

CHAPTER 6

CREATION

The character and nature of God is discussed under the category of his attributes. What he does, especially in regard to our universe, is described as his decrees. God's decree is sovereign and all-encompassing. The decrees of God include two major categories, creation and providence. Creation is the bringing into existence of the universe; providence is his sovereign government of the universe. In this chapter we will discuss creation. In the next chapter we will discuss providence, and along with that, God's sovereign decree in general.

Creedal statement

The Apostles' Creed begins, "I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth." God's creating the universe is the first statement said about his activity. This statement is repeated in the other ancient creeds.

The Westminster standards have a fuller discussion of the theology of creation.

The catechisms relate the creation to the free exercise of God's will:

WLC 14, "How doth God execute his decrees? A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of his own will."

WSC 8, "How doth God execute his decrees? A. God executeth his decrees in the works of creation and providence."

Scriptures cited—Eph 1:11; 1 Pet 1:1-2; Rev 4:11

All three symbols describe the scope of God's work of creation:

WCF 4:1, "It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good." (citing Gen 1:1-3, and the whole chapter; Exod 20:11; Ps 104:24; Jer 10:12; John 1:2-3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; 11:3)

WLC 15, “What is the work of creation? A. The work of creation is that wherein God did in the beginning, by the word of his power, make of nothing, the world and all things therein for himself, within the space of six days, and all very good.”

WSC 9, “What is the work of creation? A. The work of creation is, God’s making all things of nothing, by the word of his power, in the space of six days, and all very good.” (The catechisms cite Gen 1; Heb 11:3; Rev 4:11.)

Only the Larger Catechism specifically mentions the creation of angels:

WLC 16, “How did God create angels? A. God created all the angels, spirits, immortal, holy, excelling in knowledge, mighty in power; to execute his commandments, and to praise his name, yet subject to change.” (citing Gen 1:31; Ps 103:20-21; 104:4; Matt 24:36; Luke 20:36; Col 1:16; 2 Thess 1:7; 2 Pet 2:4)

All three symbols of the Westminster standards include statements on the creation of human beings, but this subject will be studied more in detail in a different course.

Scriptural support for doctrine of creation

The Scriptures cited in the Westminster standards, along with some others, certainly teach the doctrine of divine creation:

Gen 1:1-3, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

The rest of the chapter continues the story of God’s creation of the world and its creatures. God speaks and it is done. In the text it appears to be miraculous and often sudden. In some places it follows natural laws and processes. In both cases God immediately guides the creation.

Exod 20:11, “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.”

The six days in view are the six days of Gen. 1.

Exod 31:17, “It will be a sign between me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he abstained from work and rested.”

Job 38-41 (an extended description and commentary on the creation, going through the creation days, and showing the present conditions resulting from that creation; e.g., Job 38:9 describes the early darkness during the first day)

Ps 104:24 (a creation Psalm), “How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures.”

Isa 45:12, “It is I who made the earth and created mankind upon it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts.” (also Isa 51:13)

Jer 10:11-12, “Tell them this: ‘These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens.’ But God made the earth by his power; he founded the world by his wisdom and stretched out the heavens by his understanding.”

God’s wisdom in creation; modern science shows the complexity and fine-tuning required; an important apologetic argument (teleological argument)

John 1:2-3, “He [the Word] was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.”

John 1:11, “He came unto his own (things), and his own (people) did not receive him.”

1 Cor 8:6, “For us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.”

Eph 1:11, “In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will.”

(all creation is thus the work of God, following his own will)

Col 1:16-17, “For by him [God the Son] all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Heb 11:3, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

Rev 4:11 (song of the twenty-four elders to God the Father), “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”

As shown above, the Scriptures teach that all three members of the Trinity were active in the creation. A. A. Hodge has assembled the following list (*Confession of Faith*, p. 82):

- God in general—Gen 1:1, 26
- The Father—1 Cor 8:6
- The Father through the Son—Heb 1:2
- The Father through the Spirit—Ps 104:30

[This passage may refer to the giving of new life in God’s providence.]

- The Son—John 1:2-3
- The Holy Spirit—Gen 1:2; Job 33:4

[Job 33:4 may also refer to the Spirit’s working in giving new life under God’s providence.]

Creation *ex nihilo*

All the ancient pagan creation accounts state that the gods existed within an already-existing universe, and that they used its materials to create the world. On the other hand, Scriptures teach that God existed before he created the universe:

Ps 90:2, “Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.”

John 17:5, 24, “And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. . . . Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world.”

Thus God pre-dates existing matter, energy, space, and time. It is hard for us to comprehend this truth, since time itself is a part of our universe. In our thought patterns “before time began” is an oxymoron. Yet the Bible speaks in these terms, no doubt accommodating itself to our language and popular thought. In some way, God’s existence transcends space and time, so that we can speak of him existing “before,” as well as “beyond” our universe, while still acting in our universe.

Since God existed before the creation, creation originally must have been from nothing (but God). This is creation *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”). This original creation has been termed *creatio prima* (“first creation”); the later forming of the original material into other forms (e.g., making Adam from dust) is then termed *creatio secunda* (“second creation”). What brought the original creation into existence was not some rearrangement of previously existing matter or energy, but a direct act of the will of God.

Ps 33:6, “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth.”

Ps 148:1-6, “Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights above. Praise him, all his angels, praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you waters above the skies. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He set them in place for ever and ever; he gave a decree that will never pass away.”

Some have sought to strengthen the Scriptural evidence for creation *ex nihilo* by asserting that the Hebrew and Greek terms for “create” (בָּרָא *bārā* and κτίζω *ktizo*) stand for creation from nothing, while the words for “make” (פָּשַׁע *‘āśāh* and ποιέω *poieo*) stand for forming from pre-existing matter. The problem with this argument is that, while it frequently follows biblical usage, there are places where the terms are used interchangeably.

Examples of interchangeability:

Gen 1:26-27—man: make in v. 26; create in v. 27

Gen 1:21, 25—create great fish, make beasts

Gen 1:20-21—create, waters bring forth

Gen 2:2-4—work he made, “created to make”

Gen 5:1—man—created, made

Isa 43:7—create, form, make

Isa 45:18—create heavens; form, make, establish, create earth

“God is said to have created the world, and also to be the maker of the heavens and the earth. Plants and animals are said to be created, although formed out of the dust of the earth.” (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:558)

It can be said that the strongest word for “create” (*bara*) in Gen 1 does imply the making of something entirely new, whether out of pre-existing material or out of nothing (Gen 1:1, 21, 27).

Two passages that seem to teach explicitly that creation is *ex nihilo* are in the NT:

Rom 4:17, “As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations’ (Gen 17:5). He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” (cf. Isa 40:6)

Some take this reference to teach that God “calls” the non-existent things by bringing them forth into existence—i.e., creating them. Others understand this verse as in C. Hodge:

“*To call* may here be taken in the sense of commanding, controlling by a word. The passage then expresses the highest idea of omnipotence. The actual and the possible are equally subject to his will; the non-existing, the merely possible, is as much obedient to Him as the actually existing.”
(*Systematic Theology* 1:560-561)

In either case, the power of God over matter is absolute, and its creation would be *ex nihilo*.

Heb 11:3, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

[for good discussion of this passage, see C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:259-260]

Modern theoretical physics and cosmology are wrestling with this same question. The prevailing theory teaches that at the Big Bang the universe came into existence from nothing; it exploded from nothingness, through a split instant when the whole universe was smaller than an atom, and on to its present size. The Roman Catholic Church has accepted this explanation, with God being the one who caused the Big Bang; this is also the view of many Protestants. To counteract this philosophical conclusion, some scientists have sought for a non-supernatural explanation for the cause of the Big Bang. For example, Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* has popularized the idea that the Big Bang could have happened without any cause; hence, while God possibly caused the Big Bang, it is not necessary to believe he did so. Hawking resorts to the use of imaginary time, which, he says, can go backwards and reverse the laws of physics, including the second law of thermodynamics.

The subsequent development of the universe along its present pattern has also caused much discussion, with some physicists (e.g., Paul Davies) seeing evidence of design and the guiding influence of at least some kind of god. This subject comes under the study of apologetics and evidences. (The *teleological argument* deals with *design* in the universe.)

The concept of the universe beginning from nothing is new to physics, but it has been taught for thousands of years in the Bible. The existence of the universe is compelling evidence for the existence of a transcendent Creator—above and outside of space and time. (The *cosmological argument* deals with the *existence* of the universe itself). The Bible is unique among all “holy books” in presenting the Triune God as transcendent over time, space, matter, and energy.

Purpose of creation

All God's decrees are designed "for his own glory" (WSC 7). This includes the creation. The creation not only glorifies the wisdom and power of God by its very existence, but also provides a platform for the display of his attributes in his works of providence, especially in his works of redemption.

Scriptures teach that the creation reveals God's existence, power, wisdom, benevolence (goodness), and glory. It provides an answer to false religion and to unbelief.

Ps 19:1, "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (and on through v. 6)

Ps 96:4-5, "For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens."

Ps 147:4-5, "He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit."

Isa 40:25-26, "'To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?' says the Holy One. Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing."

Acts 14:15-17, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

Rom 1:20, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Since God is glorified when his existence and attributes are employed in activity and are demonstrated, the creation results in glorifying God.

God was pleased with his creation—Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31

Isa 43:6-7, "Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

Rev 4:11, "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

As has been noted already, the primary purpose of the creation is not the happiness or even the holiness of God's creatures, but the manifestation of the glory of God himself.

Time of creation

This subject is filled with technical arguments and difficulties from various disciplines, and deserves a more detailed study than is possible in a course of this nature. However, systematic theology does have an interest in this question, since the various views do have theological assumptions and related conclusions. Only a survey of these views from a theological and biblical perspective will be possible here.

Concordism and non-concordism

Discussions of the time of creation involve both science and theology, representing general revelation and special revelation. Other courses discuss the relation of these two.

Concordism – science and theology both depend on interpretation (biblical interpretation and interpretation of natural evidence), and, when done properly, should agree in areas where they overlap.

Non-concordism – science and theology should each be interpreted on their own, without any effort to make them agree. Many hold to NOMA (“non-overlapping majesteria”), that science deals only with physical matters, and theology only with spiritual matters. Others say that, when there is a contradiction, one is always assumed to be true, while the other is wrong and must give way. The correct one may be science (for the naturalist), or may be theology (for the biblicist).

The normal Reformed view is concordism—that is, that these two forms of revelation are true, and therefore should agree in their interpretations where they overlap.

Non-chronological theories

Those who deny biblical inerrancy usually favor the mythical view, which states that the OT creation accounts are simply one of many Ancient Near Eastern creation myths, and has no relation to the actual creation or history of the universe.

The following views assume the truth of Scripture regarding the creation and history of the world. They differ in how the creation accounts are interpreted.

There are two views that state that Genesis 1 and related passages were not intended to teach a chronological version of creation. One of these, the framework hypothesis, promoted by Bruce Waltke, holds that Genesis simply gives in poetic form the totality, extent, and grandeur of

creation, without reference to the actual order of events. The narrative's primary purpose is to show God as the absolute Creator, and that he is sovereign over the spheres supposedly occupied by the false gods of the culture. This view holds that the Bible, as a work of faith, is not a source for scientific information, but rather is a theological interpretation of the beginning of the universe.

The other non-chronological view is the revelatory-day hypothesis, which states that God revealed to Moses in seven days what he did at the creation. The seven days have to do with God's speaking to Moses (or the author of Genesis 1), not with the creation itself. The actual order and duration of creation, according to this view, are not discussed in the Bible.

Both these views depend upon scientific theories and investigations for our understanding of the time and manner of creation, and consider the Bible to be of only minimal use in these questions, other than to assert that God in his sovereignty is responsible for the universe. Many theistic evolutionists hold these views.

A criticism of these views would be that they deny the teaching value and perspicuity of Scripture. The Bible seems to present a simple, straightforward account of the creation. To state that this account bears such a little relation to the actual events would seem to deny that the Bible is actually a revelation from God.

Extended time theories

There are two views that state that the creation process took billions of years (the most widely-held current scientific estimate is 4.5 billion years for the earth and solar system; 13.7 billion years for the entire universe), and that the Bible is speaking of these eons before or in the six creative days of Genesis 1. These views differ from the earlier views in that they suppose that Genesis 1 does describe the actual creation. But both of these views would deny that the creation took place over a short period of six consecutive 24-hour days only thousands of years ago.

The first of these theories is the day-age theory, also called progressive creationism. This view holds that a "day" (Heb. יוֹם *yôm*) can mean, in addition to a twelve or twenty-four hour period, a period of activity, extending longer than one literal day. This phenomenon occurs in most languages. Thus we have "the day of the Lord," which may include many years.

Also cf. Gen 2:4, "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" (ESV). The Hebrew text includes the word *yom*, literally, "In the day when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" (it is surprising that the NIV leaves out that word here). Note here that the word day includes the six days of creation in Genesis 1.

Other passages also could be cited, as Ps 90:4 (quoted in 2 Pet 3:8), "For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by," showing that a day with God could be a longer time with us.

Cf. letters from Allan A. MacRae, *Biblical Christianity*: #31, “The Creation—Six 24-Hour Days or Six ‘Age-Days’?” [pp. 80-84]; #34, “Did God Make or Merely Reveal His Work of Creation in Six Days?” [pp. 88-89]. See also Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days* (2004). For a detailed study of the Hebrew of Genesis 1 from the day-age perspective, see Rodney Whitefield, *Reading Genesis One* (2003).

There are some difficulties with the day-age view. Usually the Hebrew word *yôm*, especially when used in the plural with a number (as in Exod 20:11), refers to a 24-hour day, and the church historically has assumed that this was the meaning of the days of Genesis 1. Another difficulty is that the day-age theory, while providing for the time required by the modern scientific theories, may not agree with them in the order of creation. This would depend on the interpretation of the actual items created on the various days. For example, the earth is created on the first day; but the sun, moon, and stars are made on the fourth day, after the earth (in order to agree with the accepted scientific order, it must be understood that only the language of appearance from the earth is being employed; i.e., the sun and stars “appear” on the fourth day, as the atmosphere clears). Likewise, fruit trees appear the third day, while fish do not appear until the fourth day—an order that runs counter to the geologic column; and it must be postulated that Genesis 1 does not include insects, dinosaurs, or several forms of life. Old earth creationists and young earth creationists continue to debate these matters.

In order to deal with some of the difficulties of the day-age view, and yet to keep a long period of creation, some have espoused the intermittent-day theory (see, e.g., Hermann J. Eckelmann, Jr., and Robert C. Newman, *Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth* [1977]). This view holds that the creation took place over billions of years, as asserted by modern science, but that the days of creation in Genesis 1 are 24-hour days, but that they are separated from each other by long periods of time. Furthermore, some resolve scientific difficulties further. They state that the Genesis days are only days of God’s pronouncements to create, while the actual appearance of the items mentioned may not have come on those days, but millions of years later. Thus the order of creation in the Bible is not tied to the order in actual history. Both theistic evolutionists and creationists can hold this view. Creationists would maintain that each “kind” was created directly by God at the appropriate time, and did not evolve from another “kind.”

One view that seeks to maintain an ancient creation but still recognize the “days” of Genesis 1 as 24-hour days is the analogical day theory (William G. T. Shedd; Franz Delitzsch; C. John Collins, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* [2003]). This view holds that Genesis presents God as a workman, analogous to human workers, laboring six days and resting on the seventh. We still are in the seventh “day” of God’s creation rest. This picture of God’s work is analogous, in the same way that other Scriptures are anthropomorphic, with God’s having arms, eyes, etc. The net result is that creation is divided into various epics, but without the strict chronological harmony attempted by the day-age view. Yet it does support a general chronology, as opposed to the framework view.

Gap theory

Some have sought to harmonize the geologic ages with a literal six-day creation by positing an initial creation in Genesis 1:1, a long period of time with a pre-Adamic race of some kind, a great judgment on the earth, accounting for the geologic column and the fossils (Gen 1:2), and then a re-creation of the earth and its life (Gen 1:3ff). This initial judgment on the earth supposedly included the fall and judgment on Satan and his angels; supporting Scriptures cited include Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. The original edition of the *Scofield Bible* popularized this interpretation.

There are severe biblical and theological problems to the gap theory. The passages used to teach the judgment of Satan are better understood from their context to be poetic and exaggerated references to God's judgment on human kings (king of Babylon in Isa 14:3; king of Tyre in Ezek 28:2; cf. standard commentaries).

The structure of Genesis 1 allows Gen 1:1 to be a summarizing statement of the rest of the chapter, or, when linked with v. 2, a description of the situation at the beginning of the creation. The Hebrew waw-disjunctive, found in Gen 1 only in v. 2, indicates that the event was not a chronologically later development; cf. the other nearby waw-disjunctives (2:6, 10, 12), which confirm the idea that Gen 1:2 was not a further action after Gen 1:1.

The condition of the earth in Gen 1:2 (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ *tōhû wābōhû*, “unformed and unfilled”) does not need to be the result of judgement (as in Isa 34:11 and Jer 4:23), but only indicates the unfinished state of the earth's creation.

Against this gap view are other biblical arguments. According to Exod 20:11 all the creation occurred within the six days. Exod 31:17 specifically places Gen 1:1 within the six days. This six-day creation includes the heavenly beings as well as the earth. This fact disagrees with the gap theory, which places the creation of the heavens and the earth and the creation of the angels before the first day of Gen. 1.

Recent creation theory

The traditional Christian view has been that the earth was created in six 24-hour and consecutive days. The development of geology, evolutionary theory, and modern cosmology has led many Christians to abandon the 24-hour-day theory for one of the others discussed above. Yet there have always been Christians who held to what they believe is the most simple and straightforward interpretation of Genesis 1, that the universe was created in six 24 hour-day periods (cf. the quotation by Charles Hodge in the following section).

If Adam was created on the sixth day, it is possible to date the creation within a certain range using the genealogies in Genesis 5 and 11. These genealogies appear to have gaps, but even so, would point to a relatively recent creation for the creation of man, probably in the range of about 10,000-50,000 years ago.

The first significant denomination to dogmatically defend the recent creation view after the advent of modern geology and the evolutionary theory of Darwin was the Seventh-Day

Adventist Church, through its founder, Ellen G. White (see Gerhard Pfandi, “Ellen G. White and Earth Science,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Seminary* 14:1 [Spring 2003] 176-194). White believed that the flood of Noah accounted for the fossils and the earth’s appearance of age. Seventh-Day geological writer George McCready Price wrote the first large book supporting this idea (*The New Geology* [1923]). Flood geology was largely ignored by mainstream evangelicals. Recently, however, since the 1960s, a large movement has developed within evangelical Christendom called the Creationist school, promoting “scientific creationism” and incorporating flood geology. This viewpoint states that the recent creation of the world is not only biblically but also scientifically evident. Standard works include *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris (1961; incorporating and updating much material from Price’s *The New Geology*), and the continuing work and publications of the Creation Research Society (e.g., Henry Morris, ed., *Scientific Creationism*, also, James B. Jordan, *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One* [1999]). The largest para-church organization actively promoting this view is Answers in Genesis (www.answersingenesis.org). The standard history of this movement is Ronald M. Numbers, *The Creationists* (expanded edition, 2006).

The main difficulty with the recent creation view is that scientists generally consider the scientific evidence that the earth and the universe are very old to be overwhelming. The universe is so vast that light from the most distant galaxies has taken billions of years to reach us. Recent creationists explain this fact by saying that the laws of physics have changed, including the speed of light, that God created the light that we see to give the appearance of age, that relativistic physics can explain the fact that we see events taking place billions of light years away, or that the true scientific explanation has not yet been found. Most young earth creationists no longer hold to the “appearance of age” argument for distant events in space, since we would then be seeing an illusion, which would run counter to the truthfulness of God.

Quite a heated discussion has been going on now for about fifty years between Christian advocates of the recent and of the ancient creation of the earth. This argument involves both biblical and scientific studies, and shows few signs of abating. The primary difference between these two schools is the relation that exists between special revelation (the Bible) and general revelation (the universe). Recent creationists hold that the Bible is so plain in teaching the literal six-day creation that all scientific evidence must conform to that view or be held in reserve until further light is shown. Advocates of the old earth maintain that the scientific evidence for the old earth is overwhelming, and that the Bible’s interpretation may be adapted to it (they say this can be done without violence to the Bible).

Perspective on this controversy

While it is possible to be caught up in the intricate arguments surrounding the details of the time of creation, it is best to assert the primary biblical truths and be patient about the results.

The Bible does say that all of creation is God’s, that it came from nothing outside God, and that he made it during the six days of Genesis 1. The various kinds of living things are all created to reproduce the same kind, thus barring evolution from one kind to another.

The question of the precise date of creation is not one on which we can be dogmatic. The Bible does not specify a date, and the genealogies in Genesis, since they contain gaps, do not even allow a specific date for Adam, let alone a date for the beginning of creation.

As Christians we must maintain our allegiance to the Bible, even when current opinion is against it; this is true in all areas, including history and science. Time and again God has given evidences and encouragements to his people that this faith is not misplaced. On the other hand, we must be willing to correct faulty interpretations of the Bible, as many churchmen (Catholic and Protestant) had to do after the demise of the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, when Galileo demonstrated the correctness of the new theory by observations through the newly invented telescope. The early Princeton theologians may have been hasty to adopt the geologic ages as fact, but they still exercised and advised caution before changing a biblical interpretation:

[discussing the nebular hypothesis for the formation of the solar system] “But when the question is asked, How long was the universe in passing from its chaotic to its ordered state? such diversity is at once manifested. According to the more obvious interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis, this work was accomplished in six days. This therefore has been the common belief of Christians. It is a belief founded on a given interpretation of the Mosaic record, which interpretation, however, must be controlled not only by the laws of language, but by facts. This is at present an open question. The facts necessary for its decision have not yet been duly authenticated. The believer may calmly await the result.” (C. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* 1:557-558)

In discussing the six days of creation, referred to in the *Westminster Confession*, A. A. Hodge likewise suggested patience:

Since the Confession was written the science of geology has come into existence, and has brought to light many facts before unknown as to the various conditions through which this world, and probably the stellar universe, have passed previously to the establishment of the present order. These facts remain in their general character unquestionable, and indicate a process of divinely regulated development consuming vast periods of time [note his acceptance of the current scientific opinion]. In order to adjust the conclusion of that science with the inspired record found in the first chapter of Genesis, some suppose that the first verse relates to the creation of the elements of things at the absolute beginning, and then, after a vast interval, during which the changes discovered by science took place, the second and subsequent verses narrate how God in six successive days reconstructed and prepared the world and its inhabitants for the residence of man [the gap theory]. Others have supposed that the days spoken of are not natural days, but cycles of vast duration [day-age theory]. No adjustment thus far suggested has been found to remove all difficulty. The facts which are certain are: (1) The record in Genesis has been given by divine revelation, and therefore is infallibly true. (2) The book of revelation and the book of nature are both from God, and will be found, when both are adequately interpreted, to coincide perfectly. (3) The facts upon which the science of geology is based are as yet very imperfectly collected and much more imperfectly understood [a situation which still exists]. The time has not come yet in

which a profitable comparison and adjustment of the two records can be attempted [the same position his father took]. (4) The record in Genesis, brief and general as it is, was designed and is admirably adapted to lay the foundation of an intelligent faith in Jehovah as the absolute creator and the immediate former and providential ruler of all things. But it was not designed either to prevent or to take the place of a scientific interpretation of all existing phenomena, and of all traces of the past history of the world which God allows men to discover. Apparent discrepancies in established truths can have their ground only in imperfect knowledge. God requires us both to believe and to learn. He imposes upon us at present the necessity of humility and patience.” (*Confession of Faith*, pp. 82-83)

So while the Princeton theologians personally favored the old-age creationist approach, they did recognize that all the data was not yet in. More careful exegetical and theological study, along with new data and arguments from the natural world, continue to correct and refine our thinking as “iron sharpens iron.”

[There has been an ongoing controversy in several Reformed churches about this question, as it relates to the interpretation of subscription to the Westminster standards. For a very good discussion of this matter, see two articles by J. V. Fesko, “The Days of Creation and Confessional Subscription in the OPC,” *WTJ* 63:2 (Fall 2001) 235-249, and “The Legacy of Old School Confession Subscription in the OPC,” *JETS* 46:4 (Dec. 2003) 673-698.]

Position of the Bible Presbyterian Church

At its inception in 1938, and through most of its history, the Bible Presbyterian Church did not have a stated policy on this matter. Ministers and churches taught different views, including the gap theory, the day-age theory, and the 24-hour day theory. The denominational seminary, Faith Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, gave reasons for the various views, with a preponderance of the faculty favoring the day-age view.

However, with the popularization of the flood geology model of earth history during and after the 1960s, the recent creation position gained more adherents in the Bible Presbyterian Church, and that view now has become the preponderant view of the Synod. The first Synod resolution dealing with this subject was adopted in 1999:

“The Westminster Confession of Faith instructs us that, *It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good*, Chapter IV, par. 1.

“Following the view that Scripture is its own best interpreter, we believe the six creation days in Genesis one, referred to in the Confession of Faith, are days of ordinary length when we compare the same words used in the fourth commandment in Exodus 20. This

is an inspired interpretation for understanding the days of Genesis. *For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day, wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.*

“The Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Beza) uniformly held to literal day length creation. No Westminster Assembly divines are on record holding to anything other than a literal interpretation of the creation days.

“We further take note that when the Hebrew word *yom* is modified by a number such as six days or the third day, as it is 359 times in the Old Testament outside Genesis one, it always means literal days.

“Therefore, we the 63rd General Synod of the Bible Presbyterian Church, meeting in Orchard Park, NY, August 5-10, 1999, believe it is important to place this synod on record in a matter that has become so important in the Presbyterian and Reformed churches and do so with this brief resolution.”

More recently, the 2004 Synod has by resolution reaffirmed this position:

“While we recognize that Christian men of character and ability have held to various views of the length of days in the creation account, the Bible Presbyterian Church, General Synod, affirms that the Scriptures and our subordinate standards, the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, teach that God created the world in the space of six sequential days of ordinary length in perfect maturity, and rested (ceased) from His creating all things ‘out of nothing’ on the seventh day of ordinary length.”

In July, 2003, in response to the position taken by the Bible Presbyterian Church, the Seminary board adopted this policy:

“WRS recognizes that both scientists and Bible students are divided on the length of creation days in Genesis 1. While not sitting in judgment on the orthodoxy of those who hold that the creation days were not of ordinary length, WRS as an institution holds to the view that the creation days are literal, twenty-four hour days. In common with ordinary instructional practice, other views will be addressed, but the seminary will promote only the twenty-four hour interpretation, which many trained in various disciplines of science also subscribe to. The seminary takes this position believing that it is consistent with accepted hermeneutical principles and with the Westminster Standards.”

This policy allows academic freedom for its faculty, and the presentation of the best arguments for all the various views held by orthodox Christians, but makes it clear that the seminary as a whole holds to and will promote the recent creation view. Additional arguments for this view are provided in the seminary’s classes in Old Testament.