

# GeoChristian.com

## Five biblical reasons I am not a young-Earth creationist

Kevin Nelstead

I was a young-Earth creationist (YEC) during my first few years as an undergraduate geology major, believing that the Bible required that the universe is no older than about 10,000 years, and that geology, properly understood, supported that position. I was a student member of the Creation Research Society, and looked forward to the day that I would have my Master's degree so I could be a full member. I knew there were problems with the YEC understandings of Earth's geological record, but figured that these would be solved with further research, and that I might even have a role in the triumph of young-Earth creationism over old-Earth evolutionism.

There are many Christians who are fascinated by God's good creation, and it is my experience is that it is not all that rare for there to be YECs in university geology programs. Some YEC geology majors are somehow able to hold onto their YEC beliefs all the way to graduation—or even through graduate studies—but many others have a crisis of faith and either abandon Christianity or are hobbled with deep doubts. Other YEC geology students, such as myself, end up switching to old-Earth Christianity with a vibrant faith in Christ, and with their confidence in the Bible still intact.

My conversion from YEC to old-Earth Christianity was driven primarily by the writings of theologically-conservative scholars such as [Francis Schaeffer](#), [Bernard Ramm](#), [Arthur Custance](#), and [Pattle Pun](#). These devout Christian intellectuals demonstrated that one could have a very high view of Scripture as the inerrant Word of God, and hold to interpretations of the opening chapters of Genesis that varied from the young-Earth view. Once my mind was open to old-Earth biblical interpretations, I was able to more objectively weigh the geological arguments for a young-Earth vs old-Earth. I concluded that the YEC side was offering few credible scientific arguments for their version of Earth history.

My reasons for believing that the young-Earth interpretation is not biblically necessary have matured over the decades since then, and do not

match the arguments that some other old-Earth Christians might offer. Most significantly, I reject the argument that Genesis is merely a myth with no relation to real events. I believe that Genesis 1-11 is deeply rooted in events that really happened.

Here are my top five biblical reasons I am not a young-Earth creationist.

### 1. Genre

Bookstores are divided into different sections, such as fiction, history, biography, science, art, religion, and self-help. If you look at a book from the poetry shelves, you will see that its contents follow very different rules than do books off of a fiction shelf. Within the fiction section, the books from the science fiction section are written with different writing conventions than those from the romantic fiction area. These broad categories, such as mystery, fantasy, and graphic novels, are what we call genres. Within a genre, there might be subgenres, each with its own styles and rules of interpretation.

The Bible contains literature written in a number of different genres, including narrative, law, wisdom, psalm, parable, genealogy, prophesy, apocalypse, and epistle. One does not read a poetic passage in the same way as one reads a narrative. As an example, consider Exodus 14-15. Chapter 14 tells the story of the crossing of the Red Sea in narrative form. Chapter 15 retells the story as a poem—the songs of Moses and Miriam. The narrative tells us that “the Lord drove the sea by a strong east wind,” (14:21), while the poem tells us “At the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up” (15:8). Did God send a strong wind, or did he send a blast from his nostrils? We don't see any contradiction between these passages, because we understand the difference between prose and poetry. Individual books of the Bible may contain multiple types of genre. One cannot make a blanket statement that “Genesis is narrative,” because not all of Genesis is written as a narrative; there are stretches of genealogy, poetry, and other genres embedded in the story.

YECs commonly argue that the book of Genesis is “historical narrative” and must therefore be read

“literally.” A YEC biblical scholar who has written much on this is Steven Boyd, who has done a [statistical analysis on verb forms](#) in Old Testament narrative and poetic passages, and come to the conclusion that Genesis 1 is indeed in the narrative genre. According to Boyd, old-Earth Christians who say that Genesis 1 is something other than historical narrative can be proven to be wrong by this modern computer-aided statistical analysis.

The problem is one of oversimplification, as Boyd’s analysis assumes that there are only two options: poetry and historical narrative. It is not always easy to determine the genre of a passage in the Bible, as there are subtleties, variations, and overlap between genres and subgenres. Genesis 1 is certainly not poetry in the same sense as a psalm or proverb—we didn’t need a statistical analysis to tell us this—but the chapter also has literary features that distinguish it from ordinary Hebrew historical narrative passages. Boyd’s analysis missed these nuances. One of these distinctions is the overall structure of the chapter, with the repetition of phrases such as “And there was evening and there was morning, the nth day,” and “God saw that it was good.” There is really no other chapter in the Old Testament—or other ancient Hebrew literature—that has a structure quite like this. Furthermore, the vocabulary is at a higher level than in most of the Old Testament, such as using “lights” instead of sun and moon, and the naming of animals with broad categories rather than using specific names. The passage is still a narrative, but has poetry-like elements, and is in a subgenre of its own. Old Testament scholar C. John Collins describes the genre of Genesis 1 as [“exalted prose narrative.”](#)

A further problem for the YEC interpretation is that just because a passage is a narrative doesn’t mean that everything in that passage has to be taken literally in the way YECs mean literally. For example, Jesus stated that he is “the door of the sheep” (John 10:7) in a narrative passage, but no one takes this as a literal statement. Likewise, in the long Joseph narrative (Genesis 37, 39-50), we are told that “all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth” (Gen 41:57). Few biblical scholars take this as a literal statement which requires us to believe that people came from places as far away as Japan and Mesoamerica to purchase grain.

If one gets the genre of a passage in Scripture incorrect—and YECs get the genre of Genesis 1 at least partially incorrect—then it is likely that one will get the interpretation of that passage at least partially incorrect as well.

## 2. The meaning of “yom” (day) in Genesis

Genesis 1 begins with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” and then goes on to describe six days of creation, each ending with “And there was evening and there was morning, the nth day.” Most YECs insist that the only way to interpret this passage is that verse 1 must be included as part of the first day, and that the six days must be literal, consecutive 24-hour days.

There are at least four ways to answer this claim, each of which is sufficient by itself as a rebuttal to the “literal” young-Earth interpretation. To start with, Old Testament scholars are divided as to whether Genesis 1:1—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”—is (1) a summary of the entire creation week, (2) an event that occurred during day 1, or (3) an event that occurred before day 1. If the initial creation of the heavens and the earth occurred prior to the events of day 1 of Genesis 1, this opens up a variety of interpretive options that do not require a young Earth.

A second consideration that may be a problem for the literal-days interpretation is that there is no sun in the sky until day four (Genesis 1:14-18). According to Genesis 1:14, one purpose of the sun and moon is to “serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years” (NIV). As far back as the third and fourth century, Origin and Augustine—and others—argued that one cannot have a day, in the sense that we understand day, if we do not have a sun as a time marker. We are not, therefore, required to believe that the days of creation are literal 24-hour days in the sense that modern YECs believe is required by the text. This did not lead church fathers to an old-Earth reading of Genesis 1, but it did lead them to question the literal 24-hour day interpretation.

A third observation about the days of Genesis 1 is that “there was evening and there was morning” is not literally a 24-hour day in Hebrew thinking. In our system of reckoning days, a literal day runs from midnight to midnight. To the ancient Hebrews, a complete day ran from sunset to sunset, not “evening and morning.” In fact, “there was evening and there

was morning” is literally a night, not a day. The use of the phrase “there was evening and there was morning” could mark a pause in the action rather than the passage of a literal day, or there could even be a figurative meaning to the expression.

Finally, most conservative biblical scholars believe that Moses was involved in the writing of Genesis, perhaps by gathering written or oral materials from earlier times. Moses was also the author of Psalm 90, which includes

For a thousand years in your sight  
are but as yesterday when it is past,  
or as a watch in the night. (verse 4)

The immediate context of Psalm 90:4 is creation, with mentions in verses 2-3 of the creation of the earth, and humans being created from dust. One observation we can make about verse 4 is that time is not the same to God as it is to us. God is not restricted by time the way we are. Applying this back to Genesis 1, we are not required to believe that God’s days must be the same as our days. This is especially true for days 1-3, with no sun to mark days, but could also apply to the days in the entire creation week. It seems that modern young-Earth creationists may be more concerned about the “literal” meaning of the days of creation than Moses himself was!

### 3. Animal death and the fall

Young-Earth believers often argue that Earth cannot possibly be millions of years old because death did not occur until after Adam sinned. They will refer to verses such as Romans 5:12, which states, “Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.” The YEC reasoning is that if all death came into the world through Adam’s sin, then there could not have been millions of years of death prior to Adam. Sedimentary rocks in Earth’s crust contain many [quintillions](#) of fossils, which are the remains of dead creatures, ranging from single-celled organisms and plants, to vertebrates, such as dinosaurs and mammals. The YEC interpretation requires all of these fossils to have died sometime after Adam sinned. Adam did not live millions of years ago, therefore Earth could not be millions of years old.

The problem with this YEC argument is that it is an over-reading of what the Bible actually teaches about death in our world. The Bible does indeed teach

that human death is tied to Adam’s sin. Adam and Eve did not literally physically die on the literal day they ate the forbidden fruit, but they did literally physically die at some point after access to the Tree of Life was denied to them. But the Bible never ties animal death to Adam’s sin. The relevant passages are Genesis 3:14-19, Romans 5:12-17, Romans 8:19-22, and 1 Corinthians 15:21-28; 35-57. None of these verses, nor any other passage of the Bible, teach that animal death began with Adam’s sin. In fact, the Bible never even teaches that animals were created to live forever.

### 4. Genealogies

Most young-Earth advocates will say that we know how old Earth is by adding up the years in all of the genealogies of the Bible. The genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11 contain chronological information, such as “When Seth had lived 105 years, he fathered Enosh... When Enosh had lived 90 years, he fathered Kenan... (Genesis 5:6,9).” Adding these together, along with chronological information in the rest of the Old Testament, and then tying these genealogies into certain dates for late-Old Testament events, results in a timeline that points back to Adam being created about 6000 years ago (or 4004 BC, as Archbishop Ussher famously calculated). Earth is, according to the YEC interpretation, only six days older than Adam, so Earth itself also is only 6000 years old as well.

There are several problems with this line of reasoning. Some YECs recognize these, and are willing to push Adam back a few thousand years, such as to 10,000 BC. I would like to focus on just one problem. As an old-Earth Christian, I believe in a real Adam and Eve. If we take these genealogies and chronologies in the YEC sense, then Adam lived in the Neolithic, about 6-10 thousand years ago (some old-Earth Christians push this date back further). The genealogies may point to this time frame, but they do not help us to address the interpretive questions we have with Genesis 1. In other words, Adam may have lived 10,000 years ago, and the Earth and universe could still be billions of years old. We can believe in a real Adam, Eve, Garden of Eden, and first sin, and hold to one of the various old-Earth understandings of Genesis 1, such as the day-age, analogical-days, historical creation, or framework interpretations.

In other words, the genealogies are largely irrelevant to the question of the age of the Earth.

## 5. The New Testament does not teach a young Earth

Finally, YECs often say that the New Testament, including Jesus himself, teaches a young Earth. They will point to verses such as Mark 10:6, where Jesus says, “But from the beginning of creation, ‘God made them male and female,’” or Luke 11:50-51, which states, “so that the blood of all the prophets, shed from the foundation of the world, may be charged against this generation, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.” YECs will emphasize the “from the beginning of creation” part of Mark 10:6, because it seems to place the first humans at the very beginning of time, not billions of years after the initial creation.

We need to think a little more carefully, however, about the phrase “from the beginning of creation,” and ask the question, “Creation of what?” Note that Jesus does not say “from the beginning of creation of the universe.” The context in Mark 10 is a discussion of divorce, not the origin of the sun, moon, stars, and Earth itself. Jesus specifically refers to God making humans male and female, whom he brought together in marriage: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh” (Mark 10:7-8; Gen 2:24). It is possible that Jesus had in mind “from the beginning of the creation of the universe,” but given the marriage context, it is also possible that Jesus was referring to “the beginning of the creation of humans and marriage.” The YEC interpretation of Mark 10:6 is possible, but there are other valid understandings of this verse, so it is a stretch to say that Jesus was a young-Earth creationist.

### Conclusion

The young-Earth, calendar-day interpretation is one of several possible interpretations of the opening chapters of Genesis. Other interpretations that are within biblical orthodoxy include the day-age, framework, and analogical-days interpretations, as outlined in the [Report of the Creation Study Committee](#) of the inerrancy-affirming, theologically-conservative Presbyterian Church in America. The age of the Earth is not used as part of a theological argument anywhere in the Bible, and has no bearing on any core doctrine, so it should not be a topic Christians divide over. Some YECs insist that the age

of the Earth is a gospel issue, but this is clearly not the case. Most old-Earth Christians, including myself, affirm the core doctrines of the Christian faith that are involved in the opening chapters of Genesis, such as creation from nothing by the triune God of the Bible, a real Adam and Eve, a real Garden of Eden, a real fall into sin, and a real promise of a coming savior (Genesis 3:15).

I adopt an old-Earth view for both biblical and scientific reasons, but I fully accept and respect those who, for biblical reasons, accept the young-Earth view. To insist that Genesis only allows for the young-Earth interpretation is not supportable biblically, as I have briefly outlined here. Being that there is overwhelming geological evidence that Earth is much older than 10,000 years, it is harmful for evangelism and discipleship to present the young-Earth view as the only infallible interpretation of Genesis.

Grace and Peace

---

### Notes:

©2019 Kevin Nelstead. This article was published online on October 4, 2019, at <https://geochristian.com/2019/10/04/five-biblical-reasons-i-am-not-a-young-earth-creationist/>. This PDF may be distributed freely as long as it is kept complete.

Unless stated otherwise, Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV). The quote marked as NIV comes from the 1984 edition of the New International Version.

YEC is an abbreviation for young-Earth creationist/creationism that is accepted by many within the YEC community. Other common abbreviations in this discussion are OEC (old-Earth creationist) and TE or EC (theistic evolutionist or evolutionary creationist).

I gave links to books by Schaeffer, Ramm, Custance, and Pun, which greatly influenced my thinking back in the 1980s. A few books I would recommend now are [here](#).