey. American scholars have said the same. Bruce Waltke states, “this is the only viewpoint that completely satisfies the demands of Hebrew grammar.”¹⁰ Von Rad says, “verse 2 consists of three clauses that are circumstantial to verse 3 and describe the condition of the earth when God spoke.”¹¹ Allen P. Ross says, “This construction signifies that verse 2 is not the result of a development from verse 1.”¹² He is further emphatic that “the syntax (*waw*-disjunctive) argues against that sequence.”¹³ Concerning the first word of verse two, Ross explains,

Verse 2 begins with the standard formation of a disjunctive *waw*. . . . The *waw* introduces clauses here that are circumstantial to the main verb of the narrative, *wayyomer* [and God said] of verse 3. While most circumstantial clauses are placed after the clause they modify, Davidson says that at times the concomitant event or clause is placed first with the effect of greater vividness (A. B. Davidson, Hebrew Syntax [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902], § 141, p. 188).¹⁴

Young, himself, gives other references where this arrangement is followed, e.g., Gen. 38:25; Num. 12:14; Josh. 2:18; 1 Sam. 9:11; 1 Kings 14:17; 2 kings 2:23; 6:5, 26; 9:25; Job 1:16 and Isa. 37:38.

Arthur Custance, the Canadian Research Scientist, a serious student of Middle Eastern languages, Oriental Scholar and fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute, gave convincing evidence on the whole issue of interpreting Genesis 1:2,¹⁵ even from a historical perspective. In a later article defending his observations, he pointed out that the earliest translation of Genesis “the LXX¹⁶ . . . translate(d) the *waw* of Genesis 1:2” with the Greek conjunction “*de*.” He elaborated, “Liddell & Scott give ‘but’ as the prime meaning, ‘It is used to call attention to the fact that the word or clause with which it stands is to be distinguished (their emphasis) from something preceding.’ Thayer says that it is a ‘particle, adversative, distinctive, disjunctive . . . it is added to statements opposed to the preceding statement . . . it opposes things previously mentioned or thought of.’”¹⁷ Even Weston Fields acknowledged “Furthermore, for the disjunctive idea there would have been no better word in Greek [than *de*]. Thus there can be no doubt that the translators of the LXX understood the significance of the Hebrew *waw Disjunctive*.”¹⁸

⁹ Edward J Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, page 30.

¹⁰ Bruce Waltke, *The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3*, BSac., July 1975, page 226.

¹¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis-A Commentary*, Westminster Press, 1972, Philadelphia, page 47.

¹² Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, Grand Rapids, Mich., Baker Pub., 1996, page 103.

¹³ *Ibid.*, page 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, page 721.

¹⁵ Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void*, Doorway Papers, 1970, Ontario, Canada

¹⁶ *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English*, Brenton, Hendrickson Publishers, 1986.

¹⁷ *Creation Research Society Journal*, Vol. 8, No. 2, page 137, Sept., 1971

¹⁸ Weston Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled*, page 83.

The translation by Jewish historian Josephus¹⁹ in the first century further substantiates this important fact. Josephus gave the translation, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. *But* when the earth did not come into sight, but was covered with thick darkness and a wind moved upon its surface, God *commanded* that there should be light” (emphasis mine, J.L.). Note that not only does Josephus begin the verse by translating the *waw* disjunctive as “*de* (but)” to distinguish it from verse one, he also immediately connects the clauses with the verbal “*command*” of God in verse three.

Even a book by the theologian Douglas F. Kelly, which is now advertised by the young earth creationists’ Creation Ministries International, correctly admits—“Normal usage of Hebrew grammar as well as the immediate context of Genesis 1 both indicate the independence of verses 2–31 from the verb ‘created’ in verse 1, and instead demonstrate the dependence of the circumstances in verse 2 on the verb ‘and God said’ in verse 3.”²⁰

And yet, in spite of all the factual grammatical evidence, the theology of these young earth creationists causes them to turn right around and place “Day one” back upon the initial creation of verse 1. The only thing apropos to this is the old cliché, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make it drink!” The sad fact is, the young earth creationists by their stubborn misinterpretation of the Biblical text, and deliberately ignoring the factual contextual and grammatical evidence, have brought a lot of unnecessary attacks upon the veracity of the Bible.

Similar to the chief Rabbi of the British Empire, three times in his work Edward J. Young warns that one cannot place a date upon the second verse of Genesis one.²¹

On this construction we are not told how long this three-fold condition had been in existence, whether for years or merely for moments. Nor is the creation of this three-fold condition explicitly stated. (Page 9.)

It has already been stated that we are not told how long the three-fold condition described in verse two had been in existence before God said, ‘Let there be light’ . . . How long a time that was we of course have no means of knowing. (Page 11.)

The Bible does not state how old the earth is, and the question of the age of the earth is not the heart of the issue. (Page 102.)

That Jesus makes reference back to the general theme of the beginnings, there is no question. That He dates the age of the earth and the world is a falsehood. It is just as careless and Scripturally ignorant as the ecclesiastical heads in “Christendom” declaring (throughout the dark ages) that the Bible teaches us that the earth is the center of the solar system, when it speaks of the “sun rising and setting.”

For additional information see *The Gap Is Not A Theory* (2011) by this author-Jack W. Langford. Contact at langfordjw@sbcglobal.net

¹⁹ *The Works of Flavius Josephus*, Translation by William Whiston, A. M., Baltimore, Armstrong & Berry, page 25.

²⁰ Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change*, 1997, Reprinted in 2010, Mentor, pages 71 and 72.

²¹ Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, 1964.