

Millions and Billions of Years?
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Summer 2008

The notion of *millions* and *billions* of years that we hear so ubiquitously bantered around is actually nothing more than an intellectual construct; an idea none-the-less, upon which an entire cultural mythology has been raised. In order to come to grips with this fundamental reality it is important to understand where and how the notion of eons of time originated in our western mindset.

It turns out that until the seventeenth century, the age of the earth (the universe; all things) was on the order of 5,500 to 6,000 years as calculated from the Scripture by professor John Lightfoot and archbishop James Ussher. However, as some individuals began to react theo-phobically to certain biblical teachings dealing especially with God's wrath and judgment (i.e., the Genesis Flood) they began to view earth geology and imbedded fossils in a different light. As the Flood account was considered increasingly mythological in nature, fantastical ideas of how the earth was formed, and how earth creatures died and became extinct were generated. One of the early proponents of this thinking was Dr. Erasmus Darwin, grandfather to Charles, the progenitor of later evolutionary thinking. The elder Darwin's idea was that the earth must be on the order of several millions of years old based on his preconceived perceptions.

By the mid nineteenth century John Phillips and Thomas Huxley postulated ages on the order of 100 million years; however T. L. Wallace thought the earth no older than 28,000,000 years. Sir Archibald Geikie jumped the age figure to 680 million years, but Jacob Johannes Sederholm and Lord Kelvin (Thomson) placed the age at around forty million at the turn of the century, with John Joly claiming again 100 million in the year 1899.

During the last century (20th) the numbers began to escalate dramatically. B. B. Boltwood (1907) and Joseph Barrell (1917) gave ages of more than a billion and a half, while Arthur Homes (1947) suggested three billion years. Finally, it was left to C.C. Patterson (1956) and Tilton and Steiger (1960) to come up with the figure we are left with today: 4.5 to 4.7 billion years of earth history!

So where did these ideas come from? Originally (E. Darwin, Huxley, Kelvin, et.al) the ideas were simply that – ideas; conjectures; suppositions; guesses. However, with the advent of scientific investigation (always based on certain assumptions, and in this case “Old Earth” is assumed) and the discovery of radio-carbon dating methods, eons of time conceptions became the hallmark of the new discipline of “historical” science.

This then brings us to look at assumptions and the role they play in scientific investigation. Oft times it is asserted that things are old (really old!) based on some or other dating method that has concrete scientific validity. Indeed, most individuals making such assertions are themselves not even aware of the level of assumptions upon which their “findings” rest. A case in point is radio-carbon dating.

Basic to the validity of mineral dating is the assumption that the dated material must be a closed system – nothing inside the system must have escaped and nothing outside must have crept in. In other words, it must have always remained a closed system. In the natural world there is no such thing as a truly closed system. The second basic assumption underlying the validity of element dating is that the rate of change (i.e., uranium decaying into lead) within the system must always have been the same. But nature offers no experience with, or example of, a constant process rate. Neither of these assumptions are supported either logically or scientifically (Morris, 1973d, p83).

Carbon 14 dating which is highly touted in the scientific community to supply near-absolute dates for events within the past 30 or 40 thousand years is based on seven germane assumptions: (1) The carbon 14 concentration in the carbon dioxide cycle is constant; (2) the cosmic ray flux has been essentially constant – at least on a scale of centuries; (3) the rate of decay of the carbon 14 atoms must have been constant; (4) dead organic matter must not later be altered with respect to its carbon content by any biologic or other activity; (5) the carbon dioxide content of the ocean and atmosphere must have been constant through time; (6) the huge reservoir of oceanic carbon could not have changed in size during the period of applicability of the method; (7) the rate of formation and the rate of decay of radiocarbon atoms has been in equilibrium throughout the period of applicability (Whitcomb and Morris, 1961/1990, pp371-372).

Beyond that, is it reasonable to expect that each of these assumptions have been controlled for over time, in order to meet the rigors of scientific investigation (cf., Taylor, 1991, ch.11 & 12, esp. pp303-305, and 317)? Taylor (1991) concludes his discussion on radiometric dating by citing the frustration expressed within the radio-carbon fraternity itself:

The radiocarbon method is still not capable of yielding accurate and reliable results. There are gross discrepancies, the chronology is *uneven* and *relative*, and the accepted dates are actually *selected* dates. "The whole blessed thing is nothing but 13th-century alchemy, and it all depends upon which funny paper you read."

Taylor notes that "this statement, by a worker in the field, sums up the truth of the matter – a far cry from the textbook claims of the 'consistency of radiocarbon dates'" (321).

Each of the current methods of indirect dating such as radioactive decay of uranium into lead, or of radiocarbon into Nitrogen 14, or of potassium into argon, in addition to basic assumptions, are based on the spurious and ill-advised premise of Uniformitarianism. This philosophy of earth science was codified and popularized by Charles Lyell in the 19th century as the foundation upon which geological dating was to later rest. Enshrined in the notion that "The Present is Key to the Past," Uniformitarianism is nothing more than observation based on an assumption of an old earth time-frame.

This idea by Lyell and later C. Darwin were, and became, a direct attack on the Bible's record of things as they happened, and subsequently a number of theologians felt obliged to enter the battle and defend God and His Word. In retrospect, this was a grievous mistake since by the time Darwin published his treatise (1859) most Bible teachers — especially those in academia — had been compromised in their own faith concerning the veracity of Scripture. History shows that some highly regarded Bible scholars entered the fray with a dull Sword, a Shield of clay, and a Belt enamored of idealistic speculation (cf., Ephesians 6).

Of the contemporary American theologians most influenced by this trend were Princeton's Charles Hodge and B. B. Warfield (circa 1820 - 1920). Ironically, these two defenders of biblical inerrancy did arguably more than any others to compromise the historicity of the Bible, accomplishing this largely through dubious attacks on the Scriptural record of the genealogy of Jesus. The teachings of Hodge and Warfield, in turn, generated further scholarship that attempted to show how one could believe in Messiah (Christ) and His Word devoid of a firm historical context. In this way it was felt that one could be a Bible-believing Christian, and at the same time retain intellectual standing in the academic community.

Indeed, holding to the view that the biblical genealogies/chronologies are relatively insignificant, one could even be a fundamentalist/evangelical Christian without succumbing to charges of being ignorant, old fashioned, intolerant, and worst of all, *unscientific!* For by the early twentieth century Uniformitarian Naturalism (i.e., Evolution) had captured and claimed science as its own. Here Warfield forcefully attacks the linear chronogenealogical record of the Old Testament directly, and in the process lays a foundation for subsequent theistic evolution models:

[N]othing can be clearer than that it is precarious in the highest degree to draw chronological inferences from genealogical tables.... But for the whole space of time before Abraham, we are dependent entirely on inferences drawn from the genealogies recorded in the fifth and eleventh chapters of Genesis. *And if the Scriptural genealogies supply no solid basis for chronological inferences*, it is clear that we are left without Scriptural data for forming an estimate of the duration of these ages. *For aught we know they may have been an immense length...* In particular, it is clear that the genealogical purposes for which the genealogies were given, *did not require a complete record* of all the generations through which the descent of the persons to whom they are assigned runs; but only an adequate indication of the particular line through which the descent in question comes. Accordingly it is found on examination that *the genealogies of Scripture are freely compressed for all sorts of purposes*; and that it can seldom be confidently affirmed that they contain a complete record of the whole series of generations, while it is often obvious that *a very large number are omitted*. There is no reason inherent in the nature of the Scriptural genealogies why a genealogy of *ten recorded links*, as each of those in Genesis v. and xi. is, *may not represent an actual descent of a hundred or a thousand or ten thousand links.* (*Biblical and Theological Studies*, pp.240-241, emphasis added)

The situation today — at the dawning of the new millennium — is such that most Bible teachers in our colleges and seminaries, as well as most pastors of local congregations having been educated in these institutions, hold, as Warfield did, to a compromise of the Scripture, manifest initially in assertions of gaps in the genealogies/chronologies, then in a belief in a local Genesis flood, then any number of explanations to compromise the six days of Creation, then to explanations of miracles as natural phenomena....

To show how this corrupting mythology has crept into even the best of the Church body today we can look at the work of Philip Yancey. Yancey is an author whom I identify with, and one whom I have an immense respect

for; someone whose several books have helped me tremendously in my own faith walk. Yet even this brother in the Lord makes a spurious reference to time past. In *Prayer: Does It Make Any Difference?* he shares this view:

Modern physics helps us conceive of the relative nature of time. According to Einstein's theory of relativity, a person traveling at the speed of light would see the entire history of the universe pass by in a single instant. On the other hand, a God who encompasses the entire universe can "view" what happens on earth and what happened fifteen thousand or billion years ago simultaneously (a word that doesn't really apply to a timeless God). We see the stars as they used to be, receiving light on Earth that they generated millions of years ago. . . . (p.49, footnote)

Here Yancey shows a misunderstanding of "the relative nature of time." His conception of time allows for billions of years, an idea completely foreign to the entirety of the Bible. According to the Scripture, *time* was created at *the* Beginning (of time itself), 6,000 years ago as chronicled in the chrono-genealogical history given in the Messianic lineages. There is no such concept as billions of years within the Scripture. To the extent that Jesus might have been invited to address such a notion (and there is no record that He ever did), it seems clear that He would have attributed such false thinking to the paganism found largely in Eastern mythology.

We have grown to be so overwhelmed with "millions and billions" that evolutionary-minded movements (in geology, in biology, in astronomy) have become increasingly emboldened to throw out ludicrous numbers which our numbed brains and often untrained critical thinking skills are ill-prepared to analyze. Instead, they become incorporated into our mind-set and subsequently affect our view of history and the world.

We must always remember that the Bible knows nothing of a "pre-history," of "eons of time," of "long, long ago in a far away land," of "Once Upon a Time," "millions and billions of years ago," etc. To hear/read these terms should be a signal to us that the discussion at hand is now entering the realm of science *fiction*.

The tragedy here is the realization that if one dismisses the notion of evolution as a mythology of secular culture (which most Christians do), then there is no need whatsoever to hold to a view of millions and billions of years (the only reason to think millions and billions of years is if one feels the need to believe in the notion of evolution!). So, why do we do it?

A case to consider is that of Dr. Mary Schweitzer who recently had the distinction of finding soft tissue in dinosaur bones said to be 68 million years old: "Even after 68 million years, these dinosaur remains look surprisingly fresh under Schweitzer's microscope. A tiny blob of stretchy brown matter, soft tissue from inside the leg bone, suggests the specimen had not completely decomposed."

This finding amazed Schweitzer's science colleagues, who had never imagined that even a trace of still-soft dinosaur tissue could survive. "After all, as any textbook will tell you, when an animal dies, soft tissues such as blood vessels, muscle and skin decay and disappear over time, while hard tissues like bone may gradually acquire minerals from the environment and become fossils." By her discovery, she ". . . has upended the conventional wisdom by showing that some rock-hard fossils tens of millions of years old may have remnants of soft tissues hidden away in their interiors."

Dr. Schweitzer is among an influential group of science practitioners who hold evolution to be true, and subscribe to a timeline accounting for millions and billions of years. But in the midst of the discussion over her unprecedented find, she has to wonder: "I had one reviewer tell me he didn't care what the data said, he knew that what I was finding wasn't possible. I wrote back and said, 'Well, what data would convince you?' And he said, 'None.'"

Such a dogmatic admission should be enough to warn Schweitzer that something more profound is going on here. This experience should show her that in the minds of some very intelligent and dedicated people, the interpretation of data has become more important than the evidence itself!

Unfortunately even Schweitzer, who describes herself as a "complete and total Christian," falls under the spell of eons-of-time dogmatism. If she has indeed "upended conventional wisdom," why is "tens of millions of years old" still part of the discussion?

SCHWEITZER: "It got me real curious as to exceptional preservation. If particles of that one dinosaur were able to hang around for 65 million years, maybe the textbooks were wrong about fossilization."

QUESTION: Why not "real curious" about Uniformitarian assumptions pertaining to the age of things? Perhaps the textbooks are wrong about their interpretation of Geological History?

(“Schweitzer’s work is showing us we really don’t understand decay. There’s a lot of really basic stuff in nature that people just make assumptions about.”)

SCHWEITZER: “Geologists have established that the Hell Creek Formation, where *B. rex* was found, is 68 million years old, and so are the bones buried in it.”

COMMENT: Even though Schweitzer professes to be a Christian, for her, “science and religion represent two different ways of looking at the world; invoking the hand of God to explain natural phenomena breaks the rules of science. After all, what God asks is faith, not evidence.”

SCHWEITZER: “If you have all this evidence and proof positive that God exists, you don’t need faith. I think he kind of designed it so that we’d never be able to prove his existence. And I think that’s really cool.”

QUESTION: Are there events that are recorded in the historical accounts (in the Bible) that prove the existence of God?

(“By definition, there is a lot that scientists don’t know, because the whole point of science is to explore the unknown. By being clear that scientists haven’t explained everything, Schweitzer leaves room for other explanations. ‘I think that we’re always wise to leave certain doors open,’ she says.”)

OBSERVATION: Do you think that leaving the door open with regards to Uniformitarian time-scales would be a part of her interest?

(Reference: www.smithsonianmagazine.com/issues/2006/may/dinosaur.php?page=1)

For many people, their minds having been for so long exposed to the *Millions and Billions Mantra* that they are conditioned to think in these terms, they are no longer able to consider thoughts beyond this mind-frame. For them, to reflect on any alternative view to the Origins/Age question produces an intense cognitive dissonance which is intolerable to their mental state. And in the case of Dr. Mary Schweitzer, for her to question the age assumptions of Uniformitarianism would quite likely end her career!

The notion of millions and billions of years is beyond the reality of the historical context, and actually falls under another strange idea, that of *pre-history*. In other words, *pre-* the ability to know and chronicle sequential facts of the past, necessitating the fabrication and invention of another *story* involving events which are purported to have happened. Since there is no way to intellectually actualize events within this story, it becomes necessary to develop a “science” for the purpose of convincing an unwary public that a certain expertise exists which can unequivocally and authoritatively relate the story of the beginning of things, the universe, and the earth.

Pre-historical accounts have become very popular in print, broadcast media, and home and screen entertainment, first in science fiction renditions, and now as fact-bearing within the science culture. Where previously “Once Upon A Time” themes were recognized as fairy tales, now “Eons of time,” and “millions and billions of years ago” are forced upon as in a matter-of-fact fashion. It takes a willing skepticism along with a fundamental faith in the Scriptural chronological accounts to break through the heavy smog!