

## THE DOCTRINE OF APPARENT AGE

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On occasion, the comment is overheard, “But the Earth **looks so old.**” There are at least two responses that might be made to such a statement. First, one might ask: “Compared to what; what does a **young** Earth look like?” Who among us has anything with which to compare? Second, we should not be surprised if certain methods in science appear to support the idea of an ancient Earth. Why? The answer lies in what has been called the “doctrine of apparent age” (also known as the “doctrine of mature creation”).

This concept states that when God made “heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that in them is” (Exodus 20:11), they were made perfect, complete, and ready for habitation by mankind and the multiple forms of plant and animal life. God did not create **immature** forms (although He certainly could have done so, had He desired), but **mature** ones. Rather than creating an acorn, for example, He created an oak. Rather than creating an egg, He created a chicken. Rather than creating Adam and Eve as infants or young children, He created them as post-pubescent beings. We know this to be true because one of the commands God gave each living thing shortly after its creation was that it should reproduce “after its kind.” This very command, in fact, was given to Adam and Eve while they still were in the Garden of Eden, prior to their sin and expulsion.

How old were Adam and Eve two seconds after their creation? **They were two seconds old.** How old were the plants and animals two seconds after their creation? **They were two seconds old.** But how old all these two-seconds-old people, plants, and animals **look** like they were? It is important to realize that the initial creation had **two** ages—a **literal** age, and an **apparent** age. It **literally** may have been just one day old, two days old, three days old, and so on. But it **appeared** to be much older.

The biblical record provides additional information concerning the accuracy of the doctrine of apparent age. In Genesis 1:14, God told Moses that the heavenly bodies (e.g., Sun, Moon, stars) were to be “for signs and for seasons, for days and for years.” In order for them to be useful to man for the designation of signs, seasons, days, and years, those bodies **must have been visible.** Thus, when God created them He made their light already visible from Earth. The psalmist exclaimed: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (19:1). There was, therefore, a specific **purpose** behind God’s mature creation.

First, the Earth was prepared in a mature state so that man would find it suitable for his habitation. Christ specifically stated that man and woman had been on the Earth “since the beginning of the creation” (Matthew 19:4; Mark 10:6). Thus, it was necessary that “from the beginning” the Earth be “finished.” Second, once man found himself in such a home (called “very good”—denoting complete perfection—in Genesis 1:31), it was only right to give honor and glory to the Creator Who designed and built such a magnificent edifice. This explains why Paul, in Romans 1:20ff., suggested that even God’s “everlasting power and divinity” had been seen by mankind “from the creation of the world,” and why those who refused to honor God would be “without excuse.”

Even the miracles of the Bible reflect God’s frequent use of the principle we call “apparent age.” During Christ’s first miracle, He transformed water into wine (John 2). [In the New Testament, the Greek term for wine, *oinos*, denotes both alcoholic and non-alcoholic grape-juice beverages, prohibiting the view that the wine spoken of in John 2 necessarily was alcoholic.] For mere mortals to pro-

duce wine (alcoholic or not) requires a lengthy process employing soil, water, grapes, sunshine, etc. Yet Jesus accomplished this task in a matter of minutes, producing what the governor of the wedding feast termed not just wine but “good wine” (John 2:10). The miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (Matthew 14:13-21) also provides evidence regarding the principle of apparent age. The young boy present on that occasion had but a few loaves and fishes, yet Christ “multiplied” them and fed over 5,000 men alone.

The moment God created matter, would it not have appeared to be “mature”—i.e., as if it already had existed? If God had decided to create Adam as a baby, how could He have produced a baby that did not **look** like it had gone through a 9-month gestation period? If He created an acorn, how could He have created an acorn that did not **look** like it had fallen from a mighty oak? Did God create the Earth “mature”? Yes, He did. How could He have done otherwise?

Frank Marsh, while serving as a professor of biology at Andrews University, was a respected scientist who wrote frequently on matters relating to creation and evolution. In his book, *Life, Man, and Time*, he addressed the subject of apparent age.

When Adam came from the hand of the Creator on Friday he had every appearance of being a mature man at least in his twenties, a man of marriageable age. Fruit-bearing trees appeared to be at least several years old. The great aquatic animals playing in the waters appeared to be sixty to one hundred years old. And the smoothed landscape with its rounded mountains and hills, and broad rivers, and with a vegetated layer of fertile soil over all land areas, from a uniformitarian viewpoint, appeared to be millions of years old. Nevertheless, no object in this landscape was more than three solar days old. Because this landscape had been specially created with an **appearance of age**, even the most careful application by Adam of his physical senses and his reasonable mind to the problem of age of the landscape could only lead to the wrong conclusion. It is of great importance to recognize here that Adam could not carry on an open-minded study of the age of the landscape and necessarily arrive at the truth about it. In order to please God and know the truth about natural things, he had to place special revelation above natural revelation....

From past events we learn that **even regarding points in natural science, special revelation must supersede natural revelation if the truth is to be known** on those points. With regard to duration since Creation Week, the Bible tells us that only a few thousand years have elapsed. To the Bible believer this means that the various timeclocks which suggest greater ages than this are not to be depended upon regardless of how coercive or compulsive the evidence may appear to be. Because of the manner of the earth’s origin, Adam could not accept the data furnished by natural processes when it came to the age of the landscape.

In like manner the Bible believer today who walks the same earth Adam walked, except for an unnatural destruction and redeposition of its surface since Creation, depends upon Bible chronology to reveal the true age of the fossil-bearing strata at the earth’s surface. This record informs us that duration since life first appeared on this earth is to be counted, not in hundreds of millions but rather in a few thousands of years. In this day of jumbled talk of millions of years in this earth’s history, the Bible believer faces no dilemma. His philosophy may not be popular but it is satisfyingly correct. Why? Because God in His providence has supplied in man’s Guidebook the very information on this planet that he needs in this confused age (1967, pp. 59,73, first emp. in orig., last emp. added).

One of Dr. Marsh’s articles on this subject, which appeared in the *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, was titled “On Creation with an Appearance of Age.” Although the following quotation from

that article is somewhat lengthy, I consider its inclusion here essential because it is, in my estimation, a one-of-a-kind, timeless masterpiece due to the simple-yet-brilliant manner in which it explains the importance of a proper understanding of the scriptural principle known as the doctrine of apparent age.

To get at the facts let us assume that some time soon after Adam's creation on Day Six (Gen. 1:27, NASB), the Creator said to him, "Adam, look about you. There is not an object in this landscape that is more than three days (evenings and mornings; 24-hour periods) old."

Assume that Adam replied, "Lord you have given me this wonderful mind and these marvelous physical senses. Now suppose I study this matter open-mindedly and learn if your statement is correct."

Assume that Adam began his careful study of age by examining his own body. If he were to hypothesize that he had become mature (of marriageable age, Gen. 1:27) by normal (to us) growth processes, then he could reasonably conclude that he had lived at least twenty-five years. If his basic assumptions were correct, then by the agreement of proof from several ways of determining age, such as anatomical structure, physiological activity, and psychological maturity, he would "**know**" that he was more than three days old.

Assume that Adam continued his study and observed mature fruit trees (Gen. 1:12) which apparently were several years old. He observed great water animals (Gen. 1:21) possibly apparently sixty years old. He observed mountains (Gen. 7:19) and spreading plains with rivers (Gen. 2:10-14), erosion plains which some think require millions of years to form. If he had examined trees, I believe he would have found annual rings, and that if he had dated minerals radioactively it is possible that apparent ages of even millions of years would have been found.

After all this careful open-minded study of the Edenic world, Adam could have returned to the Creator and with great sincerity said, "Lord, I'm sorry to have to say this, but this landscape is much older than you think!"

Why could Adam not believe what he thought he saw on the subject of age of the landscape? The answer stands clearly revealed in special revelation (the Bible). Our earth was created, along with the living forms with which it was furnished, with an **appearance of age**....

How can we know the natural truth about the age of our earth? Adam could learn that truth only by special revelation. Today our students of earth science are studying an earth which came into being **unnaturally** with an **appearance of age**. Some sixteen centuries after that creation, the surface of this earth was utterly destroyed (more here and less over there) by the unnatural activities of Noah's "Flood." Today it is fair to ask, How is it possible now to determine **in natural ways** the age of a surface which was both created and destroyed in **unnatural** ways? I submit the thesis that until man accepts the necessity of special revelation regarding our natural world, he will never know the truth about the age of our earth or the origin of life upon it (1978, 14[4]:187-188, emp. and parenthetical items in orig.).

Dr. Marsh's assessment is as accurate an assessment of this matter as I have ever seen, and I believe that we who are Bible believers are indebted to him for having reminded us of the importance of God's special revelation as presented and preserved in His Word—even (especially!) in matters like the age of the Earth that sometimes are considered scientifically sacrosanct.

However, in discussions regarding the doctrine of apparent age, we always must be careful not to abuse the concept. Some have inquired, for example, whether God placed fossils (or, for that matter, fossil fuels) within the Earth simply in order to make it "appear" ancient. This idea should be rejected for several reasons. First, such a suggestion implies that the formation of fossils and/or fossil fuels is an inherently slow, uniformitarian-type process—which it most certainly is not (see, for example, Major, 1996). Second, certain geological/paleontological phenomena provide some of the best examples available of a global, non-uniformitarian catastrophe (i.e., the Genesis Flood). When the doctrine of apparent age is invoked in an inappropriate manner, it robs mankind of powerful testimony to the workings of the Creator and weakens the similarly powerful testimony of His Word regarding what He did and how He did it. Third, the idea that the Creator may have "planted" such things as fossils and fossil fuels in the Earth is an indictment of the nature and character of God, Who never would try to "trick" humans in such a way. Nor would He ever lie (Titus 1:2; Hebrews 6:18). If we observe things in the Earth like fossils or fossil fuels, we naturally (and rightly) as-

sume that these are the results of **real** plants and/or animals that actually lived. It will not do for us to say, "God just put them there," for such a suggestion makes God deceptive, which He is not.

Others have suggested that if God created things that appear older than they really are, that is deceptive on the face of it. Thus, by definition the doctrine of apparent age makes God out to be a liar and should be rejected on that count alone. However, such an accusation overlooks the fact that **God plainly told us what He did!** Anyone who takes the time to read Genesis 1-2 can see within those chapters God's methodology. In fact, He made certain to tell us exactly how the Earth and its inhabitants came into existence. Perhaps—just perhaps—if God had not told us in such numbingly exact terms what He did, or if He had not been as specific as He was, **then** someone might be able to accuse Him of deception or trickery. But no one can accuse God (justifiably) of such despicable behavior because His Word adequately explains His actions. He did not hide the facts from us but, quite the contrary, went to great lengths to reveal them.

Some have suggested that one of the most difficult questions relating to the doctrine of apparent age has to do with the starlight that can be seen by those of us here on the Earth. Normally, the argument goes something like this. We understand today that light travels at a speed slightly in excess of 186,000 miles per second. [The time it takes light to travel one year is referred to as a light-year.] Yet we are able to see light from stars that are multiplied millions of light-years away. How can this be if the Earth is as young as many creationists suggest—with an age measured in thousands of years rather than billions? A partial answer to this question, of course, is that God created the light from heavenly bodies already en route and visible to the Earth's inhabitants (as a part of His mature creation). Without such light, the night sky would lack patterns necessary to serve as signs, seasons, days, and years specified so clearly in Genesis 1:14, and mankind would have been unable to see God's "glory and handiwork" (Psalm 19:1).

Other issues may be involved as well, a treatment of which (e.g., the possibility that the speed of light has diminished over time, etc.) has been provided by various writers (see: Norman and Setterfield, 1987; Major, 1987, 7:5-7; *Ex Nihilo*, 1984, 6[4]:46; Humphreys, 1994). The reader who is interested in an examination of these matters is referred to these sources (and others that they may recommend). Such a discussion is beyond the purview of this article.

The doctrine of apparent age not only explains many of the alleged evidences for an ancient Earth, but also is entirely scriptural in its foundations. It helps answer many of the questions relating to for their concept of a planet of great antiquity—which, in reality, is one of relative youth.

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