

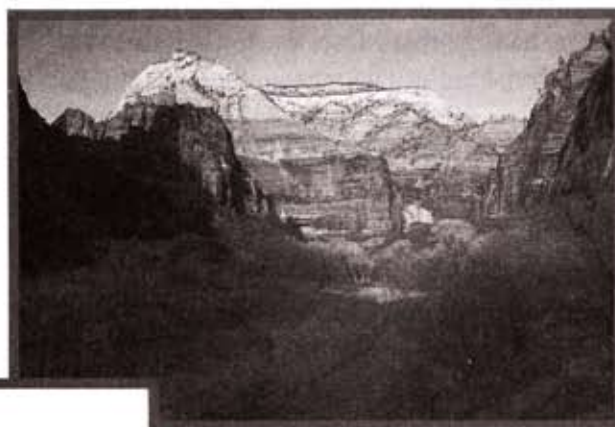
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INTRODUCTION

Geologist H.H. Read prefaced his book on the granite controversy a few decades ago with these words, “Geology, as the science of earth history, is prone to controversy. The study of history of any kind depends upon documents and records. For the history of the earth’s crust, these documents are the rocks and their reading and interpretation are often difficult operations.”¹

This book analyzes one such controversy, and an extremely important one at that, during the first half of the 19th century in Britain, which has sometimes been called the “Genesis-geology debate.” At that time a tenacious and denominationally eclectic band of scientists and clergymen (and some were both) opposed the new geological theories being developed at the time, which said that the earth was millions of years old. These men became known as “scriptural geologists,” “Mosaic geologists” or “biblical literalists.”

The label “scriptural geologists” is preferred since three of their book titles used these terms and it was the most common label used by their contemporaries and by later historians. However, we need to be aware of the label’s liabilities. It has not always been used carefully, resulting in confusion and inaccurate analysis. Calling them scriptural geologists obscures the fact that some of them were competent geologists while others were not (and did not claim to be). Conversely, it sometimes is and was used by opponents to imply, erroneously, that these men all developed their objections to old-earth geological theories solely on the basis of Scripture. Also, at least one of their contemporary critics, an old-earth geologist, also described himself by the same title.² Finally, a few of their contemporary critics and several later historians have lumped scriptural geologists together with their opponents under

1 H.H. Read, *The Granite Controversy* (1957), p. xi.

2 For example, see various letters by a Christian geologist, to the editor of the *Christian Observer* in 1839: Jan. (p. 25–31), Mar. (p. 145–148), April (p. 210–216), June (p. 346–348), July (p. 471–474). He obviously wanted to be considered by his fellow Christians as a “scriptural” geologist, even though he advocated an old-earth view.



THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT



Before considering some of the individual scriptural geologists, we need to consider the intellectual and religious background and the history of geology leading up to the early 19th century, the cultural milieu at that time, what the Bible commentaries on Genesis were saying, and the marks of geological competence in the early 1800s.

INTELLECTUAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

The controversies in early 19th century Britain regarding the relationship of the early chapters of Genesis to the geological discoveries and theories did not, of course, take place in a vacuum. They were part of a complex movement of thought with philosophical, theological, social, political, and ecclesiastical dimensions, which pulsed through the educated minds of Europeans in general and of Britons in particular. The following highlights some of the most important people, events, and currents of thought leading up to and contributing to a revolution in world view which profoundly affected the 19th century Genesis-geology debate.

THE GALILEO AFFAIR

Shortly before his death in 1543 and with some hesitation, Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), the Polish mathematician and astronomer, published *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*, in which he argued that the earth was not the center of the universe, as generally believed, but rotated on its axis and revolved with the other known planets around the stationary sun. Over the subsequent decades, opposition to his theory (as a description of physical reality, rather than merely as an alternative mathematical description) arose because it seemed contrary to common sense, was opposed to Aristotelian physics, lacked convincing astronomical evidence, and was contrary to a literal interpretation of various Scriptures. Approximately 150 years passed before his theory was generally accepted. But it was soon embraced by Johannes Kepler (1571–1630) and Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), though the latter was at first reluctant to publicize his views.

In 1613, Galileo finally came out in the open in his *Letters on Sunspots*. He argued that his observations of the heavens by means of the recently



THE GREAT TURNING POINT

"Whenever a group of people is so severely castigated by contemporaries and later historians, the student of history can be excused for being just a little suspicious that maybe there could be another side to the story."

Propaganda is usually a term that we associate with foreign enemies. It suggests a slanted version of the truth. In its milder forms, propaganda can be termed "bias," and can come from within the Christian community.

Bias is a good word to describe the various positions taken within the Church regarding creation and evolution. We're all biased. The question is, whose bias is the truth?

Since the rise of the modern creationism movement, the attempt to remind clergy and laity that God's Word is not in conflict with science, it has been popular in some circles to charge that "young-earth creationism" is a recent invention, as if it were not the dominant view of the Church for centuries, rooted in Scripture itself. *The Great Turning Point* sheds light on a time when dramatic and dangerous compromise weakened Christendom.

Dr. Terry Mortenson has published an explosive body of research that proves young-earth creationism is not "young," so to speak, but was believed by Bible-believing scientists in Europe and America hundreds of years ago. This is the opposite story told by leading scholars on both sides of the Atlantic. It is a story that will open eyes and hearts to the veracity of God's Word.



Dr. Terry Mortenson was born and raised in Owatonna, Minnesota. He studied math and was led to Christ at the University of Minnesota. In 1975 he joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ and ministered to college students, first in America for four years and then for nearly two decades in Eastern Europe. He earned an M.Div. from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Chicago (1992) and a Ph.D. in the history of geology from Coventry University in England (1996). In 2001 he became a speaker, researcher, and writer for *Answers in Genesis* in Kentucky. He and his wife, Margie, have five daughters and three sons.

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