

CHAPTER 13

BUT WHAT ABOUT . . . ?

QUESTIONS CHRISTIANS ASK REGARDING INTERPRETING NATURE

Among the many views on origins presented in this book and on this website, none are free of theological or scientific challenges. All face certain difficult questions that must be pondered. To help you think through some of the key issues, we've put together a list of questions that Christians often ask about origins. Some of the questions have no simple answers, and we know that the answers we suggest won't satisfy everyone. In some cases, we ourselves aren't completely satisfied with the answers we suggest, but they offer ideas that we've found helpful as we've worked through these issues. They represent the best we can offer at this time.

8. How strong is the evidence for an old earth? For evolution?

Many strong and independent lines of evidence from geology and astronomy support a great age of the earth and a beginning of the universe in the Big Bang. Likewise, many strong and independent lines of evidence support common ancestry of all life and the theory of evolution. Scientists have studied and double-checked this evidence many times and in many ways. The evidence is too clear to deny, since God has given us the minds to understand it. And the evidence is too important to ignore, since it tells us about God's revelation in the natural world.

9. Are the Big Bang and evolution just beliefs promoted by atheists to get around God?

Some atheists do use the Big Bang and evolution in that way, such as when they turn the scientific theory of evolution into the worldview of evolutionism. Some atheists attempt to use science to disprove God by arguing that when science finds a new scientific explanation, God is no longer needed to explain it. When this happens, Christians must not stand idly by. They must confront evolutionism.

What is the best way to do this? Some Christians confront evolutionism by arguing against the scientific models themselves. But in cases where the science is sound, this approach backfires. Scientists, both Christians and atheists, have studied the scientific evidence and their general consensus is that the Big Bang is a good description for the development of the physical universe and that the theory of evolution is a good description for the history of life on earth.

Christians who agree with this scientific assessment use a different strategy against atheistic arguments. They point out that a scientific explanation does not exclude God. The Bible teaches that God governs all natural processes, from falling rain to growing trees. Certainly, God also governs the birth of stars, the development of

species, and all topics studied by scientists today. Such topics include both things we can explain scientifically and things we can't. So when science comes up with a good model to explain the physical world, we don't learn that God is absent. Rather, we learn something about how God made it and governs it. For this reason many Christians believe in God and believe that God used evolution to develop new species.

10. Are scientists biased against religion and against God?

Some young earth creationists and progressive creationists accuse the scientific community of being biased against their views. Certainly, some atheist scientists do have such a bias. But Christians should be extremely cautious about making such an accusation against the entire scientific community as a whole.

Scientists do careful experiments precisely because they know that their own personal biases can be wrong. Scientists have strong professional standards for how experiments are to be performed and how evidence is to be handled. Moreover, scientists frequently double-check each other's work within each field. Results from one field of science, such as geology, can sometimes be used to check results in another field of science, such as astronomy. The very methodology of science has built into it ways to detect and correct personal biases.

It's also important to remember that the scientific community has shown on several occasions that it is willing to let the data convince them of a scientific model in spite of a clear personal bias against the model on the part of some scientists. Before astronomers reached a consensus that strong evidence supported the Big Bang model, many atheistic astronomers were biased against the Big Bang because it implied that the universe had a definite beginning point in time—something which seems to suggest a divine Creator. Nevertheless, the scientific evidence convinced them that the Big Bang model was correct.

One more reason to be extremely cautious about a charge of bias is that the scientific community includes scientists of many religious worldviews. In fact, it includes many Christian scientists who have no bias against a young earth. These scientists would be perfectly happy if the scientific evidence really did support a young earth; in fact, many of them grew up believing that the earth is young. Yet the multiple lines of scientific evidence for an old earth in the testimony of God's creation convinced them otherwise. Christians who make a charge of bias need to consider carefully if they might be bearing false witness against fellow Christian brothers and sisters.

11. How can scientists be sure about the Big Bang and evolution if no one was there to see them?

Like a detective studying a crime scene, scientists learn about the past by finding clues in the present. Scientists use three types of methods to gain knowledge about God's world: experimental, observational, and historical. Experimental scientists do experiments in laboratories where all aspects of a system can be manipulated and tested. Observational scientists make careful observations of systems, like the weather or the environment, which are too large or important to manipulate. Historical scientists use careful observations to deduce the past history of a system. As an example, consider the genetics of disease. Experimental scientists infect mice with a disease to test how well a certain gene blocks it, while observational scientists do genetic tests on families who appear susceptible to a similar disease, and historical scientists use similar genetic information to determine the mutation history of that gene over the past centuries.

All three methods use similar techniques and rely on the same laws of nature. All three make predictions based on their models, then test those predictions in future experiments and observations. All three methods are needed to fully understand God's world. They support each other by sharing results, giving insights into the other's work, and making predictions that can be tested by the other methods. Because of the similarities between the methods and their shared knowledge, the historical sciences share in the reliability of the experimental and observational sciences. Just as a detective can find the criminal without an eyewitness to the crime, so historical scientists can reliably deduce the history of the earth and its species without someone there to see it.

12. Is there any scientific evidence for a young earth?

Some Christians do look for scientific proofs of a young earth. For theological reasons they are convinced that a Young Earth Interpretation is the best, or the only acceptable, interpretation of Genesis, and they look to the natural world for confirmation. Over the past several decades more than a hundred such proofs have been proposed and later disproved.

The Young Earth Movement continues to look for such proofs, but each one that has been tested has been found to be flawed. Not one has been found that convinces the scientific community. Even fellow Christians who are scientists are not convinced. Thus, Christians who continue to look for such proofs need to deal with a vexing question: if God did create the earth recently, why didn't God place lots of obvious scientific proofs for a young earth, such that it would be obvious to any scientist?

13. Could God have created the earth recently and made it appear old?

If God created the earth with "appearance of age," it would explain why all the scientific evidence points to an old earth and away from a young earth. If God did it that way, it would remove all apparent conflict between modern science and a Young Earth Interpretation of Genesis. Unfortunately, this idea raises other theological problems. In fact, most Christians, including most young earth creationists, find this idea unacceptable.

It would mean that as scientists study the natural world, they are studying an elaborate false history. Evidence of a false history would be encoded in the DNA of every cell in our bodies. God certainly has the power to create the world to appear old, but would God have made a world filled through and through with false history? This seems inconsistent with what we know of God's truthful character in the rest of Scripture.

Having faith in God does not mean that God clearly tells us two contradictory things and expects us to believe both. Having faith in God means living in faithful obedience to God's commands. It means believing that God will keep his promises even when our understanding is only partial and we cannot make sense of it all on our own.

14. Can the scientific evidence for an old earth also be made to fit a young earth model?

Many young earth creationists take this approach. They acknowledge that a great deal of scientific data fits the model of an old universe and an old earth. But they hold out hope of developing a new scientific model that also could explain all of that scientific evidence in terms of a young earth model. They do not have such a model yet, but they hope that eventually they will be able to construct one.

This approach to young earth creationism seems to raise the fewest theological difficulties. It takes the testimony of nature seriously. It does not ignore the scientific data. It does not rush to accuse other scientists of being biased or of doing bad science. It does not simply resort to the "appearance of age."

But this approach faces an enormous scientific challenge. Scientists have discovered dozens of independent lines of evidence from astronomy, geology, and biology, all of which point to the same conclusion: the earth is old. It might be possible to develop new scientific models that would explain a few of them in terms of a young earth, but is it possible that a new model could explain *all* of them? And if the data is still consistent with an old earth, does this not become another version of the Appearance of Age Interpretation?