

A BRIEF OUTLINE OF THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN GROUPS OF BIBLE-BELIEVING
CHRISTIANS REGARDING GEOLOGIC EVIDENCES FOR GREAT AGE OF MOST OF
THE ROCK LAYERS OF THE EARTH --By D. E. Wonderly, 1995

1. The subject of the age of the earth has been one of much controversy among Christians during the past two centuries because:
 - (a) Many Christians believe that any acceptance of great age is of necessity also an acceptance of the popular theories of an evolutionary origin for living organisms.
 - (b) There have been an immense number of non-technical, non-evolutionary geologic observations made which give evidence that most kinds of sedimentary rocks--especially limestone--required long periods of time to be formed. This puts an obligation on Christians to examine and thoughtfully and prayerfully consider the meaning of geologic data.
2. Early in the 19th century several Bible-believing Christians began to realize that we should be careful about refusing to believe what is clearly seen in and on the crust of the earth. (This was even before Charles Darwin's influence began.) Bible-believing scholars were impressed with the principle that God did not create or arrange evidences in nature which contradicted themselves.*
3. Christian leaders in the early 1800's began to take more notice of the fact that the first chapter of Genesis says that God created the heavens and the earth "in the beginning," but does not attempt to give any idea of when that was. They also noticed that the second verse of the chapter says that when the earth was created, it was "without form and void." This appears to allow time for much of the earth's geologic history, with respect to the formation of rock layers out of an earlier "formless" condition. However, in believing in long periods of time for forming rock layers, these conservative Christian leaders very strongly rejected evolutionary theory--just as conservative, old-earth creationists do today.
4. So, the leading conservative Bible Institutes, Christian colleges, and seminaries during the first 60 years of our present century accepted the geologic data which indicate that the earth is old, but strongly rejected the main evolutionary theories. During this period of time the Seventh-Day Adventists were publishing books which urged Christians to reject practically all geologic observations and to believe that the Biblical flood produced practically all of the sedimentary layers of the earth. (Most of the rock strata formations which we commonly see in the U. S. are sedimentary.) The main author of these books was George M. Price, a high-school teacher who had never had any formal training or experience in geology, and was very unaware of what the rock strata are like, how much thickness of them exists, and by what processes rock lithification is accomplished.
5. Then, about 1960, John Whitcomb and Henry Morris adopted the Seventh-Day Adventist "flood geology" idea and began to encourage evangelical Christians to adopt it. (Whitcomb and Morris failed to notice the great number of extreme errors in G. M. Price's books, because they had never had training in sedimentology--and very little geologic training of other kinds.) Furthermore, they did not take time to consult with sedimentary geologists or petroleum geologists regarding the research data which exist.
6. From the beginning, Morris and Whitcomb insisted that believing in long periods of time for lithification of the rock layers of the earth's crust is a compromise with evolution. Being accused of accepting evolution was a big surprise to old-earth

creationists, because they had been warning people against the doctrine of evolution ever since early in this century. In fact, the Scopes evolution trial in Dayton, Tennessee, was an effort to keep the teaching of macroevolution out of the Tennessee public schools, but at the same time to allow belief in an old earth. And Bryan College was founded soon after the Scopes trial in the same town where that trial was held--teaching true fiat creation, but that most of the rock layers are very old. This was a doctrine which most of the teachers at Moody Bible Institute, the Bible Institute of Los Angeles, the Philadelphia School of the Bible, and similar well-known conservative schools had been teaching for several years already.

7. But because Whitcomb and Morris kept emphasizing the dangers of evolutionary theories in all of their lectures and writings, many evangelicals felt that their teachings must be correct. So, a high percentage of the evangelical schools which had no convenient way to actually test the accuracy of the Seventh-day ideas about geology began to accept them. As a result, "flood geology" and "creationism" have now become popular in a large number of Christian schools and churches--and, along with this change of creation doctrine a pronounced anti-science attitude is often present.

Of course it is important that we reject macroevolutionary doctrines and be especially careful to hold to the Biblical teaching of the recent origin of mankind by special creation in the Garden of Eden. But this is no reason for us to refuse to study the nature of the earth's crust or of the natural laws which God created for sustaining the earth.

8. As soon as this new "young-earth creationism" began to become popular, a very large number of Christian colleges, seminaries, and churches decided that they could not cooperate with such a system. The leaders of the creationism movement were refusing to recognize even the most basic principles of rock formation, ocean-floor sedimentary deposits (as in the Mediterranean Sea), and astronomy. A high percentage of the Christian educators and pastors saw this as a refusal to pay attention to both traditional exegesis of the Bible, and to careful, honest geological research.* So, these "middle-of-the-road" Christian colleges, seminaries, and churches began a rather rapid turn toward theistic evolution. They thought that theistic evolution was the only intellectually respectable alternative to the extreme young-earth creationism. (Unfortunately very few of the professors and pastors in these institutions had kept up with a study of actual Biblical creation doctrine, and thus they didn't realize that old-earth fiat creation doctrine was still "alive and well," and that the old-earth creationists still believe in and practice careful, honest scientific research.)
9. During the first decade (1970-1980) when the creationism movement was becoming known in most parts of the U. S., many public educators were seriously trying to listen to creationists concerning the importance of teaching creation doctrine as an alternative to macroevolution, in the public schools. And there were several signs which led to optimism regarding this possibility. Then came the Arkansas creation trial in 1981-82. During this trial the creationists frequently and openly declared their belief that the earth is only a few thousand years old. Many educators had previously been impressed with the fact that there are real scientific evidences against macroevolution, but they had not realized that the leaders of creationism were asking them to renounce the geologic and astronomic evidences for great age. As a result, the news of the young-earth stand of the creationists spread rapidly among both the educators and scientists of North America.

Consequently all kinds of creation teaching (both young-earth and old-earth) fell into disrepute and rejection. All the progress regarding the possibility of arranging for a legitimate teaching of creation in the public schools thus came to a rapid end--almost entirely because of the bizarre idea that if creation doctrine is going to be taught, it has to be young-earth creationism. (Please ask me if you want specific documentation of the truth of this last sentence. The quotations are too long to include in this outline.)

* Footnote:

More details of the two-century controversy which is outlined above can be found in Chapters 10 and 11, and Appendix I, of the book, God's Time-Records in Ancient Sediments, by D. E. Wonderly, Crystal Press, 1977 (available from the Interdisciplinary Biblical Research Institute). Also, in Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8 of this book is found an extensive (but rather non-technical) description of many of the rock-forming processes which the extreme young-earth creationists have persistently refused to examine or study. (The main reason which the extreme creationists give for not studying rock-forming processes or the great biologically-formed rock deposits of the earth is that they simply believe that nothing in the crust of the earth can be very old.)