



Biblical Catastrophism and Geology

Henry M. Morris

**BIBLICAL CATASTROPHISM
AND GEOLOGY**

by Henry M. Morris

Institute for Creation Research

BIBLICAL CATASTROPHISM AND GEOLOGY

by Henry M. Morris, Ph.D.

Institute for Creation Research

P. O. Box 59029, Dallas, Texas 75229

1806 Royal Lane

Dallas, Texas 75229

Phone: 214/615-8300

Customer Service: 800/628-7640

www.icr.org

Copyright © 2003 by the Institute for Creation Research. All rights reserved. No part of this booklet may be reproduced in any form, except brief excerpts for the purpose of review, without written permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

Dr. Henry M. Morris was Founder and President Emeritus of the Institute for Creation Research.

BIBLICAL CATASTROPHISM AND GEOLOGY

Theories of catastrophism in geology are not new. Prior to the time of Sir Charles Lyell in the early nineteenth century, scientists generally believed that most geological formations had been produced by great physical catastrophes and mountain-generating revolutions. Lyell, however, taught that these phenomena could be explained by the ordinary processes of nature, acting over vast expanses of geologic time. This “principle of uniformitarianism,” as he called it, with its creed, “the present is the key to the past,” soon became widely accepted as the foundational principle of the modern discipline called historical geology.

Charles Darwin was profoundly influenced by Lyell’s concepts in formulating his own theory of evolution throughout the long ages of earth history that were provided by uniformitarianism. His book, *The Origin of Species by Natural Selection*, quickly became dogma throughout the sciences of both biology and geology with their supposed paleontological record of the history of life on earth during the long geological ages. This approach soon became assumed as foundational in the social sciences and economics as well as in science generally, and often in religion. Thus a superstructure of gigantic size has been erected on the Lyellian-Darwinian foundation.

However, catastrophism is not dead. The inadequacies of strict uniformitarianism have become increasingly obvious in recent years so that a great many of the more recent geologists have been promoting what they call “neo-catastrophism.” It has become generally recognized that even the ordinary processes of sedimentation and fossilization must often have at least a semi-catastrophist basis, requiring rapid deposition and burial under conditions seldom encountered in the modern world. Many geologists today are arguing for the occurrence of several large-scale geological catastrophes (region-wide floods, asteroid bombardments, vast volcanic outflows, sudden climatological shifts, etc.) as significant in deciphering earth history. In fact, more and more modern geologists are realizing that *very few, if any*, of the ordinary geological formations can be explained in terms of the slow and relatively steady processes of the present.

Evolutionists sometimes try to use Occam’s “razor” to refute catastrophism, arguing that catastrophes are less likely than uniform processes. Actually, Occam’s razor would seem to cut the other way. Since large catastrophes are now being acknowledged anyhow, it might be argued that one great catastrophe would be more likely than many such events.

Biblical Catastrophism

In any case, the above considerations warrant the suggestion that a return to the Biblical catastrophism of the early geologists (Steno, Woodward, etc.) as the interpretive framework for historical geology is well worth considering. Modern studies in Biblical history have provided strong

evidence of the Bible's reliability and accuracy in matters of fact. Veneration of the Bible for its "spiritual value" only is therefore, inconsistent with rejection of its scientific and historical teachings. If the latter cannot be trusted—that is, statements which are susceptible to actual human investigation and proof—then how can its spiritual teachings, which are not susceptible of proof, be trusted?

And the Bible does have a great deal to say about the early history of the earth and the universe, not only in the book of Genesis, but throughout the whole Bible, both Old and New Testaments. If the Bible is what all its writers claim it to be—and what Jesus Christ and His apostles accepted and taught it to be—then it really and truly is the inspired Word of God Himself! Thus its teachings concerning Creation and other events of early history are not mere legends, but actual facts of history.

If one is willing to assume this perspective and make his deductions on that basis, he will find that the Bible presents a perfectly consistent and harmonious account of earth history with which it is possible to harmonize all the hard data of historical geology, as well as pertinent data in other fields. At least, this writer, having made a fairly extensive study of historical geology from both viewpoints, believes that the Biblical/catastrophist perspective will ultimately prove superior to its naturalistic, uniformitarian counterpart.

The objection that such a presupposition will necessarily color the conclusions derived from it is undoubtedly valid. But it should also be recognized that evolutionary interpretations are derived from similar, though opposite, presuppositions. It

is pure assumption that one can only interpret all the data from the unobserved past within a naturalistic, uniformitarian model. Therefore, it is not only legitimate but also highly important that the inferences based on the Biblical presuppositions also be seriously considered and evaluated.

The Biblical Framework

The major elements of the Biblical framework, within which all data should be organized, are three great recorded facts of history. These events are: (1) the Creation; (2) the Fall; and (3) the Flood.

Each of these three affected the entire globe. If they really occurred, as the Bible unequivocally teaches, then to deny or ignore them locks geologists into a drastically false (or at least unprovable and very improbable) reconstruction of earth history.

The fact of a real Creation; out of nothing but the power of the eternal God, is fundamental to any form of theism and especially to Christian theism. For if anything at all has really been *created*, that substance must necessarily have been created with some “appearance of age.” On the assumption of uniformity, on the other hand, it would always be possible to imagine some sort of evolutionary history for even the simplest created substance. Denial of the possibility of the creation of “apparent age,” (or “apparent functioning maturity”) amounts to denial of the possibility of any genuine creation at all and thus essentially amounts to atheism (which is itself a “religious” perspective).

Another very significant fact concerning the Creation is

that it was accomplished by supernatural processes no longer in operation. According to the Bible, all things were created in six days, following which “*God ended His work which He had made*” (Genesis 2:2). Therefore the physical processes which we can now study belong to an entirely different order of things and can give us no clue whatever to the history of the Creation period; this latter history can only be known through divine revelation.

This conclusion is strongly confirmed scientifically by the law of energy conservation, the first law of thermodynamics. This is the most firmly established of all scientific laws and is really the basic principle upon which all modern science is grounded. Energy, in the complete sense, includes matter, and thus really everything in the physical universe. The first law essentially confirms the fact that no creation of energy or matter is now taking place. Therefore, Creation must have been an event of the past, using processes no longer in operation. And this is exactly what the Bible says!

To some extent, therefore, in the Biblical model, the whole world was created at some time in the past, by processes unknown to us, fully functioning as if it had been doing so for some period of time. While this concept may have its limits, it should be given full consideration in the construction of a geological history or the use of any geological chronometer. For instance, the primeval ocean may have been created already saline, radioactive minerals may already have contained created “daughter” elements, light from distant stars may have been visible on earth at the instant of their creation, and so on, even as Adam was created as a full-grown man.

The second basic fact around which historical data must be organized is that of the great Curse on the earth following man's Fall. According to the revelation given by God, the original creation was, in every respect, "*very good*" (Genesis 1:31). There was nothing bad, out of balance, or out of harmony—no suffering, no struggle for survival and, above all, no death in the world. According to the apostle Paul, "*by man came death*" (I Corinthians 15:21). When man first sinned, God pronounced the great Curse, not only on man but also on his whole dominion, the earth and everything in it. This Curse primarily involves the principle of decay and death. The "*whole creation*" is now in the "*bondage of corruption*" (that is, "*decay*"), according to Romans 8:21-22. There is, everywhere, a natural tendency toward disintegration and ultimate death.

This Biblical doctrine is firmly supported by the *second* law of thermodynamics. This law, which like the first law, is as strongly proved as any fact of science, states that, in any closed system, there is a natural increase of disorganization, or an increase in *entropy* (or disordered randomness).

Even in an open system, the energy (or information, or order) of the system *tends* to become less available, or useful, or organized. For an open system to experience an increase of order or organized complexity there must at least be an external source of both energy and ordering information acting on it.

Everything therefore at least *tends* to wear out, to grow old, to run down, and finally to approach a state of death. Obviously this law flatly contradicts the notion of evolution,

which assumes that everything naturally tends to become more orderly and highly organized (or at least that is what has happened if evolution has really proceeded from “particles to people” over the ages, as evolutionists claim). Note that, although the sun provides a source of external energy to the earth, that in itself is not *sufficient* to produce an increase of order. There must also be some source of organized or programmed information. Since evolution has no such program, it seems to be impossible.

But the most significant of these facts, from the standpoint of historical geology, is that there could have been no suffering or struggle or death in the world until after man had sinned. Death is the principal effect of the Curse pronounced on the whole earth because of human sin. Consequently, the fossils of all formerly living animals now found in the earth’s sedimentary rocks must be dated subsequently to that event, the Fall of man, and the resulting global Curse. As the New Testament says: “*the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now*” (Romans 8:22).

This leads to the third basic fact in the Biblical framework. If the great thicknesses of fossil-bearing strata through the earth’s crust have been deposited only *after* man’s Fall, then nothing less than worldwide catastrophic deposition can possibly account for most of them. The Bible clearly describes this unique catastrophe, and we now know it as the Genesis Flood or as the Great Deluge in the days of Noah.

According to the Biblical record, it was because of the utterly and hopelessly wicked condition into which the earth’s original peoples had degenerated that God sent a cataclysmic

Deluge to “*destroy (them) with the earth*” (Genesis 6:13). This event is described in detail in Genesis 6 through 9 and is referred to many times in other parts of the Bible and by Jesus Christ Himself. It is also recorded, in more or less distorted and incomplete fashion, in the legends of hundreds of peoples all over the world.

According to the apostle Peter, “*the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished*” (II Peter 3:6). As described in the Bible, the flood waters battered the entire globe for a year and were immensely destructive in effect. All of the processes of sedimentation, volcanism, tectonism, fossilization, etc., were extremely active during this period. No true scheme of historical geology could possibly be erected without full consideration of the tremendous geologic records that must necessarily have been inscribed in the earth’s crust by this awesome event. Geologists often attribute specific geologic deposits to *local* floods: a global flood necessarily would leave immense geological records everywhere. The Biblical record says that it began when, in one day “*were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened*” (Genesis 7:11), and that this continued for 150 days before “*the waters assuaged*” (Genesis 8:1).

Geologic Implications

Acceptance of this Biblical framework of interpretation would have very little effect on the organization and use of the vast bulk of accumulated geologic data and methodology. The descriptive aspects of the disciplines of mineralogy, petrology, hydrology, economic geology, etc., would be very little

affected by the problem of whether the data of historical geology should be organized in terms of evolutionary uniformitarianism or in terms of Biblical Creationism and Catastrophism.

But there are two significant areas where changes in interpretation would be necessitated, and these are quite important. In the first place, the principle of uniformity must be modified sufficiently to accommodate the three great discontinuities of Creation, the Fall, and the Flood, and their effects. In the second place, the theory of evolution (in the sense of transmutation from one basic kind to another—that is, macroevolution) must be abandoned. Although these two concepts have never been verified experimentally or observationally, they have practically attained the status of sacred cows, and one can question their universal validity only at the risk of being charged with ignorance and religious prejudice. Nevertheless, their validity has never been demonstrated, and they are simply accepted by evolutionists as articles of faith.

In fact, there is an abundance of scientific evidence that they are *not* valid. Note that there has been no known instance of macroevolution in all recorded history. Neither, in the fossil record of the past, with its billions of known fossils, is there any known transitional series demonstrating macroevolution. Rather than being hindered by the rejection of uniformitarianism and evolution, it is very likely that historical geology would be greatly benefited by release from their shackles.

With reference to uniformity, it has already been noted that

this principle has proved inadequate in many areas, so that a quasi-catastrophism is already quite prominent in geologic interpretation. There are many very important unsolved problems in geology, and it is very possible that the reason they have been so intractable is because of an implicit reliance on uniformity.

Often the historical interpretations of geologic features based on uniformity don't adequately match the field data. Typical of such unsolved problems are: (1) origin of petroleum; (2) origin of mineral deposits; (3) cause of continental glaciation; (4) cause of global warm climates; (5) origin of salt beds; (6) origin of vast volcanic terrains; (7) origin of coal measures; (8) nature of regional metamorphism; (9) formation of granite; (10) cause of planation surfaces; (11) mechanics of overthrusting; and many others.

Not one of these has yet been adequately explained in terms of present processes. Plate tectonics, which has become widely accepted by geologists in recent decades, is still controversial, but even this at least involves the quasi-catastrophic processes of spreading seafloors and shifting continents in contrast to the older uniformitarianism.

A number of important geologists today, while still committed to belief in long ages and evolution, are now saying that practically *all* individual geologic formations were formed in at least *local* catastrophes: the slow uniform processes of the present explain very little, if anything, in the geologic column; and if that is the case, the present is *not* the key to the past!

Note also that, if every formation was laid down rapidly,

and if there are no *worldwide* time gaps (i.e., periods of erosion) in the strata of the geologic column (a fact which is universally acknowledged), then the entire column of continental sedimentary strata containing macro-fossils (averaging a mile in depth all around the globe) had to have been laid down rapidly. Thus the great fossil-bearing strata of the globe do not constitute a record of slow evolution of life over many long geologic ages but rather a record of the cataclysmic destruction of life in one age—that is, the year of the Flood with its after-effects extending over many years. That, of course, would fit the framework implied by Biblical Catastrophism. A number of modern Biblical geologists have already made significant contributions to solving many of the problems that have proved intractable to the uniformitarian approach.

Remember also the fact that the fossil record always exhibits abrupt appearance of plant and animal types without evidence that they descended by gradual modification from other types. Nowhere is this more evident than in the “explosion” of life in so-called Cambrian rocks, below which are no possible ancestors for the array of complex life which suddenly appears. In fact, every phylum (basic body style) is found in that lowest layer, including vertebrate fish, with no new phyla introduced since then. Furthermore, once an organism appears, it remains the same either until the present or until it goes extinct. This situation is called *stasis*. Abrupt appearance, immediate variety of body styles and stasis argue strongly against uniformity throughout the past, but agree entirely with the expectations of the Creation/Flood concept.

The concept of evolution is even more vulnerable than that of uniformity. As already seen, it is squarely contradicted by the second law of thermodynamics. Many of the evidences commonly cited for evolution are in reality evidence of deterioration. For example, the very mechanism which supposedly causes evolution (that of genetic mutations) is actually a mechanism which almost always causes disorganization and loss of information. Natural selection then acts to weed out those creatures experiencing mutations. It is thus really a conservative mechanism tending to preserve the species from genetic harm. If any permanent change *does* occur in the natural state, it almost certainly must be either neutral or actually a deterioration of the species (witness the evidence of “vestigial” organs, and the evidence that most modern animals are represented in the fossil record by larger and stronger forms than those now living).

The second law is thus the basic reason why no true cases of macro-evolution have ever been observed—either in the thousands of years of human history or in the alleged billions of years of pre-human history recorded in the fossils. And the explanation for the constraints imposed by the second law can only be in terms of God’s great curse on the “*ground*” (Genesis 3:17) following the entrance of sin into God’s original “very good” creation.

The only semi-historical evidence for evolution is that afforded by the fossil record itself. Evolutionists claim that this record shows a gradual increase of variety and complexity of organisms with the advance of geologic time. But since the very possibility of true evolution is both denied by the Word

of God and also negated by the basic laws of science, the evidence from paleontology must have been misinterpreted in seeking to make it fit the evolutionary/uniformitarian paradigm.

The idealized 100-mile thick geologic column does not actually exist anywhere in the world, but has been artificially put together by correlation and superposition of formations from many areas. The manner in which this work of developing an idealized geologic column was gradually accomplished in the past is a matter of some uncertainty and disagreement, even among creationist geologists. It has been pointed out that the crystalline rocks of the “basement” may in some localities actually constitute the land surface, and that rocks of any so-called “age” may likewise be the surface rocks in various other locations. A great variety of sequences of “ages” may appear at various localities, often with various ages missing, sometimes even with them out of sequence. In other words, the geologic column and its supposed standard evolutionary sequence of geologic ages pose many unanswered questions in the evolutionary uniformitarian context. It does seem the time is right for a serious rethinking of this whole system. The framework of Biblical catastrophism is almost certain to prove more effective in developing a real understanding of the geological formations. In fact, as outlined above, this *has* to be so, since the entire column of fossil-bearing rock necessarily was formed rapidly and continually, in a great global hydraulic cataclysm, followed perhaps by many years of residual catastrophism in various regions. The Biblical descriptions of the Flood

indicate a tremendous complex of events occurring during the Flood year—worldwide torrential rains, tremendous erosion, worldwide tectonic and volcanic upheavals, violent windstorms, gigantic waves and tsunamis, etc., as well as great destruction of all forms of life, followed necessarily by extensive burials in great “graveyards” of future fossil deposits. An infinite variety of depositional characteristics could thus be postulated at various times and places during the Deluge, often violent but also often relatively quiescent.

In any case, the rejection of evolution and the traditional uniformitarianism would not only be quite possible but also would probably be of great value in further geologic research. As one example of how the Biblical framework could solve a perplexing geological problem, consider the question of worldwide climatic change. The Bible suggests that there existed before the Flood an entirely different hydrologic and meteorological system surrounding and enriching the earth, producing just such a universal warm, pleasant climate as is indicated for many or most of the systems of the geologic column. Its disruption was one of the two main causes of the Flood (the other was the worldwide break-up of the “fountains of the great deep,” which were probably vast subterranean waters previously restrained under great pressure below the crust). These events may also have contributed to a sudden chilling of the climate and resultant continental glaciation.

Importance of the Question

If all of this were simply a question of geology and its interpretation, there would be little reason for anyone to press

for such a radical shift in orientation as here proposed. Even if this were all, however, the possibility of an alternative type of scientific generalization would at least warrant investigation, strictly from the scientific standpoint.

However, there is much more at stake here than simply a matter of geologic interpretation. The philosophy of evolutionary uniformitarianism has penetrated very deeply into nearly every aspect of human life. Evolution has become fundamental in the treatment of psychology, sociology, political science, economics, philosophy—even religion. It was the cornerstone of Dewey's educational philosophy. Through Nietzsche's adoption and application of Darwinism, evolution became eventually the quasi-scientific basis of Fascism and Nazism. Karl Marx adapted and extended the concept of evolution in developing the Communistic system, and Communism today is grounded squarely on the theory of evolution. This is true, in fact, for socialism in all its forms, as well as for every other anti-Christian system of the present day, including all the modern New Age and occultic movements.

Jesus said: "*A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit*" (Matthew 7:18). The modern fruit of the evolutionary philosophy—Communism, Nazism, progressive educationism, materialism, existentialism, Freudianism, behaviorism, hedonism, and the rest—warrants a very serious and critical look at the nature of the tree itself.

Modern geologists could render a uniquely important service to the world by re-examining, critically, the paleontological foundation on which rests this gigantic

structure of evolution and its bitter fruits. A renewed recognition of the reality of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, and the sovereignty of the Creator in the history of the earth and in the lives of men, could serve a mighty evangelistic and purifying purpose in the world in these latter days.

This booklet has been slightly revised and updated from a published presentation (originally delivered orally by invitation on September 10, 1962), at a meeting of the Houston Geological Society, with over 500 professional geologists present. At that time, Dr. Morris was Professor of Hydraulics and Head of the Civil Engineering Department at Virginia Tech. He had just recently published, with Dr. John Whitcomb, the book *The Genesis Flood*.

The lecture precipitated much reaction in geologic circles. Without claiming a causal effect, geology as a discipline began to withdraw from strict uniformitarianism soon afterwards, embracing a more empirical and catastrophic view, necessitating a revision of this booklet.



INSTITUTE for CREATION RESEARCH

1806 Royal Lane
Dallas, Texas 75229
214/615-8300 • www.icr.org

Customer Service: 800/628-7640