

Ken Keathley is at it again. His latest blog post, “The Extent of Noah’s Flood: the Geological Evidence (Part 1)”, is an excerpt from the book he coauthored with Mark Rooker, *40 Questions about Creation and Evolution*. I addressed some of the major concerns with the book in a review for *Journal of Creation* (see *Irreconcilable records of history and muddled methodology*). But even with a relatively high upper limit of 3000 words, I could only scratch the surface of the book’s problems. Keathley’s July 13th 2018 post provides an opportunity to make some further commentary on old-earth creationism.

It should go without saying that nothing herein is meant as an attack on Professor Keathley or his personal profession of faith. It is a critique of his doctrinal compromise and inclination toward middle-of-the-road positions, seemingly motivated by a desire for unity within the body of Christ.

Use of the term, *Young-earth creationism/creationist (YEC)* designates belief in a 6000 year old earth and global flood (Of course, in my opinion, this is more properly termed “biblical creationism”, but in keeping with standard terminology and Keathley’s own phraseology, I will frequently use the “YEC” designation).

Old-earth creationism/creationist (OEC) designates belief in billions of years and a localized flood that left no significant geological footprint.

Professor Kenneth D. Keathley is Professor of Theology and Dean of Graduate Studies at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and a former young-earth creationist. Today he rejects the position he once promoted of a literal six day creation and global flood. It has been my contention that a Christian’s belief in billions of years results from an unjustified elevation of the “wisdom of this world” (1 Cor. 3:19) coupled with a compromised or arbitrary hermeneutic (I have written about Keathley’s transition to old-earth creationism [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#) and will not attempt in this post to reiterate a defense of this contention).

The red herring of Seventh Day Adventism

Right out of the gate, Keathley cannot resist the opportunity to find YECs guilty by association, thus tainting the readers’ perception of the development of the modern “young-

earth creationist movement". He notes that John Whitcomb and Henry Morris "borrow[ed] heavily from George McCready Price (1870-1963), a Seventh-Day Adventist author".

Old-earth creationists seem to have an obsession with Price and over-emphasize his influence upon those of us who actually believe that God created the universe in six days, and that the global flood was actually, well, global.

Theodore Cabal and Peter Rasor, for example, devote a disproportionate amount of space to Price in their rejection of young-earth creationism in the 2017 book, *Controversy of the Ages*. Reference to Price is made on pages 134—37, 139—42, 152, 168, and 211 (see my refutation of Cabal and Rasor's book in 'Faltering between two opinions: the epistemological conundrum of old-earth creationism'[1]).

Back in 1985, OEC Alan Hayward wrote that

"It was mainly the Seventh-Day Adventist author, George McCready Price, who kept recent-creationism alive in the USA during the early twentieth century."[2]

Now let's consider for a moment the fallacy of this guilt-by-association tactic. Alan Hayward happens to be a Christadelphian.[3] Yet I'm pretty sure that Keathley, Cabal and Rasor would not appreciate young-earth creationists trying to make the case that old-earth creationism must be wrong because such a view was promoted earlier by Alan Hayward, the Christadelphian. Since, even a stopped clock is right twice a day, Price's rejection of billions of years of geological prehistory in favor of a relatively recent creation happens to be consistent with the biblical record of history; such has nothing at all to do with his own adherence to Adventism.

I happen to believe the SDAs are also correct in their interpretation of the prophecy regarding the "man of sin" as being fulfilled in the papacy. That does not make me a Seventh-Day Adventist, nor does it mean the SDAs invented this interpretation of antichrist, nor does it even imply that I acquired this view from their literature. Belief in a recent creation and global cataclysmic flood was the position of millions of Christians long before Adventism ever existed, simply because they believed in the plain biblical record of history. And the teaching that the papacy is the antichrist is a centuries old tenet of Protestantism. SDAs have embraced it while modern evangelicalism largely repudiates it in favor of Jesuit

futurism.

Somewhat similarly, in an earlier paper[4], Keathley tried to tie YECs to dispensationalism since many of the modern YEC movement's early proponents were dispensationalists. But those of us who repudiate dispensationalism can (and should) still hold to a "young"[5] earth by virtue of the clear testimony of Scripture. Belief in a young earth does not necessitate dispensationalism, or vice versa. In fact, as I have shown elsewhere, dispensationalists historically were not all in favor of taking the Genesis creation narrative as straightforward history:

"In noting Morris and Whitcomb's opposition to uniformitarianism...Keathley says of this 'new' YEC movement that 'flood geology and young-earth creationism fit very well within the premillennial worldview of classic Dispensationalism which dominated evangelical thinking for much of the 20th century' (p. 2).

...Firstly, whether or not young-earth creationism 'fits very well' within classic Dispensationalism is irrelevant to the truthfulness of the Bible's record of a recent creation and global flood. Certainly, 'young-earth creationism' is not a new position but was the dominant view of Christians for most of church history.[6],[7] Secondly, it can be argued that the opposite of Keathley's assertion is true, despite Whitcomb and Morris' own embrace of that 'unified interpretive scheme'.[8] It was actually the work of premillennial Dispensationalist C. I. Scofield through his Scofield Reference Bible which had been in large part responsible for indoctrinating multitudes of Christians with the gap theory 'as a means of reconciling the Bible with modern geological theories'.[9]

Weston Fields noted that 'Probably no reference Bible...has ever been as broadly distributed in the English-speaking world. ... The inclusion of this [gap] theory in the Scofield Bible is most unfortunate, for it has led so many into believing a theory which was tailored to harmonize science in its present fluid form and the Bible in its immutable form.'[10]

Since 1909 Scofield's work 'has been the doctrinal touchstone for believers in the pre-millennial [sic] dispensationalist...system'.[11] And according to O.T. Allis, even John Nelson Darby accepted the gap theory.9"[12]

Allis also noted that

“While Dispensationalists are extreme literalists, they are very inconsistent ones. They are literalists in interpreting prophecy. But in the interpretation of history, they carry the principle of typical interpretation to an extreme which has rarely been exceeded even by the most ardent of allegorizers.”[13]

For the purpose of severely beating a dead horse, consider this: If one wanted to criticize premillennialism, pointing out that Jehovah’s Witnesses are premillennial would be a poor method of attack since premillennialism does not depend on the heretical teachings of the Watchtower Society.

All of this to say—to belabor the point, since old-earthers can’t seem to stop talking about George McCready Price—Seventh Day Adventism has nothing to do with YECs’ belief in the Bible’s straightforward record of history. Please, old-earthers, stop talking about Price and start exegeting the text of Scripture.

Propositional truth or empirical data

Regarding the positions of YEC Andrew Snelling and OECs Young and Stearley as articulated in their respective books examining the geological data, Keathley says that

“Snelling and Young often present the same geological data—the geological column of the Grand Canyon, the mid-Atlantic ridge, coral reefs, etc. But they almost always arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions.

... As it stands now, the dissonance between the two geologists and their respective books is so great that one has to wonder if they are looking at the same planet.”

This is the point that old-earth creationists seem to miss again and again. Snelling and Young arrive at “diametrically opposite conclusions” because they are each wearing different glasses. It is not ultimately about the physical evidence; the physical evidence is interpreted in light of a worldview. That statement is not code for, “just believe the Bible and don’t worry about it”. It is a reality acknowledged by both Christian apologists and secular philosophers alike. Evidence does not speak for itself. The “worldview lenses” one is

wearing will determine how evidence is interpreted.

Obviously, Andrew Snelling is looking at the geological evidence through the lense of Scripture. He cannot help but see massive geomorphological structures (such as the Grand Canyon) as a consequence of a global flooding event. No other event in recorded history would have left such a geological footprint. On the other hand, Young and Stearley (and Keathley) view the evidence with a different epistemology. For them, “science” somehow has something to offer in the way of propositional truth. But rocks don’t say anything. Their shape, size, composition, etc., must be seen as fitting comfortably within a particular worldview or incongruous with it. But even if an old-earthier has a theory which appears to accommodate what he views in nature, that does not prove that his theory (being *a priori*) is true.

Again, rocks don’t say anything. The Bible, on the other hand, does. And it says quite clearly

“For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11).

It also says that

*“...The waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and **all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered**. The waters prevailed fifteen cubits upward, and **the mountains were covered**. And **all flesh died that moved on the earth: birds and cattle and beasts and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died**. So He destroyed **all living things which were on the face of the ground: both man and cattle, creeping thing and bird of the air**. They were destroyed from the earth. **Only Noah and those who were with him in the ark remained alive**. And the waters prevailed on the earth one hundred and fifty days” (Genesis 7:20-24).*

Could God have been any clearer that the Noachian Flood was not confined to the Mesopotamian Valley?[14]

Retreating flood waters of such incredible magnitude could easily account for the geomorphological landscape of earth's surface. If secularists can propose a geological model to suit their fairy-tale evolutionary worldview, that's just fine. But Keathley and other OECs need to decide which worldview they will embrace. They can't have both. Neither the Genesis narrative nor the doctrine of inerrancy will allow it.

The cancer of compromise

Keathley's attraction to middle-of-the-road solutions is not limited to his analysis of biblical history and geological deep time but has spread to other areas of theology. His soteriology is likewise compromised by the Jesuit inspired philosophical paradox of molinism.

I was first exposed to this soteriological synthesis when I read *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*. That led me to Ken Keathley's *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*. Initially, I thought Keathley's soteriological middle-ground had some merit, but upon further inspection it appears to be nothing more than another example of compromise and amalgamation of two mutually exclusive theological systems.[15]

It is my opinion that Professor Keathley has more of an affinity for "common ground" than he does for clarity, doctrinal precision, and a consistent view of inerrancy. His advocating of a "mediating position" in his book on creation culminated not in biblical and logical consistency but in confusion and contradiction. He even tried to argue that Ken Ham of *Answers in Genesis* believes in evolution, again trying to show common ground where there is none. While he has defended biblical authority on more than one occasion, he will not consistently maintain it to the exclusion of his deep time beliefs about the Genesis record. Keathley is determined to reconcile the irreconcilable. Matthew Barrett's assessment of Keathley's soteriology similarly describes his protology and bibliology:

"Keathley's middle way proposal [molinism] is unbiblical and theologically inconsistent."[16]

The more time I spent trying to understand molinism the less time it took me to become convinced that the Calvinists were the most biblical, systematic and logically consistent in

how they handled the doctrine of election. Without getting into the details, molinism is essentially a compromise position between Calvinism and Arminianism, or perhaps one might prefer, between monergism and synergism. Molinists would probably roll their eyes at such an overly simplistic description, but the point is that the Jesuit inspired “dialectical tension” created by molinism is another attempt to reconcile the irreconcilable.

I concluded my review of Keathley and Rooker’s book in this way:

“In an age where ecumenism, irrationalism, dialectical tension and faltering between two opinions have become the hallmarks of academia,[17],[18] Keathley and Rooker’s approach should be warmly received. Now, one can simply admit that the plain reading of Scripture supports a young earth and global Flood while simultaneously embracing deep time.[19] Since the rise of neo-orthodoxy, blatant contradictions have often been termed ‘paradoxes’, thus prompting no further investigation or criticism.[20]

Keathley and Rooker[21] advocate a ‘mediating position’ favourably quoting the following statement by Bruce Waltke: ‘To be sure the six days in the Genesis creation account are our twenty-four-hour days, but they are metaphorical representations of a reality beyond human comprehension and imitation’ (p. 164). I suppose the vast geological eons can fit themselves comfortably into the metaphorical representation beyond human comprehension. Unfortunately, such preposterousness often passes for profundity. And, since all compromise positions have been shown to fail by doing injustice to the biblical text, affirming two contradictory histories simultaneously may be the most satisfying ‘solution’ for those impressed with empiricism but unwilling to renounce inerrancy openly.

In the authors’ defense, and as Keathley reminded me in his email, the book is intended to be an overview of various creationist positions. It is not a commentary on the book of Genesis and the authors never promised a systematic defense of their position(s). As providing a summary of various perspectives and the common objections raised against them the book is of considerable value. However, the reader must be content to accept the dichotomy between a fairly honest exegesis on one hand and a capitulation to the wisdom of fallen man on the other. Most significantly, the authors’ epistemological method is not one which should be followed by the Christian who claims to stand on the authority of the Bible.”[22]

- [1] Faltering between two opinions: The epistemological conundrum of old-earth creationism; book review of *Controversy of the Ages*, by Theodore J. Cabal and Peter J. Rasor II, *Journal of Creation* 31(3):28-32, 2017..
- [2] Hayward, A., *Creation and Evolution: Rethinking the Evidence from Science and the Bible*, Bethany House Publishers, 1985, p. 77.
- [3] Sarfati, J., *Refuting Compromise* (updated and expanded) Creation Ministries International, Powder Springs, GA, 2014, p. 117.
- [4] Keathley, K., *The confessions of a disappointed young-earth*, 2013.
- [5] “Young” is a relative term. 6000 years seems pretty old to me, which is why I put the word in quotes, but I suppose it’s extremely young compared to billions of years.
- [6] “While Morris and Whitcomb may be responsible for the resurgence of the young-earth creationist movement in the 20th century, their book [does not] account for the history of interpretation that clearly documents that the young-earth view was the mainstream and dominant interpretation right up until the time of the enlightenment.” Kulikovsky, A.S., In the beginning...they misunderstood, *Journal of Creation* 28(2):50, 2014.
- [7] See Mortenson, T. & Ury, T.H. (Eds.), *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2008, chs. 1 & 2.
- [8] Erickson, M.J., *Christian Theology* (2nd ed.), Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI, 1998, p. 1168.
- [9] Allis, O.T., *Prophecy and the Church* (1969), Wipf and Stock Publishers, Eugene, OR, 2001, p. 287 endnote 14.
- [10] Fields, W., *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory* (1976), Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 2005, p. 43.
- [11] Penn, L., Premillennial Dispensationalism, *Spiritual Counterfeits Project Journal* 37(3)-37(4):7, 2014.
- [12] Sabato, N., A theologian’s disappointing departure from biblical creation, *Journal of*

Creation 28(3):120-121, 2014.

[13] Allis, ref. 9, p. 21.

[14] For anyone unfamiliar with OEC argumentation, there is an important reason why they must regard the Flood as local and not global. If the Flood were global, it would erase all of the supposed evidence for billions of years. The geological data interpreted as evidence of deep time could not be thus interpreted if the rocks were formed in recent history. That is why when the Creation narrative of Genesis was compromised, the Flood narrative of Genesis also had to be compromised. They needed to get rid of the Flood to retain their supposed evidence for an ancient earth.

[15] See Nettles, T.J., A serious and respectful interaction with Kenneth Keathley, *Founders Journal* 81:3-33, 2010.

[16] Barrett, M., Review of *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, by Kenneth Keathley, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53(2):437, 2010.

[17] "The dialectical ['theologians'] of neo-orthodoxy ... taught that two opposing thoughts could be held in the mind at the same time. They called this feat 'dialectical tension'. So this great term 'dialectical tension' not only gave rise to all kinds of contradictory statements being made but, even worse, it destroyed the perspicuity of Scripture, the basis of true systematic theology." Cooke, R., *Sola Scriptura and the Rebellion in the Modern Church*, Truth International Ministries, Max Meadows, VA, p. 22, 2006, p. 23.

[18] "Who embraces the middle? Obviously, it is those who reject extremes. It is those who are sensible, respectable, whose judgment is sound. It is those who think carefully and critically. In short, the middle is a very comfortable place for scholars; it matches the scholarly disposition." Lloyd, V., The rhetoric of the middle, *Syndicate* 1(3):58, 2014.

[19] For instance: "The fundamental tenet of the day-age theory is that the creation of the universe took place over long periods of time. *While this point may be conceded due to the abundance of scientific evidence*, Carl F.H. Henry made the important observation that neither Christians nor secularists believed in the vast antiquity of the universe before the nineteenth century" [emphasis added] (p. 123).

[20] “In [the] ‘theology of paradox’, God can even teach us through false statements. Contradiction is even asserted by Brunner to be the hallmark of truth.” Crampton, W.G., *The Scripturalism of Gordon H. Clark*, The Trinity Foundation, Unicoi, TN, p. 24, 1999.

[21] I am perfectly willing to be corrected as to what their position(s) actually are, but I am constrained to use the information which the authors have made available, which includes a personal email exchange with Keathley [dated 3/8/2015]. Again, if Rooker does indeed lean towards young-earth (p. 23), he does not (in this book) call into question, for instance, the legitimacy of the standard geologic timescale.

[22] Sabato, N., Irreconcilable records of history and muddled methodology; book review of *40 Questions About Creation and Evolution*, by Ken Keathley and Mark Rooker, *Journal of Creation* 30(1):23, 2016.

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