

THE FORMATION OF COAL— TWO VIEWS CONSIDERED

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Buried within the bosom of the Earth are billions of tons of “bottled sunshine”—more commonly known as coal. How did it come to be there? And how much time was involved in its deposition? There are two general theories regarding the formation of coal. First, there is the **uniformitarian** view, which asserts that coal is the result of “the slow accumulation, through long ages, of the leaves, seeds, stems, and trunks of this vegetation, now hardened and pressed down into a fraction of its original bulk by the pressure of rocks above.” It is alleged that in vast swampy areas, “this process was often repeated again and again, through immense periods of time” (see *Richards Topical Encyclopedia*, 1962, 3:28). This is the theory favored by most evolutionists. Accordingly, the assumption that the Earth’s coal deposits required millions of years to accumulate frequently is advanced as “proof” that the Earth is billions of years old. The claim therefore is made that the Bible, which contains numerous indications that both the Earth and mankind are relatively young, must be inaccurate—or else is simply a “poetic” account.

There is, however, another view of how and when coal was formed. It might be called the **cataclysmic** view, which associates the formation of Earth’s coal beds with the Great Flood of Genesis 6-8. The cataclysmic concept contends that the Noahic deluge accounts for the transportation and sudden burial of the vast amounts of vegetation required for the various coal seams found in the Earth today. Interestingly, when Peter affirmed that the world of Noah’s day “overflowed” with water (2 Peter 3:6), he used the Greek term *katakluzo*, from whence derives our word cataclysm. The word is composed of *kata*, “down” and *kluzo*, “to wash.” This view argues as follows:

The vegetation that produced the coal beds was swept by the waters of the Deluge into recesses or quiet bays, and there covered by currents that washed mud, sand, or calcareous material in over it from perhaps the opposite direction. The great number of successive seams of coal one above another, alternating with the same kind of sandstone, shale, or limestone,

as the case may be, show that there must have been an alternation of currents, such as would be produced by **successive tides**, with their ebbs and floods (Price, p. 214).

The question is, therefore, which of these two views best conforms to the available data? First of all, those who believe in the divine origin of the Bible will give its testimony foremost consideration. God’s **written revelation**, if it touches on a subject, will, from the very nature of the case, be superior to speculative interpretations of the geological record. And the fact of the matter is, the Bible indicates that man’s existence can be measured only in terms of several thousand years (as evinced by Christ’s genealogical record, which extends back to Adam—Luke 3:23ff.; see also Jackson 1978a). Further, Scripture teaches that human existence extends back to the beginning of the creation (Mark 10:6; Romans 1:20; see Jackson, 1978b). Thus, the age of the Earth can be only several thousand years—not billions of years! Now, if there are two views of the formation of coal—one which contradicts biblical chronology, and one which can be harmonized with biblical chronology—which one should the Christian accept?

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to the above, however, there are other geophysical evidences that ought to lead one to reject the evolutionary uniformitarian theory of coal formation. A brief summary of some of them is as follows.

(1) **Coal not being formed today**—If the uniformitarian principle, (“the present is the key to the past”) of coal origin were true, we would expect to find areas where coal is undergoing various stages of being formed today. This, however, is not the case. Whitcomb and Morris observe: “All known coal beds, therefore, seem to have been formed in the past and are not continuing to be formed in the present, as the principle of uniformity could reasonably be expected to imply” (1961, p. 164).

(2) No evolutionary changes in coal record—

If coal were formed over an era of millions of years, the fossilized plant life it contains should reveal a series of evolutionary changes. Yet, as professor Harold Clark noted: “In the Coal Period, which was supposed to have lasted millions of years and to have submerged over and over again, the vegetation remained the same. It was practically identical over the world, and evolutionary assumptions do not seem to be very consistent with the facts” (1967, p. 85).

(3) Polystrate tree trunks—There are numerous examples of tree trunks extending through several successive beds of coal, with their alternating layers of sandstone or shale. This precludes the notion that these beds formed over vast ages of time. N.A. Rupke stated: “A special class of polystrate stems is constituted by stumps which extend up through a coal seam, together with some layers of sandstone and sandy slate, or even through two or more of these coal seams and all interbedded strata.” He thus concluded that “the coal beds were rapidly deposited just as well as the above-mentioned inorganic sequences” (as quoted in Lammerts, 1976, p. 154).

(4) Preservation of plant fossils—In all of the great coal deposits “there are found the leaves and tissues of plants so exquisitely preserved that it is absurd to think of the material lying for centuries rotting in a peat bog or swamp, as the common theory involves” (Price, p. 215).

(5) Relatively recent formation of coal—A number of discoveries indicate that coal has been formed within the era of human history. Near Glasgow, Scotland, for example, under a mass of boulders, an iron, man-made instrument was discovered imbedded in a natural seam of coal seven feet under the surface (*Bible-Science Newsletter*, July 15, 1970). One evolutionist admitted: “...in a vein of coal in England there once were found a number of stone hammers and picks that must have belonged to men way back in the Stone Age of human history” (*Richards Topical Encyclopedia*, 9:435). “Near Freiburg, Germany, a certain wooden railroad bridge was being replaced with steel. The wooden piles which had supported the weight were found to have turned partially into coal. This proves that coal can form within the short hundred year span of the railroad era” (Daly, 1972, p. 138). Finally, it has been experimentally demonstrated in recent years that wood or other cellulose-type material, under the proper conditions of pressure and heat, can be converted into coal or coal-like products in a matter of **hours**. “These experiments conclusively demonstrate that the formation of coal and oil did not necessarily require millions of years or even thousands of years to form...” (Gish, 1974, p. 16).

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