

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF YOUNG EARTH CREATIONISM AND THEIR IMPORTANCE TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

by  
Matthew A. Postiff<sup>1</sup>

For about 15 years I have had the privilege of studying under William Combs, Bruce Compton, and Robert McCabe. More recently, I have benefited from their advice concerning local church ministry and their mentorship as I assisted two of them in their teaching responsibilities at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. Their interaction as personal friends has been a great encouragement. I am indebted to all of them for their careful and conservative scholarship in exegetical, biblical and systematic theology as well as the biblical languages. I trust this essay will be a fitting honor to them as I offer further support for one of Dr. McCabe's areas of special interest: the important biblical doctrine of young earth creationism.

A note about nomenclature is necessary to begin. The theological view we espouse is most commonly called *young earth creationism* (YEC). *Young* quickly conveys the distinction of our view compared to all who posit an earth and universe that are billions of years old. The YEC moniker will likely remain the popular name of the view. But YEC can also be very appropriately called *literal creationism*. I somewhat prefer to use the term *young earth theology* (YET). The reason for this is that the significance of young earth creationism is not limited to the opening days of creation. Its long tentacles reach into the gospel, apologetics, the nature of God, man and sin, and many other areas of Christian theology.

This is consistent with Dr. McCabe's teaching. In the conclusion of his defense of literal days in the creation week published 16 years ago, he wrote,

While many Christians and Christian organizations relegate a literal creation week to a secondary or tertiary level of Christian doctrine, I would suggest that it is an essential part of the faith. To relegate literal creationism to a peripheral doctrinal level minimally suggests an inconsistent view of Scripture's perspicuity on this subject and pervasively promotes deterioration in other facets of orthodox doctrine.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Postiff is the pastor of Fellowship Bible Church in Ann Arbor, MI.

<sup>2</sup>Robert V. McCabe, "A Defense of Literal Days in the Creation Week," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 2000): 123.

In this essay, I will offer further evidence for his conclusion. To do so, I will first locate young earth creationism in the spectrum of creationist views. Second, I will provide a list of non-essential beliefs regarding young earth creation. The main body of the paper is the third section, in which I will list and explain the essential or “non negotiable” aspects of young earth theology.<sup>3</sup> Finally, I will highlight the fact that young earth theology is not just about creation, but that it touches on other areas of systematic theology and is an indispensable part of the faith once delivered to the saints.

### THE SPECTRUM OF VIEWS ON CREATION

Various views on how everything came to be can be summarized in two major categories depending on the most important authority that informs the view: Biblical Creationism and Scientific Creationism. Biblical creationism emphasizes what the Bible teaches about the existence of God and his role in supernaturally creating all things. It takes its data from the exegesis of the Bible. The various scientific views of creationism include more or less of an emphasis on secular science and evolutionary ideas with much less, if any, participation by God.

A third major category of creationist views arises from other ancient religions. These are mostly polytheistic or mythological explanations of creation, such as the many creation accounts of the ancient near east. I will not address them in this essay.

#### *Biblical Creationism*

Today, the most common biblical creationist viewpoint is young earth creationism. It teaches that the Bible contains a straightforward account of how God supernaturally created the heavens, the earth, and all that is in them in six normal days about 6,000 to 10,000 years ago. It teaches that there was a real Adam and Eve, that all death came through the sin of Adam, and that Noah’s flood was a worldwide catastrophic judgment by God that has important implications for present studies of geology and geography.

According to this view, the interpretation of historical or observational scientific data must be brought into agreement with biblical data rather than the other way around. The Scripture is a sufficient witness to creation and does not require the additional input of science to explain the basic elements of creation.

With the remainder of the views, science is viewed as an authority alongside or superior to the Bible.<sup>4</sup> For them, the Bible must be

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<sup>3</sup>I was able to participate in early discussions about these essentials several years ago with Robert McCabe and Terry Mortenson from Answers in Genesis.

<sup>4</sup>For instance Hugh Ross’s “the voice of nature” in *The Fingerprint of God* (Orange, CA: Promise Publishing, 1991), 145. In the back matter of that book, Ross’s organization “Reasons to Believe” is described as providing teaching “on the harmony of God’s dual revelation in the words of the Bible and in the facts of nature.”

accommodated to the results of science so that a concord can be found between the two competing authorities.

We also have old earth creationist views such as the gap and pre-creation chaos theories. These views postulate a ruin followed by a reconstruction either before Genesis 1:1 or between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, after which the creation account is understood as literally true, occurring in six literal days.<sup>5</sup> So, the gap and pre-creation theories hold to six days, but only after an indeterminate length of time prior to the six days. This is why I class it in the biblical creationism category (although I could be convinced to class it with the scientific creationism views). Popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, this understanding grants prominence to geology by accepting the long geologic ages as a necessary part of the biblical timeline of world history. This view was popularized just over 200 years ago<sup>6</sup> and can be held with or without biological evolution. One variant is that the ‘mineral creation’ is old while the living organisms are young. Another variant is that there were animals and/or angels prior to the ruin and reconstruction.<sup>7</sup>

Another view is what I will call the “time dilation” view,<sup>8</sup> in which Einstein’s theories play an important role. According to his understanding of the universe, time is not a constant and instead depends on the effects of gravity. The result of this could be that time near the earth consisted of a short week while farther out in the universe it was dilated to greater lengths of time. Like Einstein’s theory, the time dilation view is quite difficult to understand and explain. However, what is clear is that it attempts to explain the vast distances in the universe and how they relate to the (apparently) short time of creation. This understanding could be modified to have a more naturalistic emphasis, but it can also be used to explain creation from a literal biblical perspective.

### *Scientific Creationism*

Compared to biblical creation views, *scientific creationist views* expand the role of science in the understanding of creation. The views

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<sup>5</sup>George H. Pember, *Earth’s Earliest Ages and their Connection with Modern Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Buddhism*, ed. G. H. Lang (repr. of 1876 ed., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1946), 65. For the best book-length critique of the gap theory, see Weston W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory* (Collinsville, IL: Burgener Enterprises, 1976). McCabe wrote a lengthy critique of the re-creationist views in his Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Course Syllabus, “Biblical Creationism.”

<sup>6</sup>Ian Taylor, *In the Minds of Men: Darwin and the New World Order*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: TFE Publishing, 1984), 362–64.

<sup>7</sup>In the gap view, there is no pressing need for the Noahic flood to explain the world’s current appearance because there was a prior flood, before the re-creation that started in Genesis 1:2. Still, gap theorists such as Pember held to the global flood of during Noah’s lifetime as distinct from the earlier flood of ruination.

<sup>8</sup>For an introduction, see the opening chapter by D. Russell Humphreys, *Starlight and Time: Solving the Puzzle of Distant Starlight in a Young Universe* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1994).

that fall under this heading are normally connected with a uniformitarian view of earth history that extends billions of years, punctuated by occasional catastrophic events.<sup>9</sup> These are old-earth understandings of creation. The scientific views are different in another way from biblical creation: most do not posit a completed creation. The processes of creation (evolution) are ongoing today in most of the following views and therefore there is no “completion” or “cessation” of creation as there is in the biblical creation views.

The *day-age view* is an old-earth explanation that teaches that the six days of creation were not regular days but rather were a sequence of geological ages, giving time for the several-billion year age of the earth taught by secular science.

*Theistic evolution* is an old-earth view that teaches that God created inorganic materials and set in place laws and properties that would, with time and evolutionary processes, yield the result of creation that we see today. It is also called the fully gifted creation view or evolutionary creationism.<sup>10</sup> Macro-evolution is true on this view, but its processes were created and initiated by God.

Old earth *progressive creationism* is a modification of the theistic evolution view that suggests God intervened at various key points to modify existing species or to specially create new species.<sup>11</sup> Accordingly, the problem of missing transitional evolutionary forms is eliminated since God “filled” those gaps with his supernatural creative work.

The old earth *framework* understanding of creation explains that the creation account of Genesis is a poetic, pictorial, and careful arrangement of the events of creation. The events are not given in sequential or literal order but are rather designed to express God’s orderly creation of spheres and subsequent filling of those spheres with living things, followed by his Sabbath rest.<sup>12</sup> Technically, the framework theory says that Genesis does not provide specifics on the age of the earth or other such details. Practically, it is a doctrine that attempts to harmonize the Bible with science.

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<sup>9</sup>Before the advent of modern uniformitarianism, there were basically no Christian commentators who suggested that creation took millions of years. This is demonstrated convincingly in the first three chapters of *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008).

<sup>10</sup>Howard J. Van Till, “The Fully Gifted Creation,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland & John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 161–218. The Biologos organization promotes this view ([www.biologos.org](http://www.biologos.org)).

<sup>11</sup>For a summary and refutation of this view, see Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise: A Biblical and Scientific Refutation of “Progressive Creationism” (Billions of Years), As Popularized by Astronomer Hugh Ross* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004).

<sup>12</sup>Meredith Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (1958): 147–57. For an excellent critique, see McCabe’s “A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books: 2008), 211–49.

The secular *evolutionary theory* is an old earth, non-theistic evolutionary model. Purely natural processes brought about all that exists, except perhaps the remarkable beginning at the Big Bang. Random mutations are filtered through natural selection to produce various life forms of increasing complexity over vast periods of time.

### *Summary of Views on Creation*

At somewhat of a risk of oversimplification, the chart below shows a pictorial summary of the various views and how they are distinguished from one another (○ = no, ● = yes, ◐ = partial or “in some variations”).

	Old Earth Views						
	Young Earth	Gap/Recreation	Day-Age	Progressive	Theistic	Framework	Pure Evolution
Millions of Years	○	●	●	●	●	●	●
Big Bang Cosmology	○	○	●	●	●	●	●
Macro Evolution	○	◐	●	◐	●	○	●
Death Before Fall	○	◐	●	●	●	●	●
Supernatural Creation	●	●	●	◐	◐	○	○
Real Adam	●	●	◐	●	○	○	○
Literal Hermeneutic	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Six 24-hr Days	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
Global Flood	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
6k–10k years	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Sin Before <i>Any</i> Death	●	◐	○	○	○	○	○
Adam Brought Sin and <i>Human</i> Death	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
Comprehensive Extent	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
Second Coming	●	●	●	●	●	●	○
New Heaven/Earth	●	●	●	●	●	●	○

### NON-ESSENTIALS OF YOUNG EARTH THEOLOGY

Although various authors over the past decades have expressed strong beliefs in one or the other details of young earth theology, many such details are extraneous to the system, mainly because of limited biblical revelation. In this section, I briefly list a few such details that

are *not* essential to young earth creationism.

For instance, it is not necessary to believe in an exact age of the earth, such as 6,000 years, or to adhere to Ussher's Chronology. Dogmatism on the precise age is not necessary as long as the age is "young."<sup>13</sup> It is not required that one be dogmatic on an absolute absence of gaps or missing names in the Genesis genealogies.

It is not necessary to believe in the water vapor canopy theory. This theory had many early adherents but has lately fallen out of favor.

It is not necessary to believe that the second law of thermodynamics started at the Fall. Perhaps it did begin then, but the pre-Fall situation would seem to be unworkable if heat would not transfer from hotter to colder entities. Perhaps God provided special counteracting features in creation that overcame the second law perfectly until he removed those counteracting features after the Fall.

Young earth theology does not require one to hold a particular view on the initial light source used during the first three days. Nor need one believe that the speed of light has changed or that the universe is of small size, or that time dilation accounts for the appearance of age. It is not necessary to believe that radioactive half-lives have changed, nor that God only created fresh water and not salt water.

It is not required that one believe that angels were created at a particular point in the creation week, although the fact that they were created during that week is part of young earth theology.

Multiple answers or hypotheses on these issues are consistent with young earth creationism. No particular view is demanded by Scripture.

Finally, it is not necessary to abandon true (observational) science or be intellectually backward. The number of accomplished Ph.D.-level scientists over the centuries who have embraced young earth theology is enough to dispel that myth.

The focus of this essay is not on speculations as to the scientific reasonableness of this or that detail of young earth creationism. Details like that are covered capably elsewhere by scientific creation ministries such as Answers in Genesis, Institute for Creation Research, The Creation Research Society, etc. These ministries have focused on answering questions about various details of young earth creation, but ultimately it is Scripture that informs us that young earth creationism is true and what we should believe about it.

### ESSENTIALS OF YOUNG EARTH THEOLOGY

In contrast to those non-essential matters listed in the previous section, I will now offer a list of essentials of YET. The list of essentials is not necessarily irreducible. I believe it is more important to carefully delineate the various facets of young earth theology rather than try to provide a minimalist list. Still, if any of these characteristics are taken

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<sup>13</sup>Mark A. Snoeberger, "Why a Commitment to Inerrancy Does Not Demand a Strictly 6000-Year-Old Earth: One Young Earther's Plea for Realism," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 18 (2013): 3–17.

away, the resulting theology cannot be called “young earth” as its own adherents have understood it for the last half century.

Furthermore, this listing is not novel. Many have written on matters such as these. And although such lists of essentials can be synthesized from elsewhere, I believe it is valuable to provide in a single publication a list of essential characteristics of young earth theology. I believe those necessary characteristics are:

- (1) Hermeneutic: Literal.
- (2) Method: Direct and supernatural acts of God.
- (3) Extent: Comprehensive.
- (4) Duration: Six consecutive 24-hr days.
- (5) Age: 6,000 to 10,000 Years.
- (6) Anthropology: Real Adam.
- (7) Hamartiology: Sin and resulting death.
- (8) Geology: Global Catastrophic Flood.
- (9) Authority: The Sufficient Scriptures.

Each of these is of the essence of young earth creationism. They will now be examined in turn.

### *Literal Hermeneutic*

It does not really matter to the young earth creationist whether God created the universe recently or a long time ago—not nearly as much as it matters that we believe that he created it in the way that he plainly explained in the Bible. If the text of Genesis, taken in its most basic sense, indicated that the earth is old, young earth creationists would be old earth creationists. That is because the authority of the Bible matters more to the young earth creationist than does the age of creation.

But as the text of Genesis 1–9 stands, an originalist and literal interpretation<sup>14</sup> demands young earth theology. This fact is recognized by some liberal scholars, if for no other reason than that there is no limit to what kind of interpretation might arise from a text if its plain communicative intent is ignored.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>See Rachael J. Denhollander, “Restoring the Foundations,” *Journal of Creation* 25 (2011): 104–10. Originalism is distinguished from literalism in the following way. Literalism says that a text should “be interpreted only according to its language, without the context of any outside source, including the historical understanding of the language, to interpret the meaning of the terms” (108). This, the author argues, may appear to be less subjective than a “living constitution” theory, but apart from historical context, the words could only then be interpreted in terms of the present-day context. Such could easily distort the original meaning intended. So, originalism says that a text “ought to be interpreted according to how it was originally intended to be.” Original intent is “the contemporary usage and understanding of the language in the document.”

<sup>15</sup>Most famously, perhaps, James Barr wrote in a 23 April 1984 letter to David C. C. Watson of the UK, dated 23 April 1984, “So far as I know, there is no professor of

### Principles of Hermeneutics

Biblical hermeneutics entails principles that can be applied to the text of Scripture to arrive at the meaning of the text. Biblical meaning is informed and constrained by several factors. These include, first of all, the text itself. That is to say, the meaning of the text is *in* the text. It is not found outside of the text. Second, the author's evident intent is a crucial factor. What the author wanted to convey has a pride of place in determining the meaning. With Scripture, this authorship is twofold—divine and human, with God's superintending work in inspiration ensuring that the words of the human author perfectly conveyed the intent of the divine author.<sup>16</sup> Third, the principle of stability, namely that the text means what it meant originally. The meaning does not change with time. Fourth, lexicography must be taken into account. Words have a limited range of meanings, and only one of those meanings is active in a given context. Fifth, the word forms and arrangement influence the meaning conveyed, thus the need for grammatical study of the text. Sixth, the context must be considered. The context in which a text sits not only limits the semantic range of individual words, but also provides boundaries beyond which the meaning of the sentences and paragraphs cannot go. Seventh, the larger theological context includes all of Scripture. The coherent, non-contradictory system of truth that it conveys informs the meaning of a text. Eighth, the genre and form of a text can affect the meaning of a text. Narrative, poetry, epistolary, and parabolic settings have different effects on the interpretation of a given text. Ninth, the historical and cultural settings are factors in determining the meaning. Finally, tenth, the doctrine of the clarity of Scripture must be recognized. God intended to communicate with beings created in his image—beings who have the ability to communicate. We can rightly expect that his communication is perspicuous.

A consistently literal approach is the only proper way to interpret the biblical text. This is demonstrated by several biblical examples of the production and use of Scripture as clear communication from God (Neh 8:8, Num 12:8; Hab 2:2; John 16:25, 29; Deut 27:8; and Ezra 4:18). These texts show that not only in the use of Scripture but also in its production, a plain, literal meaning was intended by God. The Bible is essentially clear (Ps 119:105; 2 Pet 3:16). Some things may be harder to understand than others, but most of the Bible is straightforward.

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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."

<sup>16</sup>By this statement, I intend to convey the ideas of verbal inerrancy and infallibility.

None of it is in code language. This doctrine of the clarity of Scripture supports a literal hermeneutic.

A literal approach to the Scripture is further presupposed in the normal use of language to communicate propositions. God created man in his image with the ability to communicate. We expect that when God communicates, he will do so in an understandable, straightforward way. Literal interpretation is axiomatic. Without it, communication is impossible. It has to be assumed to even speak about it. The critics of literal interpretation certainly understand what it means, and in fact they must rely on it in order to clearly communicate their distaste for it.

These principles drive the conclusion that the plainest sense of Scripture is the right sense. Taking a figure of speech as such, for example, is plainer than the “woodenly literal” interpretation. In terms of the creation debate, for instance, a day should be considered a 24-hour day unless it is impossible to take it that way.

### **Literal Approach to Genesis**

Beyond reasonable dispute, Genesis 1–2 should be understood as narrative in form. McCabe’s lengthy treatment of the framework theory emphasizes that the alleged figurative nature of the creation account cannot square with the data that proves the text is a narrative text.<sup>17</sup> Boyd’s statistical analysis buttresses this conclusion.<sup>18</sup> Since the text is narrative, there are no clues given to the reader that there is any other sense that is plainer than the literal, narrative sense.

Some interpreters object that the genre of Genesis is exalted prose. “Exalted” is a code word that leaves room for a figurative interpretation. The problem with this understanding is that it confuses the exalted content for an exalted form. God used an essentially normal narrative form to convey exalted content. Others suggest that the genre of Genesis 1–2 is poetry, again leaving room for a figurative interpretation. But the text has none of the markers of poetry, including the Hebrew device of parallelism. Others claim that the text is strictly mythological. This view, however, cannot be squared with a conservative, biblical view of inspiration and inerrancy.

In the end, it is most natural to understand the text as a narrative. We could refer to it as a *structured* narrative to make clear that we understand the text was composed in seven organized units—each unit covering a day of God’s creative work—but this does nothing to undermine the genuine narrative form of the text. As a narrative, it should be read as any straightforward, non-parabolic account is intended to be read, and that is literally. This way, the days are understood in their plain sense and young earth creationism naturally arises out of the text.

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<sup>17</sup>McCabe, “A Critique of the Framework Interpretation,” 216–28.

<sup>18</sup>Steven W. Boyd, “The Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3: What Means This Text?” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books: 2008), 174–76.

Literal interpretation is necessary to YET. The alternative, that Genesis 1–11 could be read as myth or poetry or framework or the like, would chop the legs out from under the entirety of young earth theology. The other essential elements of YET hang in the balance of literal hermeneutics. Reading the text literally demands that Genesis 1–3, Exodus 20, Genesis 5 and 11, Genesis 6–9, and Romans 5 be taken seriously to express that God created directly in six 24-hour days about 6,000 to 10,000 years ago, that death only came after the Fall of the real single man Adam, and that some centuries after the creation, the world was destroyed in a global deluge.

### *Supernatural Direct Acts of God*

The method God used to accomplish the creation of the universe was mainly divine speech, initially creating *ex nihilo*, and later using materials created earlier in the first week. Positively, this says that creation was a miracle: each portion of creation was supernatural and sudden. Negatively, this says that evolution was not used, because evolution is a naturalistic process that rests on mutations, natural selection, survival of the fittest, and vast amounts of time. None of these principles of evolution require God, at least on the naturalist's accounting of the matter.

In particular, the formulae “God said...and there was” or “God said...and it was so” indicate an immediate fulfillment of the divine speech, issuing in creative events that happened within moments. The initial acts of creation had to be by fiat speech, for there was no other matter, energy, space, or time that could be used to create things with material, time-bound, and/or space-limited natures.

For some parts of creation, later acts of creation built upon earlier ones. There are portions of creation in which God used material created by earlier acts of divine speech to fashion later parts of creation. For instance, God formed man using the organic material that he had created earlier (Gen 2:7). The text suggests that God used similar means in the planting of the Garden of Eden (2:8), the growth of trees there (2:9), and the creation of animal life (2:19). Finally, the text is clear that God used Adam's body to form the body of the first woman (2:21–22). This method of creation serves as part of the explanation as to why death reduces man to dust: that was the state from which he came. But it does not make the method of creation significantly easier, for even with a collection of appropriate organic elements, it is impossible through normal means to create plants, trees, or a man. Making use of a part of a man to create a woman is of similar difficulty. The “handiwork” required was still a direct act of God.

With some portions of creation, the text adds to the standard formulae another statement: “Then God made” (1:16, 25). The method God used is not specified, but it seems to be different than mere speech. Still, it is a direct act of God, not portrayed as though it required a complex series of means.

It has been claimed by progressive creationists and theistic evolutionists that God used evolution to accomplish some or all of the work of creation. Evolution is an anti-theistic, anti-supernatural belief system. It consists of “normal means” that do not invoke a god. In the evolutionary system, vast amounts of time and chance take on god-like qualities. The “God made” formulae may seem to provide an opening for progressive and theistic adherents, but evolution requires time that simply was not available in the duration of the creation week, as a later essential element of young earth theology will show.

Evolution cannot explain how life got started, how the vast amount of information that is in the genome is maintained from generation to generation, nor how organisms happened to evolve to have reproductive abilities before they died. Young earth creation explains all of these things by the supernatural creative act of God.

Young earth creationism is at heart a supernatural understanding of creation; without this essential, the creation could not be young.

### *Comprehensive Extent*

Although this essential is a standard belief among young earth creationists, I did not find it called out specifically in the literature that I reviewed. It almost seems unnecessary to state, but there are some important implications of the comprehensive nature of creation.

Positively, this essential says that God created everything. Negatively, it asserts that there was no spontaneous generation of matter or life. Abiogenesis did not and does not occur.

### **Scriptural Support**

Exodus 20:11 explains that God finished the entire creation—structure and contents—in six days and did no work on the seventh. Likewise the Jewish people were not to do any work on the seventh day. But this text teaches another essential of young earth theology, namely that God created *everything*. This includes all the residents of the heavens, holy and (eventually) fallen angels included. All matter is included. Every physical place and inhabitant of creation, whether in the starry heavens, the earth’s atmosphere, the depths of the sea, the remotest corner of land, the earth’s molten core, and even the third heaven; all are included in this comprehensive statement about creation.

Other Bible texts aver the same truth. The prophet Isaiah emphasizes God as unique and omnipotent creator who is worthy of worship (Isa 40:28, 42:5, 45:12, 45:18).<sup>19</sup> Acts 14:15 teaches that God created the heaven, earth, sea, and everything in them. Acts 17:24 says that God made the world and everything in it. The two latter passages are found in contexts in which the apostolic team is preaching the gospel to pagan idolaters. Ephesians 3:9 describes God as the one who “created all

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<sup>19</sup>So testify a multitude of passages in Isaiah that use the *created*, *formed* and *made* word groups.

things.” Colossians 1:16 credits God the Son with creating “all things,” whether in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, or whether thrones, powers, rulers, or authorities. These contrasting descriptors emphasize that Christ created *everything*. The text then reiterates that all things were created through him and for him.

Nothing of a created kind made itself. The triune God is self-existent and never had a beginning, so there was no point at which he was “made.” John 1:3 reminds us that “all things” were made through him, and without him nothing was made that has been made.

### **Theological Importance**

Theologically the fact of comprehensive creation is significant because it means that there are two basic categories of things in the world—God is alone in the first category, and that which is created is the second category. This distinction is inviolable for all eternity and forms the foundation of much of Christian theology.

Without a proper distinction between God and man, the doctrine of God’s holiness, in the sense of his transcendence above creation, is diminished. Either God is brought down to the level of creation and pantheism results; or man is elevated to the level of God and some form of anthrodeism results.

This creator-creature distinction makes it impossible that an angel could succeed in an aspiration to be just like God, or that a man could truly be self-autonomous. Such attempts at usurping the sovereignty of the self-existent God are at the root of all sin. But God’s existence and sovereign rule is not ultimately threatened by his creatures because he is their creator.

Additionally, the creator-creature distinction proves that there has not been an eternal battle between good and evil as in many polytheistic religions. Before God created, there was nothing beside the Triune God. There was no evil power, no chaos, no struggle for dominance, etc.

This distinction also serves as a reminder of God’s lordship. Revelation 4:11 asserts that God is worthy of worship precisely because he created all things and is alone responsible for their continued existence. God is worthy of our reverent recognition because he made us.

The creator-creature distinction establishes a hard barrier between God and man in terms of their ‘kind.’ God is so great and so high and so different than his creation that it takes God’s infinite power to reach down through that barrier to establish a relationship with man. No one can reach up through that barrier to reach God or have fellowship with him. God must initiate the creation of such fellowship. What makes this fact infinitely more true is that humanity fell into sin, thus falling “farther down” from God.

Another important distinction between God and his creatures is that his creation is finite. He is the only infinite anywhere. This demands humility on the part of creature. Such humility includes intellectual humility, so that we must acknowledge that there are many things

we cannot possibly understand, particularly those things that are not revealed to us in Scripture.

An enlightened recognition of the truth that God created everything causes man to seek a mediator that can bring the two parties together. This need was recognized from ancient times by Job (9:33) and was filled by Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5).

This essential is important because an attack on it ultimately would unravel all of Christian theology. If something exists that was not made by God, then it is either another self-existent being (a rival god) or it traces its origin to some other such being. We can safely say that if God did not bring all of creation into being, then Christian theology is wrong.

To the extent that non-young-earth cosmologies remove God from an active role in creating all things by assigning the wonder and power of creation to naturalistic means, they strip God of his glory and power. The God who is identified as the creator-God in the Bible becomes in the other views a mere participant, an observer, or totally absent.

### *Six-Day Duration*

One of the most repeated and universal experiences of human existence is the passing of a day. It is natural that God would define what a day is in the portion of his self-disclosure that describes his creation; there would be no better place to do so, in fact.

### **McCabe's Case For Literal Days**

Robert McCabe's afore-mentioned "Defense of Literal Days" is an important read on this subject. He develops his defense of six 24-hour days in two sections.

The first part of his defense of literal days of creation is an examination of the evidence in favor of literal days in creation. He writes that although the semantic range of the Hebrew word for day (יָמִים) includes literal and figurative uses, there are several strong arguments in favor of concluding that its use in Genesis 1–2 is literal.<sup>20</sup> First, the Hebrew language offers a wide selection of words regarding time. It would have been easy for Moses to have used another word to indicate a longer amount of time. Second, when יָמִים is used in the singular and not as part of a compound construction like יָמֵי הַיְשׁוּרִים (‘in-the-day-of-making,’ such as in Genesis 2:4), it always means a regular day. Third, the surrounding context offers clues that it is a literal use, with juxtaposed phrases such as ‘evening and morning’ and ‘day and night.’ Fourth, when יָמִים is qualified by the ordinal numbers, it almost always refers to a literal day. Fifth, two passages in the Law corroborate that Genesis is speaking of literal days, namely Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:14–17. The Exodus passages give the most direct evidence for literal days and render

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<sup>20</sup>My analysis of McCabe's article suggests he has six supporting arguments, whereas he calls out five.

the six-literal-day interpretation invulnerable to attack. Sixth, the creation happens in a certain sequence of events, as indicated by the arrangement of the ordinal numbers on the days. It is essential to the survival of the creation that these periods of time be short, as in one day. Longer periods of darkness, or great distances of time between the creation of certain co-dependent parts of creation, would render impossible the survival of the creation. For these reasons, it is most natural to understand the creation days as normal 24-hour days.

The second division of McCabe's article on literal days refutes objections to the doctrine. The first objection he addresses is that the seventh day is allegedly open-ended without an "evening-morning" conclusion, thus indicating that all the days could be open-ended and longer than 24 hours. In reply, McCabe argues that the seventh day is treated in a special way in that it has none of the formulaic markers that are used in the six prior days. This is to demonstrate that the final day is not a day of creation, but rather one of cessation from creative work. Additionally, no "evening-morning" formula is necessary here because there is no need to transition to the eighth day, since the creation week is over. Passages such as Psalm 95:7–11, John 5:17, and Hebrews 4:3–11 are used by some interpreters to argue that the seventh day is open-ended. McCabe argues a good case can be made that these later allusions/quotations of the "rest idea" do not demand a figurative interpretation of the six days of creation. In the Psalm passage, the *rest* refers to the blessing of the Promised Land. In John 5:17, God the Father is working but it is not necessary to conclude that he is working on his seventh-day Sabbath of Genesis 2. Hebrews 4:3–11 can be understood as using the seventh day of the creation week in an analogy or pattern with God's eternal rest. None of these passages demand that the seventh day, much less the prior six, are non-literal.

The second objection McCabe addresses is the figurative use of "day" in Genesis 2:4 as a support for taking "day" in Genesis 1 figuratively. It is granted that "day" in this verse does not refer to a literal day, but rather to the entirety of the creation week. However, the bound form in which "day" is found affects the semantics of the term such that it is a special use of the term that means "when."

Third, the explanations of God's kind of time in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 supposedly support figurative (lengthy) creation days. When the Scripture says that a day is as a thousand years, this is allegedly proof that the days of the creation week can be very long ages. McCabe argues to the contrary, emphasizing the particles "like" and "as" are used to say that God views or experiences time much differently than mankind does. In addition, *day* is once again part of a compound construction in Psalm 90 and cannot be equated to the singular absolute state of "day" in Genesis 1.

Fourth and finally, McCabe addresses the objection that the many activities done on the sixth day of creation render it impossible that it could be a 24-hour day. In response, most of the activities on that day were done by God in very short order. The longest activity ascribed to

Adam, naming the kinds of animals, was feasible for the newly created, sinless, and mentally well-endowed man to accomplish in a relatively short period of time. This is especially plausible given that he is not said to have named *all* of the created kinds, and that kinds are probably far fewer in number than our modern taxonomic species.

The defense of literal days in the creation week stands at the heart of young earth theology.

### Various Other Objections

The appearance of age is used as an attack-point on young earth creationism. But at least some portions of the creation had to have a *prima facie* appearance of age greater than one week. Adam and Eve were mature adults; the animals, trees, rocks, stars, and other objects all appeared to have been in place longer than they actually were because of their maturation level. The appearance of age may have disappeared if a skilled scientist were present during the creation week, ready to make keen observations and armed with a full array of sophisticated instruments to test the age of various portions of the creation. That did not happen, so the age of creation has to be a historical question rather than one determined by scientific investigation.

We need not insist that the days were precisely the same number of seconds to the thousandths place as the present length of a day—we know that major seismic events can slightly change the rotational speed of the earth. The global flood probably had a similar effect on the length of a day. But because of the specification of numbered days as mornings and evenings, it is clear that God is presenting normal days as they were experienced by the initial Jewish readers of his book of beginnings.

### Young Age

Creation was, in a word, *recent*. The universe is young relative to the standard scientific model. The earth, and all of creation, is on the order of 6,000 to 10,000 years old. We don't have detailed information to provide more significant digits to those numbers. But we can provide a couple of important details.

First, the young age of the universe is a distinguishing and essential characteristic of YET. No other views hold to a young earth, as the comparison chart in the opening section of this essay showed.

Second, when we correlate the creation of humanity on the sixth day of the earth's existence with the key scriptural data on the age of the earth—the genealogical records—we can arrive at a close estimate of the age of the earth. Travis Freeman's article<sup>21</sup> suggests that there are two types of genealogies, which he calls "regular" genealogies and "chronogenealogies." The latter are important witnesses to the age of the earth

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<sup>21</sup>Travis Freeman, "Do the Genesis 5 and 11 Genealogies Contain Gaps?" in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 283–313.

because they can be stitched together with relative ease to show the distance of time from Adam to the flood. The numbers in the genealogies, Freeman argues, must be there for some reason and must, because of the doctrine of inerrancy, be accurate.<sup>22</sup>

Even if there were proven gaps in the genealogies, this does not greatly affect the argument about the age of the earth. To support an old earth, the gaps would have to be overwhelming compared to information given, and such huge gaps would make the numbers pointless. Since we hold to an inerrant Scripture, we cannot hold to genealogies that would be in such error. Furthermore, even if names are missing from some of the genealogies, that does not mean that the numbers are incorrect. A name may be missing, but the grandfather-grandson time measurement can still be accurate.

### *A Real Adam and Eve*

The Bible teaches a theology of man in which Adam was the special creation of God, the first human being, followed by Eve, and that these two are the parents of all humanity. This theology begins on the sixth day of creation, when God miraculously created a single human male that we call by the proper name Adam. God then created Eve out of Adam to make the second person, and joined Adam to Eve as his new wife. This is an essential element of young earth theology because the doctrines of sin and of the second Adam rest upon it. YET's understanding of the literal Adam distinguishes it from most forms of old earth creationism.

### **Are There Other Options?**

Are there any options other than a literal Adam? To many conservative Christians, it comes as a surprise that some interpreters do not believe that Adam was necessarily a real individual man. In order to harmonize the Bible with modern evolutionary theory, other options have been proposed. Two main options are to connect ancient near eastern cosmologies to the Bible, and to raise science as an authority alongside or above the Bible.

For example, a few years ago, a video of evangelical scholar Tremper Longman caused a stir in this regard. The transcript of what he said follows:

A lot of people believe that Genesis 1–2 sort of insists on the idea that there is one literal historical Adam. And they might go on and say that that literal historical Adam was created by a special act of God, and not a result of an evolutionary process. There are a lot of difficult questions associated with it, but I think you could only insist on the idea that there is

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<sup>22</sup>I do not believe that stating some facts about these genealogies entails a violation of the Scriptural prohibition about contentions over genealogies (1 Tim 1:4 and Titus 3:9). The genealogies to which Paul referred were probably mythical accounts not rooted at all in Scripture.

one historical Adam if you read Genesis 1 in a very highly literalistic way rather than understanding that it is using ancient near eastern concepts to express how God did create the first human beings. I just personally don't think that Genesis 1 and 2 prohibits the idea that there is an evolutionary process...and whether there is sort of one moment when God says, "This is the first human being," and it is one individual, or whether, you know, Adam stands for mankind. After all the Hebrew word *Adam* does mean mankind. That's a different question, and one that, at least, I haven't completely resolved in my own thinking yet. There are still open questions.<sup>23</sup>

Although Longman does not explicitly mention the ancient near eastern concepts to which he refers, some of them would include creation as a temple-abode for God, creation coming out of disorder or chaos, and creation connecting man to God's likeness.<sup>24</sup> I would add that ANE religions were rife with polytheistic ideas.

Evangelical scholarship does recognize that Genesis offers several distinguishing features when compared to the ANE creation accounts. For instance, although the ANE chaos is a mark of disorder or a representation of evil, God makes it into a good creation. Genesis distinguishes God's creation from ANE ideas in distinguishing that man *and* woman were made the image of God, not merely the kings of the nations. At the same time, the concept of ANE ideas being included in Genesis becomes an attack vector against young earth theology.

Conservative biblical theology goes farther than broader evangelical scholarship and demands that there is basically a complete distinction between pagan religious thought and God's acts in creation. The polytheism of the ANE could not be more distinct from the monotheism presented to the Jews in the Torah. The universe is not a suitable temple for the infinite God, for neither earth nor all the heavens can contain him, much less a small building in Jerusalem (1 Kgs 8:27). The Scriptures present the earth as a dwelling place for mankind under his stewardship, not as a dwelling place for God. God did not initially create chaos and have to re-fashion it into something useful. On the young earth accounting of the matter, everything was well under control throughout the creation week and nothing was chaotic.

Another manner in which the doctrine of a literal Adam is attacked is through evolutionary science, particularly through the field of anthropology. I have addressed the impossibility of this under the headings of the young age of the earth and the supernatural method of creation. Young earth creationism leaves no room for evolutionary process, whether naturalistic or punctuated by special creative acts of God. The earth is so young relative to the supposed geologic ages that evolution cannot be the explanation for how humanity was created.

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<sup>23</sup>Wilberforce Fellowship Video of Tremper Longman III, "Is There a Historical Adam?" September 12, 2009. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8Pk1vXL1WE>, accessed April 9, 2016.

<sup>24</sup>These three characteristics are mentioned in the article by Joseph Lam, "The Biblical Creation in its Ancient Near Eastern Context," [https://biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam\\_scholarly\\_essay.pdf](https://biologos.org/uploads/projects/lam_scholarly_essay.pdf), accessed April 9, 2016.

### **Scriptural Support**

A plain reading of Genesis 1–3 along with the rest of the Bible makes clear that God presents Adam as a single individual and that the generic noun “man” became the personal name of the first man. Throughout chapter one and the first portion of chapter two of Genesis, the noun could be explained as a generic (the entire human race). But by the later half of chapter two and into chapter three, it is clear that the text presents Adam as a single individual who did activities consistent with a single person. He named animals, was put to sleep for surgery, named his wife, disobeyed God, hid himself from God, talked with God, wore clothing made by God, procreated with his wife to produce children, had a genealogy, lived to an advanced age, etc. It is most plain that we should understand this man to be the first man created by God and who is the father of the human race.

Moving ahead in the Hebrew Bible, the opening verses of 1 Chronicles assume Adam to be a literal man as the starting point of the genealogy. Any claim that this “point of singularity” must be treated as a special case is met with the response that the special case concerns a special creation by God, not that Adam was evolved or was actually one of many. A similar case can be made regarding the genealogy of Christ in Luke 3:38.

Jesus indicates support for this interpretation in Matthew 19:4 and Mark 10:6. The gospel message in Acts 17:26 opens with a reference to God as creator and mankind sharing solidarity in one progenitor. Paul is clear in Romans 5:12–21 with his analogy between the one sin of one man Adam and the righteous act of another man, Jesus Christ. Adam is mentioned explicitly in Romans 5:14 and 1 Corinthians 15:22. In 1 Corinthians 15:45 he is explicitly called “the first man.” 1 Timothy 2:13–14 rests male church leadership on the creation account and on the literality of Adam. Jude remarks that Enoch was the seventh from Adam, obviously considering the genealogical information as literal truth.

### **Theological Importance**

What is the importance of a single, real Adam? Briefly stated, it is a gospel issue. What I mean is that there is a connection from every human back to Adam, a connection through which each human receives the imputation of Adam’s sin and the inheritance of the sin nature. Without these truths, there is no need for the gospel. Also, without the single, literal pair Adam and Eve, other parts of the Scripture central to the gospel are falsified, most especially Romans 5:12–21. Furthermore, if there were several “Adams” that arose out of a pre-human race through evolution, Christ would have a racial or organic connection with only one of them. He would not be part of the other “races” and thus could not be a savior for them. The whole gospel is gutted in such a scenario.

### *Sin as the Cause of Death*

Somewhat paradoxically, the evolutionary model makes death an important ingredient for life even though it cannot really explain why death came about or why it was necessary to begin with. Without continued death of the unfit and repeated “experiments” that result in death, life cannot arise or continue. Biblical theology teaches an entirely different idea. The creation was initially perfect, but then sin intruded. Sin caused the Fall of mankind and death came as a consequence of sin. Thus death came about only after the Fall. We have to believe this if we are to take Romans 5:12 seriously: “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death [came into the world] through sin.”<sup>25</sup>

One of the purposes of the Genesis text is to explain where death comes from. God through Moses is giving to later generations the precise cause of death. Everyone experiences death of loved ones, but apart from the Genesis history of creation, they may wonder why death happens. The plain explanation of Scripture is that death occurs because of sin.

Perhaps it could be argued that death in Romans 5 refers to spiritual death entering the world in addition to the physical death that already was present. This idea is theologically strange because it puts physical death before spiritual death, the opposite of the biblical order. Only with a spiritual separation from the sustainer of life is physical death possible.

The repeated testimony of Genesis 5 is that Adam and all his descendants died physically after living a certain number of years and having children. Genesis is a book of death as well as a book of beginnings, from Adam in 5:5 to Joseph in 50:26, with better than 60 references to physical death in between. Genesis 3:17–19 proves that the death in view is physical death, because it says that, as a consequence of disobedience, Adam’s body would decompose into the organic matter from which it came (Gen 2:7; see also Ps 103:14 and Eccl 12:7).

### **Theological Importance**

In short, if man does not die as a judgment of God because of sin, there is no need for the gospel. Because of the attribute of God’s holiness, sin causes a separation between the sinner and his God. In consequence, the sinner is cut off from the author and sustainer of life, God himself, which is spiritual death. Finally he experiences physical death after his natural vitality wears away. The gospel is the antidote to this terrible problem.

Besides being textually irrefutable, the gospel makes it axiomatic that death had to come from sin, because otherwise the fix for sin would not necessarily entail a fix for death. But it is clear that the gospel of

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<sup>25</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, 2001.

Christ is the fix for both sin and death, by means of removing the penalty and power of sin. Death is cured by the bodily resurrection of the believer, likewise made possible only in Christ.

### ***Global Catastrophic Flood as a Judgment of God***

The watershed book by Whitcomb and Henry Morris entitled the *Genesis Flood*<sup>26</sup> is rightly credited with starting, or at least re-starting, the young earth creationist movement in the last century. The book presupposed a young earth interpretation, and focused on the literal biblical account of the flood during the life of the patriarch Noah. Ever since its publication, the idea of a global deluge has been a litmus test for young earth creationism.

Although the flood is removed by some centuries from the opening days of creation, it is significant to creationism because it is the primary explanation for many of the geological and topographical features of the earth that we see today. It also explains the vast fossil graveyards and fossil fuels that are used to power much of the world's economy. It explains the elderly appearance of the earth despite its youth.<sup>27</sup> Such features are most commonly interpreted from an evolutionary, uniformitarian perspective. Young earth creationism, together with the global flood, provides a competing and biblically consistent explanation of these features. This is why the flood is essential to YET.

Actually, in addition to being itself an essential part of YET, the interpretation of the flood in Genesis 6:3–9:19 relies upon the same essentials as YET. Our essay started with the essential of a literal hermeneutic. The same is critical to properly understanding the flood. The flood is a direct supernatural judgment of God, just like young earth creation is a direct supernatural act of God. The flood is comprehensive in extent like young earth theology, although it is limited to the globe instead of the entire universe. The duration of the flood was much longer than six days, and at about a year in length it was certain to accomplish its purpose to cleanse the earth of the sin that had overtaken it. The flood account requires a literal Noah with his family to build the Ark and populate the earth after the flood. And as in the previous section, sin was the cause of the flood and its death-dealing blow to humanity.

The large amount of revelation on the flood will prohibit a detailed examination of all the pertinent points here; all of them have been ably covered not only in the *Genesis Flood* but also in more recent articles and books. Even so, a couple of truths bear repetition. First, Genesis emphasizes that the entire earth was covered in the flood (7:17, 7:18, 7:19, 8:9, 9:19). A local flood is a poor explanation for the enormity of

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<sup>26</sup>John C. Whitcomb, Jr. and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and Its Scientific Implications* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1961).

<sup>27</sup>The other main "aging" mechanism of the creation is the curse.

the ark, the migration of the animals, and all the other aspects of the biblical narrative. Second, the genealogical records carry a reminder of the flood (Gen 10:1, 32, 1 Chron 1:4, Luke 3:36). Third, the historicity of Noah is supported by a number of biblical texts.<sup>28</sup> Fourth, the flood was not an accident, but a supernatural divine judgment. The flood “swept them all away” (Matt 24:35–39) and “destroyed them all” (Luke 17:26–27). This truth figures importantly in Peter’s argument that God will once again judge the earth for the sinfulness of its inhabitants.

### *Sufficiency of Scripture*

The final essential aspect of young earth creationism is a truth that was recognized by the Reformers centuries ago, and that is the sufficiency of Scripture alone as the Christian’s rule of faith and practice. When Scripture speaks, it speaks as the ultimate authority. We cannot take just any view of creation that we wish, at least if we consider ourselves to be under the authority of God and his Word. Contemporary advocates of young earth creationism express this truth using phrases such as *biblical authority*, or ideas like *historical science* as over against *observational science*.

Regarding biblical authority, when Scripture speaks to a topic and science contradicts what Scripture teaches, the science must be set aside. As a Ph.D.-trained scientist and engineer, I don’t say that lightly. But the Christian life is not directed by the principle *Sola Scientia*. Nature is not a 67th book of the Bible. Science is not permitted to usurp authority from God’s Word even though some make a mighty effort to use science in this way. Certainly scientific inquiry can complement our knowledge of Scriptural truth. In fact, scientific study is implied in the stewardship mandate that God delivered to Adam and, by extension, to us (Gen 1:26, 28). We are commanded to inquire and investigate the creation and with the knowledge thus gained, practice good stewardship over it. We are to do that precisely *because* God created the universe and we are responsible to manage it with care. Modern science has turned that reality on its head and claimed for itself the title of revelatory source and vehicle.

Observational science, a key support of all the old-earth views, cannot prove an old earth apart from evolutionary presuppositions. But questions of history must be answered using different means, and YET holds that there is only one way to know the details of how creation happened, and that is through biblical revelation.

Perhaps this essential element of YET should stand at the front of the list along with literal hermeneutics. Where it is placed is a secondary matter to the fact that it is on this list. If Scripture is not the Word of God, and if there are sources of information outside of Scripture that “correct” the Bible, then the entirety of Christian unravels.

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<sup>28</sup>Isa 54:9; Ezek 14:14; Matt 24:37–38; Heb 11:7; 1 Pet 3:20; and 2 Pet 2:5.

***Are the Essentials Really Essential?***

Up to this point in this essay, I have argued for the importance of each of the nine elements to young earth theology. The collection of these elements and their cohesion together define young earth theology. If any of these are taken away, the view ceases to be a young-earth view.

From this young earther's perspective, there doesn't seem to be a lot of leeway in the matter. I cannot imagine a young earth creationist view that doesn't rest on literal hermeneutics, that doesn't include supernaturalism, that leaves God out of the creation of some parts of the universe, that takes longer than six days, that dates creation to billions of years ago, that doesn't posit a literal Adam, that chalks up death to something other than sin, that doesn't have a global deluge, or even worse that suggests Scripture is insufficient as our rule of faith and practice.

Some of these characteristics can be affirmed by non-YET views of creation. The fact that they are not then "distinguishing characteristics" does not mean that they cannot be "essential characteristics" for the YET view. For instance, someone could affirm belief in comprehensive creation, or in the method of supernatural direct acts of God without affirming belief in full-orbed young earth creationism.

**YOUNG EARTH THEOLOGY ESSENTIAL  
TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE**

I have examined essential elements of young earth theology. But is young earth theology itself essential to Christian theology as a whole? The essay thus far has given away my view on that question, but I would like to look at the question more specifically, and then critique an approach to theological study that can diminish the importance of whole portions of Christian theology, including YET.

***Is Young Earth Theology Really Essential  
to Christian Theology?***

I have called the subject under discussion *young earth theology* because it interconnects with the full body of Christian doctrine in a way that touches on far more than just creation in the opening days or even years of the universe. It affects many other crucial areas including the gospel proper, hermeneutical method, the trustworthiness of God, and one's theology of God relative to the creation. If we were to fully develop this "essentiality" it would be necessary to consider all the references and allusions to creation in the New Testament. A full treatment is beyond the scope of this article, but a few thoughts are in order.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>For a helpful discussion of the theological ramifications of creation, see the chapter by Morton H. Smith, "The Theological Significance of the Doctrine of Creation," in *Did God Create in Six Days?* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999): 243–65. Smith writes about creation's impact on epistemology, revelation, theology proper, anthropology, hamartiology, redemption, and eschatology.

The many Isaiah texts affirm God's creatorship as an explanation of his lordship. Romans 5:12–21 relies upon the literal Adam and the sin described in the creation account to explain the marvel of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. The apostle Paul began his gospel message in Athens with a reference to the comprehensive creation (Acts 17:24) in which God made "from one man" all mankind (17:26). Jesus referred to the first man and woman in his proclamation of the sanctity of marriage. The great time of tribulation that will come upon the world will be unparalleled from the time God created (Mark 13:19). Creation texts like John 1:1–3 and Colossians 1:16 proclaim the deity of Christ, in part based on his role in the creation. The Colossians text serves another purpose, namely, to highlight the headship and preeminence of Christ over everything in his creation. According to Romans 1:20, the visible creation declares two key invisible attributes of God: his eternal power and deity. This could not be true if the creation sprang into existence by itself or through mostly natural means. Furthermore, Romans 1:20 declares that the unbeliever is without excuse and therefore under the wrath of God revealed in the creation (1:18–20). Ephesians 3:9 indicates that the overarching plan of God for the ages includes his creative work as part of a coherent package from beginning to end. The miracle nature of regeneration is likened to God's creation of light on the first day of the creation week (2 Cor 4:6). Timothy is told that false teachers would forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created as good things to be received with thanks (1 Tim 4:3–4). Peter emphasizes the truth that God's supernatural activity in creation makes it certain that he can and will intervene again in a supernatural way at the final judgment. The doxological focus of the Christian message is highlighted in Revelation 4:11 when the heavenly worshippers announce God's worthiness of worship because he created everything.

I hope that these few references to the New Testament persuade the reader that there are at least substantial *connections* between creation and what any conservative Christian would agree are absolutely essential doctrines. More than that, I hope the texts remind the reader that if creation did not happen as we have described in this essay, the meaning of the key texts above is eviscerated. If a view of creation eliminates one or more of the essentials we have described in the previous section, they do serious damage to the New Testament texts that rest upon those essentials. Creation is not ancillary; it is *foundational* to the gospel, to all other Christian doctrines, and to the right functioning of society. This is not a conclusion that rests on tenuous evidence. It is solidly founded in the Bible.

This is not to say that a conscious or fully-formed belief in young earth theology is required in order to be saved. To say so would be to add a condition to salvation, other than repentant faith, and that is not permitted by Scripture. But it is to say that the believer today who would be fully faithful to God and his revelation will acknowledge that God is the literal, miraculous creator, and that his word is the sole

authority in faith and practice, including in the area of creation.

Young earth theology is part of a conservative biblical systematic theology. A theology may be otherwise conservative, but to the extent that it embraces cosmologies other than young earth creation, it is to that extent liberal in its stance.

### *A Critique of Theological Triage*

Having given reasons why young earth theology is essential to Christian doctrine as a whole, I now turn to a very popular argument that has been used against raising creationism to such a level. In 2004, Al Mohler wrote an influential article calling for theological triage.<sup>30</sup> In that article, Mohler likens the sorting of doctrines according to priority with triage of variously ill patients in a medical emergency room. More serious injuries or illnesses are prioritized for faster response, whereas minor injuries are pushed toward the back of the line. Similarly, a doctrinal prioritization is visible in the historical development of doctrine in church history. Mohler calls for such sorting in today's debates over doctrine and in the arrangement of churches and fellowships.

As a corrective to overreaction, Mohler wrote this in his article:

A structure of theological triage does not imply that Christians may take any biblical truth with less than full seriousness. We are charged to embrace and to teach the comprehensive truthfulness of the Christian faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. There are no insignificant doctrines revealed in the Bible, but there is an essential foundation of truth that undergirds the entire system of biblical truth.<sup>31</sup>

Despite this caution, the idea of triage seems to this author to be less than carefully applied by many church members, missionaries, pastors, and academics. It has been used as a mental tool to set aside important doctrines as if they are practically not very important at all, creationism included.

I believe this happens because the triage analogy fails in several key ways that make it an incomplete explanation of how Christians should handle the Bible's doctrines. Granted every analogy has its shortcomings, but the three shortcomings that I will raise here weigh against the central thesis of Mohler's model.

The first way that the triage model fails is that it presents the Christian life as a non-stop emergency. It is true that triage can be a helpful concept for certain situations. For instance, a person who is unsaved or newly saved does not need first of all to be taught on the essentials of young earth creation. He would more importantly require basic instruction on other doctrines of the faith, with only an introductory reference to God as creator. A church that is having a doctrinal problem needs

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<sup>30</sup>Albert Mohler, *A Call for Theological Triage and Christianity Maturity*, May 20, 2004, <http://www.albertmohler.com/2004/05/20/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity-2/>, accessed April 5, 2016.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, par. 17.

instruction that is tailored to the error that is causing the problem. Certain doctrines would rank higher in the particular situation being addressed. We must note that such situations represent theological illness, like the medical emergency room. Triage is helpful in those kinds of situations. But it is not so helpful in describing how doctrine is to be handled by a healthy Christian or a healthy church. In other words, medical triage is not a helpful analogy for the whole Christian life.

I would prefer to look at the normal, healthy situation according to the analogy of a medical textbook on normal anatomy and physiology. In other words, triage is helpful when there is injury or pathology, but not when striving for wholistic health and describing what the whole Christian life and doctrine should look like. Healthy churches and individuals are not in a constant state of triaging theological problems into a priority order. Rather, they should be living out the healthy Christian life day by day in accordance to their “normal anatomy and physiology.” Christian and church life is not an emergency that requires triage.

In my analogy, normal anatomy is akin to a careful exposition of sound doctrine. Normal physiology is likened to biblical Christian practice. This explanation is advantageous because it highlights that Christians should be striving for good health in all departments. Certainly there are some “sick” Christians. But then there are those who are, by God’s grace, doing well. Their standard is the whole counsel of God, not just the doctrines that receive top priority in Mohler’s scale. Pastors, theologians, and Christian leaders must be called to a higher standard than believing only the doctrines that sort into the highest bucket, or practicing just some of the more important elements of the faith.<sup>32</sup>

The second way that the triage analogy fails is that it does not do justice to the interconnectedness of doctrines in the body of Christian truth. The initial setup of the explanation in Mohler’s article has the reader picture an emergency room with several patients with injuries of varying severity. These patients are independent of each other and, once sorted, can be treated without regard for the other patients.

But this is not true of doctrines. Doctrines are more like organs of an individual person than separate entire persons: they are members put together to form a unitary whole. The church body has many members just like a physical body; and the body of Christian doctrine has many truths carefully woven together into a single coherent whole.

To carry on with the medical analogy, the poor function of the heart can affect the kidneys and vice versa. The poor function of either radically affects the entire body. A small organ such as the thyroid affects many body systems. Its diminutive size belies its necessary and pervasive function. It is true that certain body parts can be amputated—

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<sup>32</sup>To put this into concrete terms, so-called conservative Christians should not be struggling over whether baptism is for believers or not (it is); whether miraculous gifts have ceased (they have); whether creation was recent or not or whether God used macro-evolution; or whether there will be an earthly millennial kingdom with Israel at the head of the nations (there will be). These are clear teachings of Scripture.

feet, hands, legs, arms, gall bladder—without killing the patient, but the resulting quality of life is generally not as good. Even small body parts, when missing, can cause inordinate effects on the function of the body.

With the triage analogy, one has to wonder if certain doctrinal issues, like doctrinal ingrown toenails or slivers, would end up being dismissed entirely from the emergency room. The patient may go home and contract an infection from that little problem that could end up threatening life and limb. We must remember that sin started with a little question about God's Word. It quickly blew up into a world-engulfing inferno.

In the same way, certain doctrines left out or not carefully preserved can have an outsized effect on the church or the individual. The poor treatment of one doctrine can influence other good ones. Such is the case with young earth creationism. When it is damaged, the whole body of doctrine fares poorly.

The third way Mohler's triage model fails is that after a couple of key doctrines concerning theology proper and soteriology are triaged, there is little agreement on what should be included in the first, second, or third levels. Mohler offers an outline for his own sorting function in his article, but he offers little Scriptural justification for the levels he assigns to various doctrines. Some have even suggested that it is sin to assign a doctrine to a higher level than is wont.<sup>33</sup> Where does Scripture specify which doctrines belong to which levels? Other than its general teaching on unity in the church that today is used to eliminate almost any doctrinal precision, it is not easy to find texts that tell us how to do this sorting.

Additionally, no one could undertake to triage doctrines without examining all of them first. Just like a good doctor knows the anatomy and physiology textbook completely, and just like he examines the entire patient to find out everything that is going on, the theologian has to take in the entire Scripture before he can have any confidence that he has gained the wisdom and discretion necessary to start to triage doctrines. This theological process is never fully completed. Doctrinal prioritization thus must be held with caution and humility, for in a few years a reader might discover that creation is more significant than is imagined while reading this article!

In this connection, it is helpful to remember that our Lord enjoined the Pharisees to carry out the weightier requirements of the law without neglecting the lighter ones (Matt 23:23). We might call this an "all of the above" approach to handling theological issues. It is granted that this can be criticized as a kind of *everythingism*, but it is hard for me to categorize some things into a box labeled "neglected." Furthermore, the critic should justify his critique in the face of the fact that *all* Scripture is God-breathed and that the Pharisees should have carried out the

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<sup>33</sup>I have even experienced a case where a missionary left a mission because he perceived the mission's longstanding doctrinal statement wrongly included one doctrine, thus sorting it higher than it should have been.

small matters of the law with fidelity while caring for the “big” ones as well.

To further address the *everythingism* concern, I suggest that instead of emphasizing *priority* or *urgency*, we should take care to maintain the right *weight* or *proportion* in our doctrinal formulation and practice. In so doing, we must care for the entire theological textbook as it describes how we should believe and live. I am advocating for an everyday embrace and practice of the whole body of Christian doctrine in the proportion that it is found in Scripture. This will obviously give some doctrines a larger cut from the cake than others, but we should still eat the whole cake. The size of the various pieces should be proportioned as they are in Scripture. This is why a regular expositional diet of Scripture is the best, as it will treat all the issues that Scripture does.

The proportionality of which I speak is not necessarily a proportionality of Scriptural frequency, for then certain doctrines such as the Trinity would be almost nonexistent in our theological dialog. Still, the weight of a doctrine certainly can be affected by frequency of mention. For instance, phrases like “I am the Lord who created” by their very frequency call the reader to take note. Other doctrines must be weighted by their effect on other truths that logically rest upon them, or by how their own tentacles reach through Scripture’s perfect web of theological truth. Narrative incidents that are disconnected from the larger network of theological truth have a proportionally lower weight (e.g., 1 Chron 11:22). Creation, sin, the doctrines of God and Christ, justification, the church, and eschatological renewal among others have much higher weight. None should be left behind.

If we apply this idea of doctrinal proportionality in the area of young earth theology, we will see that although the young earth doctrine concerns a small fraction of world history a long time ago, it is interconnected with so many other portions of Scripture and biblical doctrines that it has a proportionally higher weight than chronology alone would indicate. On it rests everything in world history and doctrine. Since God made us, he is to be regarded with the ultimate respect that a human being can offer. Young earth theology is situated as a key element to the most central of Christian truths.

## CONCLUSION

Is young earth creationism a man-made doctrine? We answer with a resounding no! God has given us the innate ability to collect, organize, and summarize information in all areas of life, including the Scripture. Young earth theology is the result of such activity concerning Scripture’s teaching on the beginning of the world from an originalist perspective. When we carefully apply such a method of study to the Bible’s doctrine of creation, we find that there are certain aspects of the doctrine that percolate to the top. These are the defining and organizing concepts that describe young earth theology that we have outlined in this essay.

Young Earth Theology is the area of systematic theology out of which grow all the other areas of theology. The existence of the Triune God in contradistinction to that of his creation is found in young earth theology. The origin and constitution of man is found there. The origin of sin is found there. The need for the gospel originates there. The origin of angels is there. Important principles of bibliology, namely literal hermeneutics and the sufficiency of Scripture, are at issue there. And eschatology is wrapped up in the initial creation, for the first utopia was ruined and will be replaced with a second, even better one. God created the first heavens and earth. We believe he will create the second set with the same miraculous power and literalness as he did the first. Without YET, Christianity is not really Christianity, for if God did not create the world supernaturally as he described in the Bible, our faith is futile.

Could God have created the world in a longer or shorter time? Could he have used more or less direct means? While we can extend a limited affirmation to such hypotheticals,<sup>34</sup> what is important is this: what did God *say* that he did? All Scripture that concerns creation is breathed out by God. It is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. By itself it is not the complete equipment that the man of God requires to live a life of good works, but it is most certainly an important part of it.

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<sup>34</sup>We cannot affirm that God could have used evolution, because then he would have used death to accomplish creation, and that is not “very good” nor just, nor does it harmonize with Romans 5:12. The evolution-hypothetical is impossible because it is not in agreement with God’s nature nor with other portions of his Word.