

REVIEW & PREVIEW

Old-Earth Creationism on Trial: The Verdict Is In

Tim Chaffey and Jason Lisle

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Reviewed by Mark R. Kreitzer, D.Miss., Ph.D.

Director, International M.Div. (English)

Kosin University, Busan, Korea

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Copernicus and Galileo laid down the gauntlet for Evangelical Christians believing in the inerrancy of Scripture. Are the Scriptures perspicuous with respect to cosmology, cosmogony (origins), and the age of the earth? Many since that time have made a step by step retreat from the absolute authority of the Bible, while thinking that the Gospel message is still being preserved. It is no different with the contemporary generation.

In this volume, Jason Lisle is the scientific authority, while Tim Chaffey is the writer and editor. According to his blog, Lisle seems to be competent and credentialed:

[Jason Lisle] is a Christian astrophysicist who writes and speaks on various topics relating to science and the defense of the Christian faith. He graduated summa cum laude from Ohio Wesleyan University where he double-majored in physics and astronomy and minored in mathematics. He then earned a master's degree and a Ph.D. in astrophysics at the University of Colorado in Boulder....He now works (beginning in April, 2012) as director of research at the Institute for Creation Research. (<http://jasonlisle.com/about-lisle/> (accessed 8/24/2012)).

Although the book is written for laymen, it is philosophically sophisticated, worldview competent, and uses a form of Vantillian presuppositionalism with which I heartedly agree. For the authors, Scripture is the ultimate foundation for authority not the consensus of human scientists: "The Bible alone provides the philosophical foundation for logical thought and scientific inquiry" (Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 15). In the Introduction, Lisle and Chaffey set out the methodology of the volume as following "loosely...the procedures of a court case" with the pro's and con's of the ancient universe perspective. Each case will then be "cross-examined in the light of Scripture" (Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 14). After discussing preliminary issues such as why this issue is important, what the attitude of brother to brother dialogue should be and when the battle between old and young earth believers began (decades before Darwin, they claim),

they then issue the foundational reason for the volume: “Old-earth creationists certainly claim that the battle is not over the trustworthiness of Scripture the interpretation of it. However, the following chapters will show that the battle is truly over the trustworthiness of God’s Word” (Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 20).

The main interlocutors (debate partners) with the authors, thus, are Ancient Universe Creationists (AUC)¹, such as Evangelical Astrophysicist, Hugh Ross. In the first chapters of the book, the authors, whom I will term RUC’s (Recent Universe Creationists),² start with a solid foundation in classic Reformational hermeneutics. They then state the teaching of Scripture on the relatively recent age of the earth (about 6000 years in their opinion), the universality of the Noahic flood, and the counter-arguments of those evangelicals who teach that the Scripture can be interpreted to mean otherwise. In other words, AUC’s teach that immense ages, animal death before Adam, and a local flood could very well be within the parameters of what Scripture teaches. They then try to accurately survey the AUC position on each of these issues and show how the classic RUC position more adequately represents a biblical position using classic Reformational hermeneutics (see Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 53. 64). They rightly critique and reject AUC authors, who begin with the consensus of scientists and then seek to reinterpret Scripture in the light of this authority. They also correctly reject those who claim an agnostic position on the age of the earth.

Next they deal with most of the objections to a recent universe position, such as the fact that scientists had already come to know that the earth was ancient a generation or two before Darwin. Last, they also discuss the inadequate view that scientific consensus is a virtual 67th book of Scripture with equal authority to the perspicuous (“plain reading”) of Scripture (Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 155). They counter by showing that the reading of the rocks by non-believing scientists is through a worldview grid which colors their thinking. Two basic principles that these scientists use are uniformitarianism and naturalism. In other words, everything in the past can be explained using observed rates in the present. The second presupposes that everything observable today must be interpreted without reference to a transcendent Creator and without reference to any religious book, even one that purports to be an eyewitness account.

¹I prefer the acronym AUC to OEC or Old Earth Creationist.

²I prefer this to YEC (Young Earth Creationist).

Last, the authors attempt to refute the consensus arguments against a relatively recent universe such as radiometric dating, tree ring dating, distant starlight, big bang expansionism from a “no size” “singularity” (Chaffey and Lisle 2008, 144), and such arguments as “the earth looks old.” Though in the main adequate, this section could be revised. In addition, the arguments against distant starlight could be revised. I recommend that they carefully study and take into account the arguments of Philip Stott’s, *Vital Questions* and John Byl’s, *God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space, and the Universe*.

Apart from these criticisms, however, I highly recommend this volume as based on sound hermeneutics, an excellent grasp of the philosophy of science, and faithful exegesis of Scripture. I recommend that this volume be put into the hands of high school and college students struggling with the issues in an introductory manner. Laymen in the churches struggling with understanding the age of the universe and why the classic inerrantist position is defensible and extremely important to hold to, especially in our mission to Muslims, should read it as well. Even open-minded post-bachelor scholars would be helped in an introductory manner especially as they begin follow-up study using some of the bibliographic materials at the end.