

Lesson 17

The Age of the Earth

The Bible records the true history of mankind and the universe.

Overview

Lesson Focus

The genealogies in the Bible provide a clear date for creation, showing that God created about 6,000 years ago. Some people use a process called radiometric dating to determine that the earth is billions of years old. This method is not correct, and it goes against God's Word.

Key Passage

Genesis 5:1–5, 5:32, 11:10, 11:26

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Identify the source of the biblical age of the earth.
- Identify the source of the secular age of the earth.

Memory Verse

Psalm 8:5–6 Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

So, now that you've read the key passages for this lesson, is your head spinning? We often rush through the genealogies of the Bible, laughing at our inability to pronounce the difficult names. But this time, take note of the details given in these two chapters. Genesis 5 recounts the 10 generations before the flood; Genesis 11 lists the 10 generations after the flood. When God includes such specific details, he intends for us to take notice.

Unlike a genealogy that simply lists the order of lineage, these passages contain ages and enough detail for the reader to determine the time span. They serve as "birth certificates" and allow us to calculate the time from Adam to Abraham. Each generation builds on the one before it, so we can add the years together to determine when Adam was created and the approximate age of the earth.

As we add up the years from Adam to Abraham, we get approximately 2,000 years. Historically, Christian and non-Christian historians alike agree that

Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Christ. If we add the 2,000 years that have passed since Jesus' birth, we get an accurate age of roughly 6,000 years.

Were there billions of years that passed before Adam was created? No! The Bible says that Adam was created on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:26, 31) and that God created at the "beginning" (Genesis 1:1). Jesus himself confirmed his belief in the creation account when he acknowledged that Adam and Eve were created at "the beginning of creation" (Mark 10:6).

In an attempt to make the universe older than it is, many Christians and non-Christians will say there are gaps in the genealogies recorded in Genesis. They argue that the word fathered (or begat in some translations) allows for generation skipping. However, the Hebrew word for begat (yalad) means a literal father/son relationship. Nowhere in the Old Testament is yalad used in any other way than to mean a single-generation (father/son or mother/daughter) relationship.

The genealogies are important to our history and should be read just as they are written. They are given to us to verify that the Bible is real history and that we are all descendants of a real man, Adam. We can trust these genealogies to give us accurate information because they are a part of the infallible, inerrant Word of God.

Historical/Apologetics Background

The belief that scientists have "proved" the earth to be billions of years old is a major reason many in the church have abandoned the biblical account of creation. However, contrary to popular belief, radiometric dating does not prove the earth is old.

All radiometric dating methods are based on the rate that radioactive elements decay in the rocks. Geologists refer to "parent" elements in rock decaying to "daughter" elements in the rock. By measuring how much "parent" and "daughter" elements are in a specimen, scientists try to calculate how old it is.

However, these methods are based on assumptions that are neither testable nor provable. These old-earth geologists come up with faulty dates because they are relying on the faulty assumptions below.

The assumption that we know the starting conditions of these rocks—particularly the ratio of parent atoms to daughter atoms in the rocks to begin with. No one can definitively explain the starting conditions because no one was there when they were formed. It is impossible to know the ratio when the rock was formed, so secular scientists assume there was 100% parent and no daughter.

The assumption that all of the daughter atoms found in a rock were formed from the parent atoms in the same rock. We have no way of knowing for sure that all of the daughter atoms in a rock came from parent atoms in the same rock. Contamination of some sort, from ground water, for example, could add or eliminate parent and/or daughter atoms to the rock, making any dating of this type unreliable.

The assumption that the rate of decay has always been constant. This is a dangerous assumption because we weren't there when the rock formed, and we don't know if the rate of decay has been the same over thousands of years. In addition to these assumptions, there are documented examples of inaccurate radiometric dating. The following are just a few examples.

A sample of the lava dome in the Mount St. Helens crater (that had been observed to form and cool in 1986) was analyzed in 1996. It contained so much argon-40 (daughter atoms) that it had a calculated "age" of 350,000 years!

Lava flows on the sides of Mt. Ngauruhoe, New Zealand, known to be less than 50 years old, yielded radiometric "ages" of up to 3.5 million years.

The same basalt flows on the top of Grand Canyon were tested using three different dating methods. The "ages" calculated were 916 million years, 1.143 billion years, and 2.6 billion years!

For centuries Christians have believed that God created the world in six literal days roughly 4,000 years before Jesus' birth and that he judged the world by destroying it in the flood of Noah's day. It is only over the last 250 years that questions about the Bible's record of time have arisen. Why? Christians and non-Christians swayed by the words of men began to try to fit billions of years of earth history into the Bible. The anti-biblical, philosophical assumptions that were used to interpret rocks and fossils threw the door wide open for doubting, manipulating, and questioning God's Word.

Even before the technology of radiometric dating was available, the shift in belief from the young earth to the faulty old-earth theories invented by man was leading to the idea of Darwinian evolution. Consequently, an avalanche of anti-biblical science appeared on the scene. It wasn't long before many church leaders began to embrace the old-age theories and made efforts to fit the ages into the Bible. Today, placing man's knowledge above what Scripture says has become commonplace. Sadly, interpretations of science and tradition often influence Christians more than Scripture itself.

If we are unable to take the book of Genesis—which includes God's detailed genealogy account—as documented history, then how are we to believe the rest of the Bible? God's Word unmistakably teaches a young earth and universe. God has ensured the accurate recording and preservation of his eyewitness account of the earth's history, which Jesus endorsed repeatedly during his earthly ministry. We must have confidence in what God has revealed to us in his Word and not allow man's ideas to cause us to reinterpret it or compromise it in any way. We dare not presume to know more than the Creator God.

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