

The False Hope of a Mature Creation

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Strike up a conversation about the age of the earth with nearly any group of evangelicals and you are sure to get a lively discussion. There may be a young earth defender who will pull out some Ken Ham top-10 proofs of a young creation, some will claim to be agnostic on the topic while others will say that they accept the evidence that the earth is very old. Many evangelical pastors recognize that the evidence for an old earth is quite strong and yet there is a real fear of how acceptance of an old earth might push them into uncomfortable territory regarding other origins questions. The result is that many pastors assiduously avoid the topic. When prodded for their opinion they often may reach for what appears to be a get-out-of-jail free card but in the end, I would argue, satisfies no one.

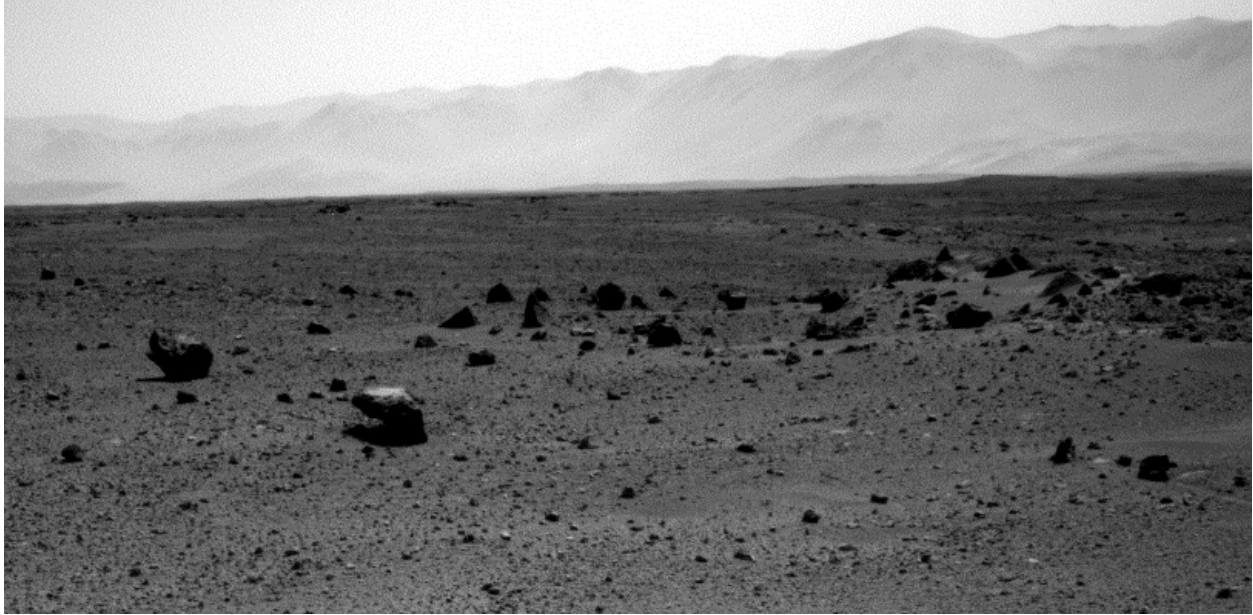
I'm talking about the appeal to a mature creation or creation with the appearance of age. At first glance the appearance of age argument might seem to permit a person to recognize most of the findings of modern geology and yet still believe that the physical origin of the earth was very recent. This argument then singularly eliminates the need for the many contrived theories of flood geology to explain all of the geological features of the earth in the context of their origins in less than 10,000 years.

It's a seductive explanation. After all, who could deny that anything created from nothing or molded supernaturally into its present form would necessarily have an apparent history that didn't reflect its true history? No physical object could be created without the appearance of having a past.

For example, were Adam and Eve created as adults, of course they would have to appear as if they had had a childhood and parents. Presumably a peek at their genetic code would reveal further evidence of this apparent history such as variations of genes that appear to have been inherited. Or would they? Consider if Eve were literally constructed from the flesh of Adam, would she not be a genetic clone of Adam? It would seem so, but as a female we would expect that part of her difference from Adam would have to be the result of real physical-chemical differences in addition to different set of sex chromosomes. As such we would have to conclude that even the genetic material of Adam would have to have been re-sculpted or created new by God to enable female physiology including the ability to carry offspring. Undoubtedly then, an investigation of Adam and Eve would strongly suggest Eve had a history



separate from Adam and thus for any strictly literal reading of Genesis Adam and Eve would have to have been created with an apparent history.



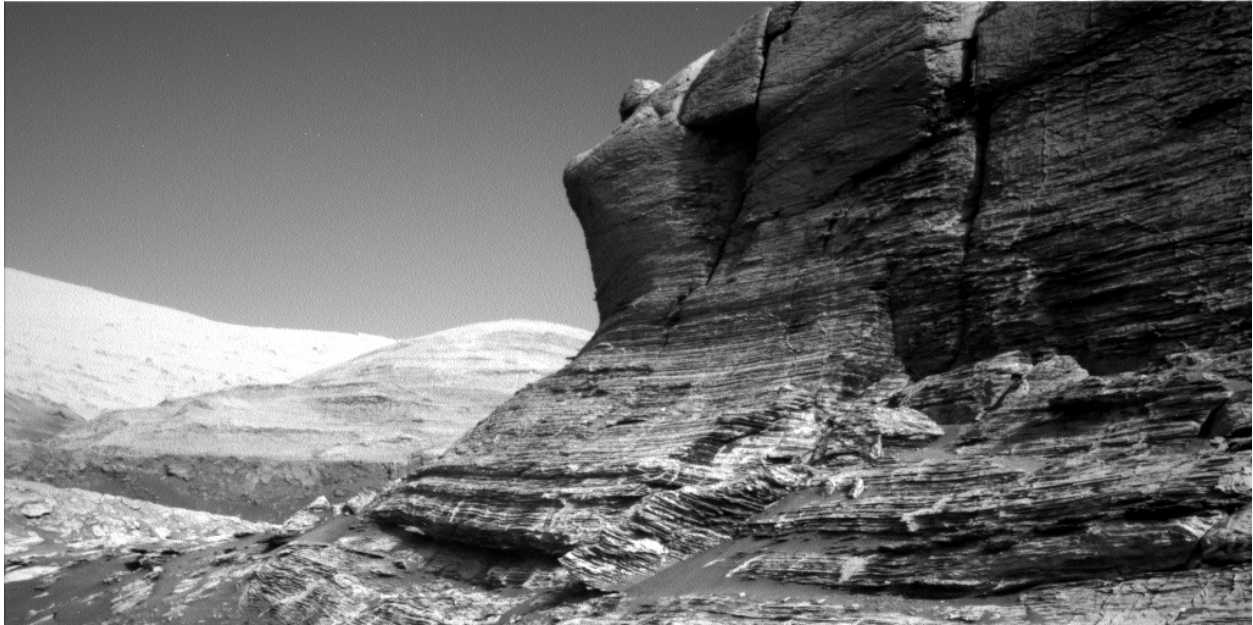
The surface of Mars as seen from inside the Gale Crater by the rover Curiosity on October 8th 2013. Image courtesy of: JPL/NASA-CalTech

An appeal to appearance of age is most often made to avoid the ramifications of the evidence for an old earth or solar and stellar evolution. For example, the Moon appears as if it has had a long history of being bombarded by asteroids and meteorites and thus undergone a long a difficult history. But if created with apparent age the cratered appearance speaks not to a history of bombardment but only an apparent history.

The solar system is full of examples of physical features that appear ancient. Look at the image of Mars above which was taken by the Curiosity rover that has been roaming across the floor of a large crater on Mars. The boulders you see in the foreground could be interpreted as having been tossed onto the surface from a meteorite impact crater seen just to the right. These rocks in turn are sitting on many layers of sedimentary rock that appear to have been produced under diverse conditions over time. All of these rock layers are found on the floor of a nearly 100 mile-wide crater called Gale Crater. Simple logic requires that this huge crater must have formed before the events that formed all the sedimentary rock layers, the small crater and the boulders lying on top of the other rocks. The rocks in this picture tell a story, it is a story of specific historical events that did not occur simultaneously. Did all these events happen in just the past 6000 years? There is no remotely plausible scenario which can compress all of this



history into such a short time frame. So what is the origin of this scene on Mars? The choice is rather clear: Either Mars is exceedingly old in real years or it was created with the appearance that a series of historical events were the cause of the present features of Mars.



This image was taken by Left Navigation Camera onboard NASA's Mars rover Curiosity on Sol 3076 (2021-04-01 20:12:52 UTC). **Image Credit:** NASA/JPL-Caltech

The obvious and usually intuitive nature of the evidence that points toward an immense age of the Earth or other members of our solar system has tempted many Christians who are convinced of the young age of the Universe to appeal to creation with apparent age. But if apparent age is a feature of an object's creation how should or can we evaluate where apparent age ends and real history begins? For example, take the image above.

Astrogeologists suggest that over the last 10,000 years the conditions on Mars have changed little from what they are observed today. If this is the case, if we run the clock back 6000 years to where young earth creationists (YECs) place the origin of Mars, what you are seeing above may be almost exactly what God created the day this planet came into existence except for a millimeter or two of dust and tiny bit of erosion.

Possibly some conditions may have changed in the recent past or there may have been some meteorite impacts in the past 6000 years. So it is possible that the 100 mile-wide crater and the layers of rock deposited in it are all part the created apparent history but the small crater just off to the right in the first image and the rocks knocked out of it represent real historical events. In the end, anyone appealing to the creation of Mars with apparent age will have to say that



the dividing line between apparent history and real history cannot be determined because the data collected from both the real and apparent histories are both consistent with their being real historical events. It is this inability to divide reality and illusion that has been one of the main reasons to reject creation with the appearance of age.

Ken Ham of young apologetics ministry *Answers in Genesis* would disagree with the stark choice that I presented above. He doesn't agree that anything looks old but rather "have we simply been indoctrinated to believe it looks old?" Furthermore, "by saying the universe looks old, you are trusting that dating methods can give us an apparent old age for the universe—but they can't."¹ So he and other young-age creationists believe that the evidence either exists already or will be found in the future to show that the features of Earth and probably even Mars can be explained as the result of events that have occurred within the past 6000 years. He doesn't deny that the original creation must have had some "maturity" but he and his team of young-age apologists have been at a loss to provide a functional definition of how that created maturity is fundamentally different than creation with the appearance of history of specific events.

Ken Ham has good reasons to distance himself and YECs in general from appealing to creation with apparent age. First, for YECs, God would seem particularly deceptive if he had created much of the world we see with the appearance of being very old. Very simply, YECs believe, almost universally, that the Scriptures require that the death of all animals was the result of Adam's sin. They view the original creation as deathless (for breathing and blood-bearing animals at least) and thus very unlike our present world. As a result, he reasons that any evidence of death in the world must be the result of activity after Adam's creation and fall.

Furthermore, since Adam was created the sixth day and fell into sin sometime soon thereafter they are obliged to assign any of the geological features of the earth that contain fossils to some point after the creation week. This is because they accept that fossils are the remnants of formerly living thing and thus cannot represent part of the original creation. Since most mountains today have fossils contained in them it is argued that God could not have created the mountains or practically any other geological formation we see today during the original creation week. An appeal to apparent age, in their mind, is an admission that God imagined the world as containing cycles of death prior to the physical creation which conflicts with their view of the world prior to the fall.

There is a second reason that creation with apparent age is avoided and in YEC circles in particular. That reason stems from the fact that the same hermeneutic that results in a young



Earth reading of Genesis 1 also necessitates the reading of the Noahic Flood as a global event. This matters for the simple reason that if there was a global Flood it is only reasonable to expect there would be global effects of that Flood. If the world were created with an appearance very similar to what we see today, then a global flood would become problematic because it would appear to have made no impact on the features of the Earth. YECs expect to see massive changes in the physical world as a result of this Flood and so have little reason to try to push the geological features of this Earth back into the creation week.

An Example: The Origin of the Hawaiian Islands

Let us take up one example of how appealing to apparent age doesn't solve any problems. Did God create the Hawaiian Islands directly or were they produced over a period of time by secondary causes? The Hawaiian Islands are a chain of volcanic islands that visually appear to be of different ages and many other sources of data agree with this observation. Faced with an onslaught of evidence for the antiquity of the Hawaiian Islands but wishing to maintain a belief in a young earth many Christians are tempted to exclaim that God created the Hawaiian Islands on the second day of creation but that they appear to be much older.

This is more than just a mere appearance of maturity but rather the appearance of long string of historical events such as a specific and testable series of volcanic eruptions combined with erosion, subsidence and changing sea levels. Agreeing that they were created to look old one could accept that the radiometric dates and all the other inferences that led to the belief that the islands were old were correct interpretations of the facts. Except that the study of the islands was, in reality, the study of an implanted history rather than literal history. This does raise the interesting but somewhat vexing observation that if you were to visit that most active volcano on Hawaii that you could be walking along on a series of prior lava flows from the past and the first you step up onto could represent one that really had been liquid lava at one time but the next step you take could bring you to step onto a lava flow that had never flowed but simply been created to appear as if had been flowing lava in the past. Chemical ratios and pieces of plant material trapped in the lava all would point to an apparent history of this lava so that you would never suspect it were not real and you would have no way of knowing when you had crossed that boundary between apparent history and real history.

At this point advocates of a mature creation think they found a way to accept the findings of science but have maintained a traditional belief that the Earth has only been in existence for 6000 years. Of course, Ken Ham and most other YEC would say this is not good enough. They could quickly point out that had the Hawaiian Islands been formed on the second day of



creation then those islands must have endured the Noahic Flood and yet there is no evidence (in this case they choose to accept the evidence of secular science!) that these islands were ever covered by the ocean. Not wanting to appeal to miraculous preservation of the islands in their present form, YECs generally deny special creation of the Hawaiian Islands and virtually all other recognizable geological features on earth. Instead they insist that the Hawaiian Islands were formed after the global flood and are thus less than 4000 years old. This is in complete contradiction with numerous sources of evidence and necessitates the YEC anti-intellectual response to the scientific community.

Ken Ham and other young-earth leaders leave the lay Christian who recognizes that there is evidence that the Hawaiian Islands and other geological features on the Earth in a very difficult position. Clearly if they were formed less than 4000 years ago then they cannot appear to have been created as part of a mature creation. Ken Ham has presented Christians with a stark choice (millions of years or literally very young) and left them with no way to appeal to apparent age.

Appeals to creation with apparent age don't seem to satisfy anyone. YECs recognize its shortcomings and old earth creationists have no need to appeal to apparent age other than for specific cases of God's miraculous interventions in his creation (water to wine, etc...). Despite this, my experience is that large numbers of Christians use apparent age as a means of helping them avoid making hard choices on the question of origins. Many recognize the problems with young-earth creationism but aren't ready to rethink the implication of an old earth on their faith and so take the easy way out with apparent age. Anyone who is working at the grass roots level to help people to work through origins questions will recognize that the apparent age question is one that must be dealt with before any substantive progress can be made in making people confront their origins in a meaningful way.

1. Ken Ham "Mature for Her Age" Published Augst 25, 2008 on the *Answers in Genesis website* and archived here: <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v3/n4/mature-age>

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