

# Can A Christian Believe in Evolution?

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# The Biblical Claim

- The bible asserts that death came into the world by human sin(1 Cor 15:21) and death by sin (Rom 5:12).
- Rom 8:22ff asserts that by this same event (the Fall of humanity) all of the creation was subject to death (the bondage of decay)
- That Salvation is possible only in Jesus Christ (Rom 3)

# The Problems that Evolution poses

- No historic creation of humans
- No historic Fall that results in universal sin among humans (and creation)
- Death is not a consequence of the Fall but is a natural state of all life
- No hope of an eternal life (or second coming)
- No need for Christ as Savior
- The Bible is not reliable or valid for soteriology (salvation) – the plan of salvation has no historic basis in the past and no hope in a future reality

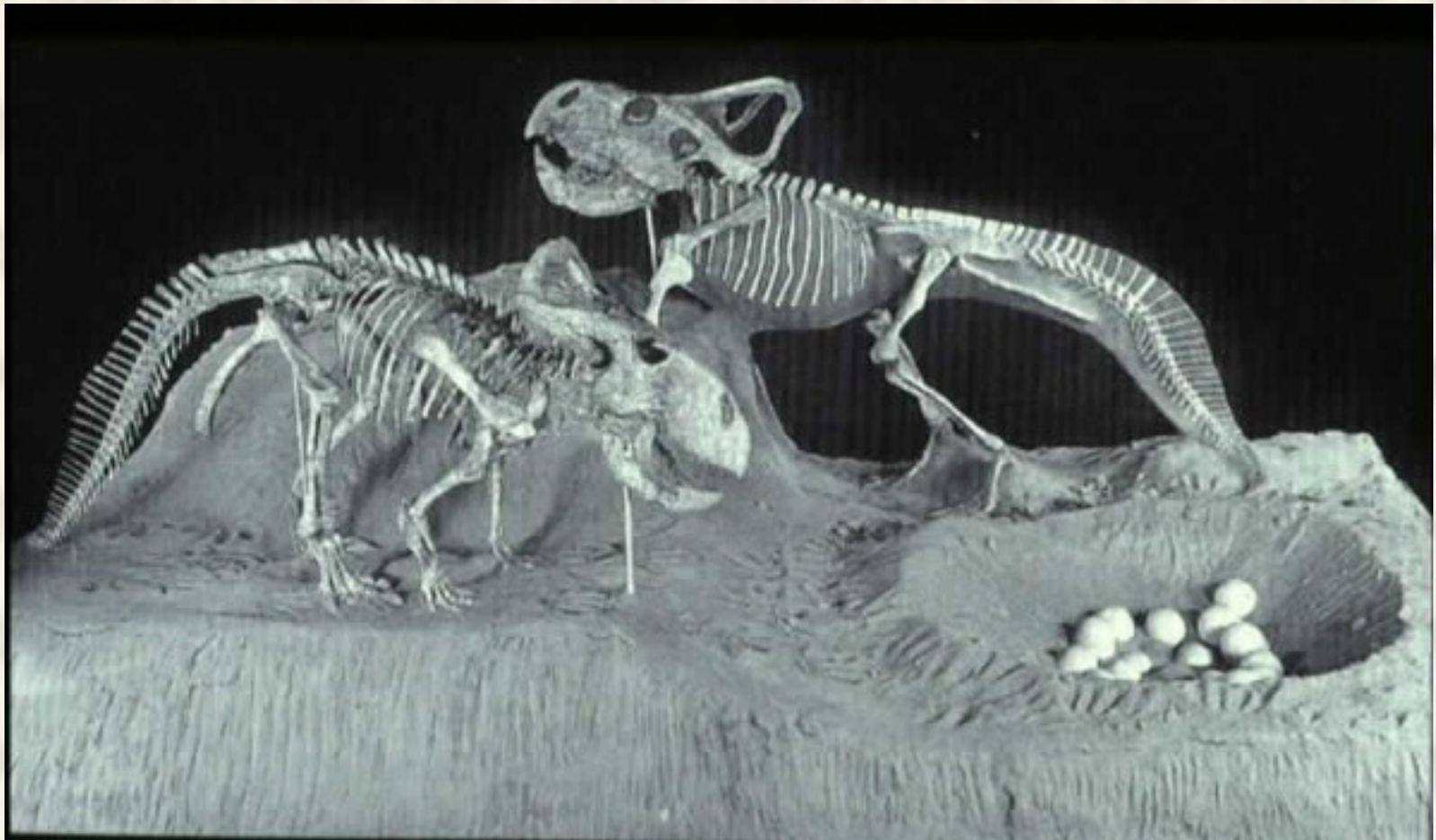
Does the Bible know  
of Death prior to the  
Fall?



# Geologic Column seems to represent ancient death



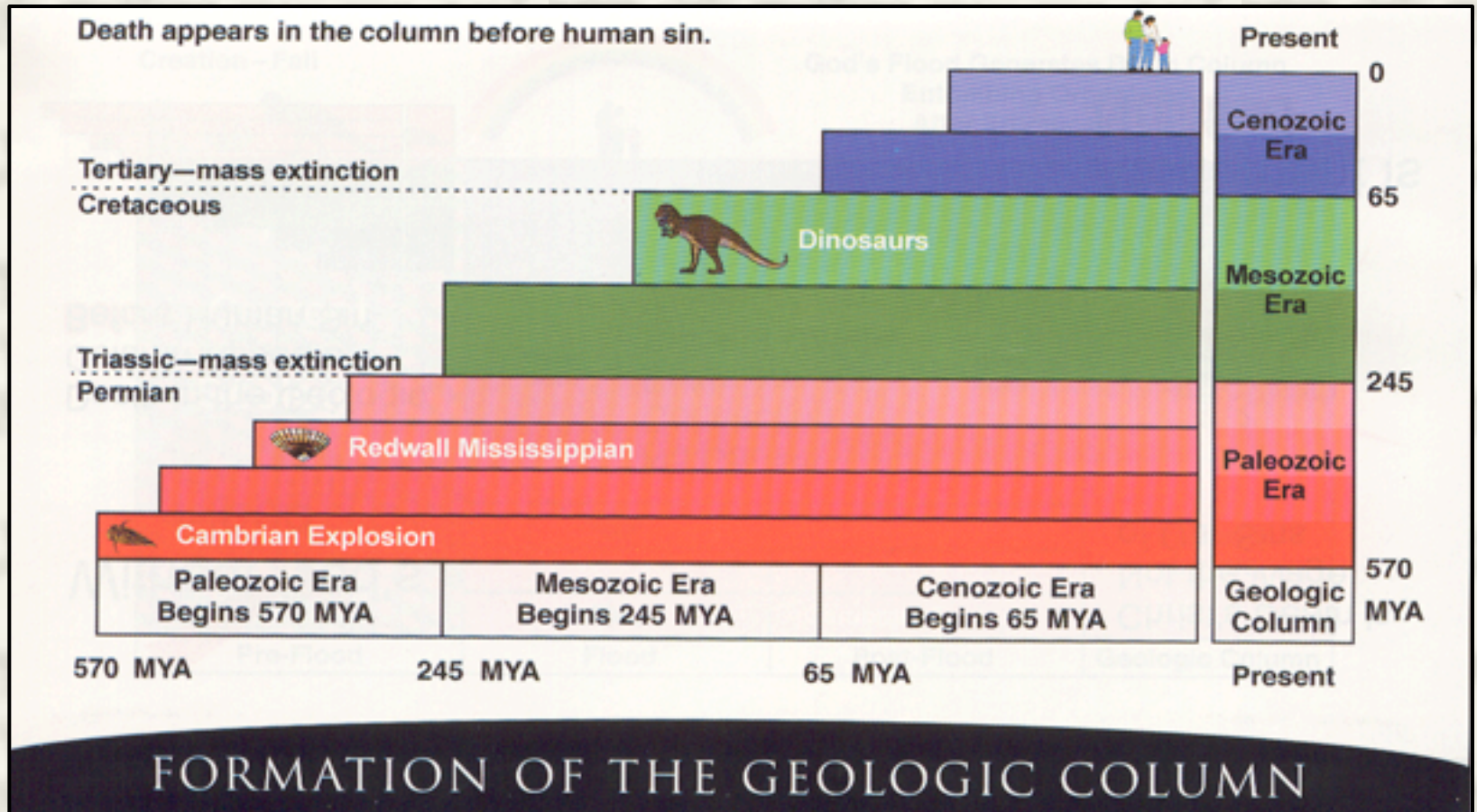
**Dinosaurs died millions of years  
*before* mankind existed**



# Mass Mortality Layers are found throughout the geologic column



# Death before Origin of Humans in Evolutionary Theory

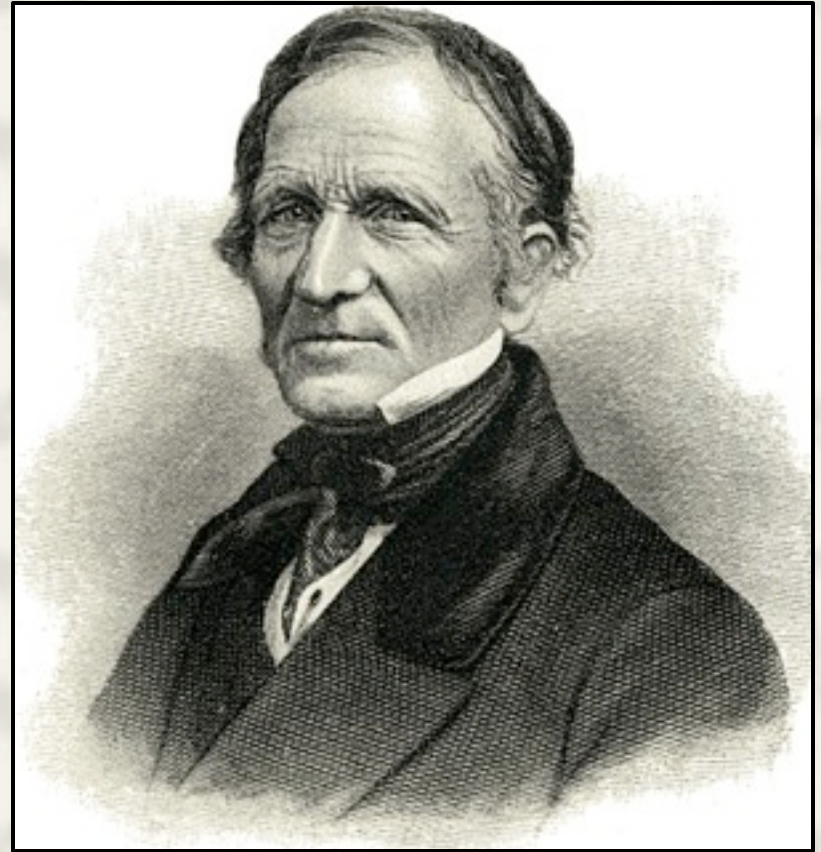




# Edward Hitchcock

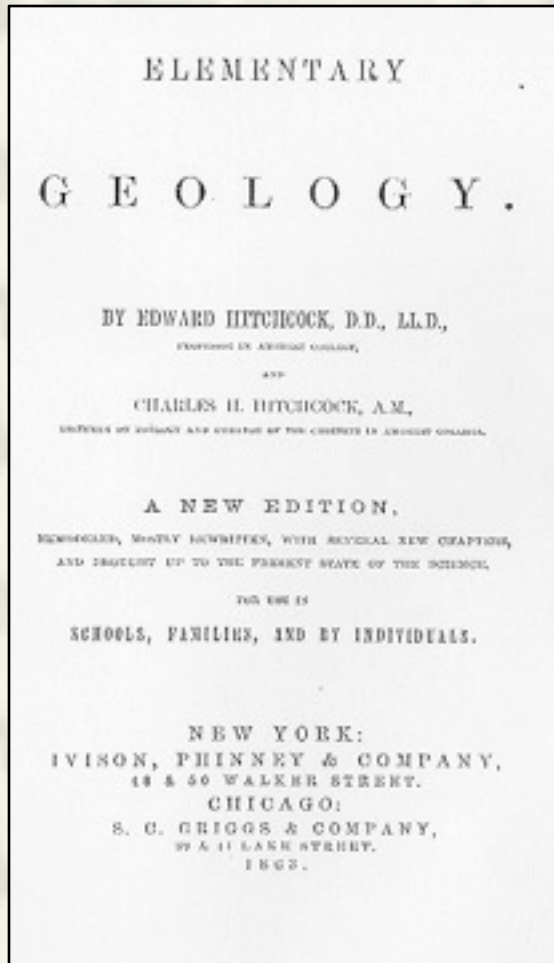
(1793-1864)

As early as 1840 Dr. Edward Hitchcock – a theologian and geologist (and President of Amherst College, Mass. ) – clearly saw the implications of the new science of geology for theology and addressed these in his book, *Elementary Geology*



# *Elementary Geology*

(Edward Hitchcock 1840: 273)



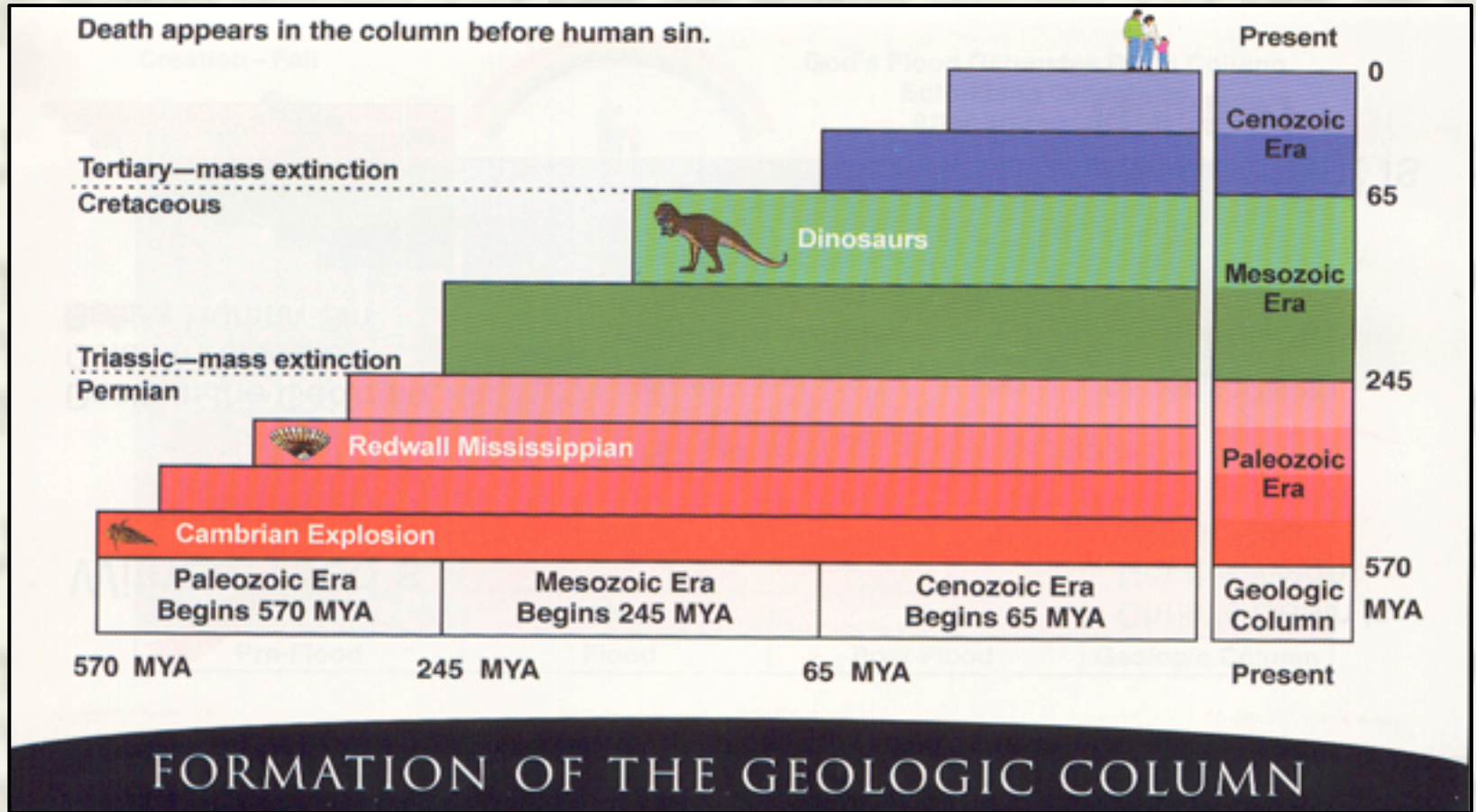
# *Elementary Geology*

(Edward Hitchcock 1840: 273)



- “The general interpretation of the Bible has been, that until the Fall of man, death did not exist in the world even among the inferior animals. For the bible asserts that by man came death (1 Cor 15:21) and by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin (Rom 5:12). But geology teaches us that myriads of animals lived and died before the creation of man.”

# How can the Geologic Column be explained within Bible View?



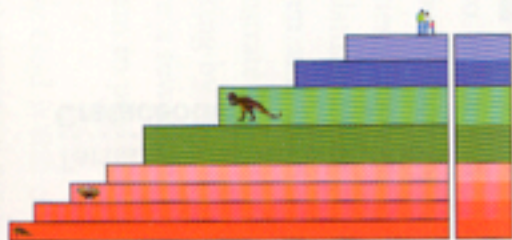
The Bible describes a unique global catastrophe known as the mabbul – if historically true, it would be expected to leave its mark on the earth – flood geologists argue that the mabbul is responsible for a good part of the geologic column and the dead organisms it holds



# Post-modern Evolutionary View

~~Without God's Flood~~

Death in the Geologic Column Appears **Before** Human Sin



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No Causal Connection Between Sin and Death—Wages of Sin Is Not Death

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Christ's Death Is Not the Wage of Our Sins



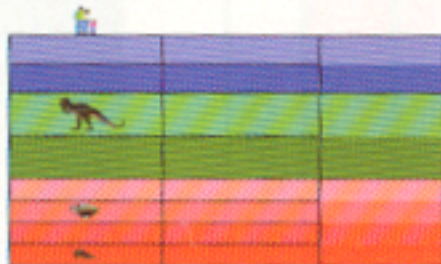
Atonement Is **Nullified**

# Great Controversy Worldview Creation/Flood/Salvation



With God's  
Flood

Dead Forms Entombed  
in the Geologic Column  
**After** Human Sin



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Causal  
Connection  
Between  
Sin and Death  
Is Real

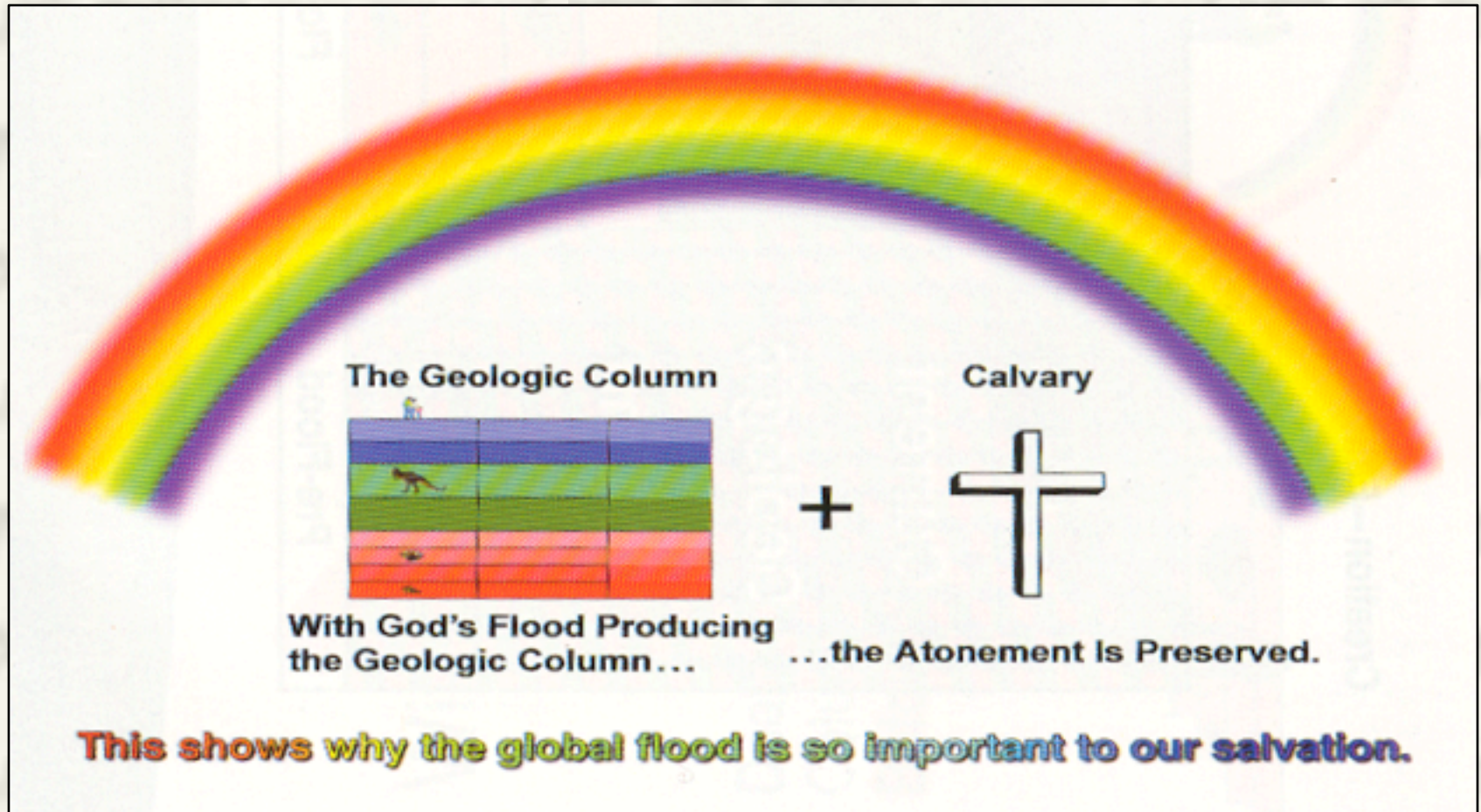
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Christ's Death Is  
the Wage  
of Our Sins



Atonement Is  
**Preserved**

# Flood Explains Geologic Column--Preserves Cross







- A denial of the historicity of Genesis not only denies the Flood but also the first historicity of the first week of creation and the story of the Fall as well as the creation of the **first historic humans** who were responsible for introducing sin into the human race;



- this in turn denies the spread of sin from that first human couple, the introduction of death into the world, and the need for the cross – at least it denies how these things have been traditionally explained by mainstream Christianity for centuries.

# Jesus and the Fall

- Historically, Christians have traced their sinful condition and need for Jesus to the event known as the Fall (Gen 3).  
Christians believe that somehow, the results of the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God were passed on to all of their biological descendents —

# All have sinned

– as Paul says in Romans 3:23, we all need Jesus “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

# Original Sin



The church father Augustine attempted to explain the phenomena of how all of Adam and Eve's descendents became sinners in his doctrine of Original Sin.

# Original Sin



- This teaching as led to a considerable amount of theological discussion and controversy which is our well beyond our present discussion. In brief, however, there were two central components to Augustine's teaching:

# Propensity to sin



(1)--that all human kind inherit Adam's actual guilt for his rebellion; (2) that humans inherit from Adam a *tendency* to continue sinning – as Ellen White puts it – a *propensity* to sin – is the common lot of all humans.

# All are sinners



- While Adventists have *not* subscribed to Augustine's idea that we inherit and are condemned for Adam's *personal guilt* that derived from his own act of rebellion, we *have* maintained that we do inherit a sinful *nature* with a propensity to sin that is so irresistible that we will inevitably commit our own sinful acts.



# All need Christ



- Because of this inherited sinful nature, we need Christ's death on the cross to forgive us our own sinfulness, and the grace of His Spirit to help us overcome our natural sinful tendencies.

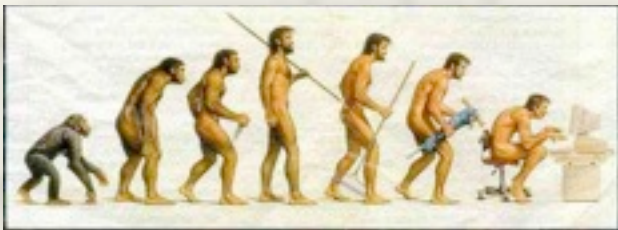
# Theistic evolution – no historic Fall



- Theistic evolution, on the other hand, has no place for an historic Adam and Eve nor a historic fall. To fully appreciate this, it is important to understand how most physical anthropologists explain the origin of humans

# No Historic Fall

- In brief, they do *not* believe that a single pair of human beings evolved into existence. Rather, it was an *entire population* of hominids that somehow became isolated from a “parent” population and due to a variety of factors, evolved into a new species that



# John Hick



- John Hick: "Until comparatively recent times the ancient myth of the origin of evil in the fall of man was quite reasonably assumed to be history" (John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love*, [London: Macmillan, 1966], p. 283).

# John Hick



- This view, says Hick, is "open to insuperable scientific . . . objections . . . We know today that the conditions that were to cause human . . . mortality [death] . . . were already part of the natural order prior to the emergence of man and prior therefore to any first human sin" (ibid., 285).



# Hans Kung

- The famous Catholic theologian Hans Kung, quotes with favor his fellow Catholic theistic evolutionist, Karl Schmitz-Moormann as follows: "The notion of [the] traditional view of redemption as reconciliation and ransom from the consequences of Adam's fall is **nonsense** for anyone who knows about the evolutionary background to human existence in the modern world" (Hans Kung, *Credo* [New York: Doubleday, 1993], p. 22).



# Hans Kung

- Karl Schmitz-Moormann tells us what the new meaning of redemption must be: Salvation "cannot mean returning to an original state, but must be conceived as perfecting through the process of evolution" (Karl Schmitz-Moorman, "Evolution and Redemption: What Is the Meaning of Christian Proclaiming Salvation in an Evolving World?" *Progress in Theology* 1, No.2 [June 1993]: 7).

# Biblical Support?

- Is it possible to reinterpret the Bible so that it supports a non-historical soteriology (plan of salvation)
- Many have tried – especially, a certain group of Evangelical Christians!



# Today there are Three Basic Hermeneutical Divisions

- Orthodox Evangelical – Bible as it reads it true (Adventists historically here)
- Neo-orthodox, Neo-evangelical, Neo-Reformed, Young Evangelicals – Bible not intended to be read literally in many cases
- Liberal – Bible intended by authors to be as it reads, but modern man knows it is not true

The Hermeneutical divide on Genesis was vividly illustrated by a debate between Plantinga and



# Ernan McMullin



- McMullin is the John Cardinal O'Hara Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Notre Dame
- “the great majority of contemporary Scripture scholars agree [that to interpret early *Genesis*] literally or quasi-literally is to misunderstand the point that the writers of those narratives were trying to make”

# Alvin Plantinga



- However, world renowned philosopher **Alvin Plantinga** directly challenges his Notre Dame colleague and points out that **both conservative *and* liberal** biblical scholars hold that the author of Genesis intended to be understood **literally**.



- “First, of course, there are whole coveys of phalanxes of conservative critics — e.g. E.J. Young and G.C. Aalders — who think that the writers(s) of Genesis meant to teach much more than that creation depends upon the Lord (There was of course, Thomas Aquinas, who took early Genesis to teach that God created the world in six 24 hour days.) But the same goes for their more liberal colleagues.”



# Alvin Plantinga



- **Plantinga** then quotes three representatives from different periods of OT scholarship – Julius Wellhausen, Herman Gunkel, and James Barr. According to Wellhausen:

# Julius Wellhausen



- “[the author of Genesis] undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denied that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author.”

# Herman Gunkel



- “People should never have denied that Genesis 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened”



# James Barr

Distinguished Professor of Hebrew Bible Emeritus  
Vanderbilt Divinity School



- “To take a well known instance, most conservative evangelical opinion today does *not* pursue a literal interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these day being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights . . .”

# James Barr



- “... so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the **writer(s)** of Genesis 1-11 **intended** to convey to their readers the ideas that:

# James Barr



(1) creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience

# James Barr



(2) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story

# James Barr



(3) Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguish all human and animal life except for those in the ark.'



# Barr's point

- Plantinga reminds us that Barr's statements are within a context in which "he means to discredit the 'fundamentalists' or 'evangelicals' by showing that they profess to take Scripture at its literal word, but in this case clearly do not do so, since it is obvious (at any rate to those professors at world class universities) that the writer(s) of Genesis meant to assert the three things Barr mentions."



## Barr's point

- It is important to note that both Plantiga and Barr are actually referring to Neo-evangelicals, -- they are not aware of Geisler's distinctions of the divisions within the evangelical community and both Barr and Plantiga clump them all together



- In other words, Barr believes that the author of Genesis *intended* to describe things in a historical-literal way, but he [Barr] doesn't believe it because of modern science.





- Ironically, secular liberals are at least more faithful to the text – they will acknowledge that the writer intended to be taken literally, but according to modern science, he was simply wrong

# Why the Difference of Opinion?

- Here I can only speculate but I suspect that the philosophers like Mullen are more driven by the findings of science than the exegetical demands of the text. Here I would point out an observation that I have noted recently – while it is not 100%, I have noticed that those theological scholars who feel more free to re-interpret Genesis in a non-literal fashion are *not* usually trained as Hebrew, Old Testament or Ancient Near Eastern scholars – rather, they tend to be trained in some area of theology – systematics or philosophy ,etc.

# An Evangelical Problem

- I have also noticed that the *non-literal* scholars tend to come from *more conservative, evangelical schools* or backgrounds, but have moved to the more “liberal” end of the spectrum within those contexts – they have a respect for Scripture, but are powerfully impressed by the scientific method and the findings of modern science.

# Problem

- The biggest problem with the Neo-evangelical or Neo-reformed position is **lack of exegetical consistency**
- How Genesis 1-11 is a good example of this inconsistency

# Different View of the Bible

- Traditionally and officially Adventists have advocated the **grammatical-historical** approach to the text, including Genesis 1-11
- Accommodating a non-literal view of the of these chapters (which is necessary for atheistic evolution and other alternate approaches) requires **rejection** of the grammatical-historical approach and a literal interpretation

# Non-literal problems

- Ironically, a non-literal interpretation flies in the face of sound exegetical practice among *both liberal and conservative* scholarship
- Requires ignoring **internal textual indicators** that Genesis 1-11 was intended to be treated and understood like later materials in traditionally understood “historical” books such as Chronicles and Kings

# Eisegesis vs Exegesis

- The requirements or understandings of modern science should not be used to “force” into the text what the ancient author must have thought or intended – this is *eisegesis*, not exegesis and represents poor scholarship
- The argument about how to treat Genesis 1-11 is not unique to Adventists, of course

# Helping the Bible?

- Evangelicals, with their desire to preserve an inspired Bible, are more willing to help the Bible out of its “difficulty” of apparent ignorance concerning creation (and other “scientific facts”), by ascribing different intents and understandings – non-literal – that they believe the author of Genesis must have had in mind while composing his work.



# Neo-evangelical consistency?

- To be *consistent* with the neo-evangelical methodology, however, it requires that one also denies an historic Patriarchal period (Abraham), the Sojourn (Israel in Egypt), the Exodus (Red Sea), Mt Sinai (Ten Commandments – Sabbath), the Conquest (Jericho), and probably the existence of the Monarchy (Solomon and David) – even the resurrection of Christ must be denied

# Liberals more faithful to text

- Liberal historical critics have already seen this. This is nicely illustrated by Max Miller, a practicing historical critic – he knows what the Bible says and does not deny that this is what the ancients may have believed, but because of modern science (including scientific history) he, as a scholar, must reject it . . .

# Max Miller



- “Remember that **the Bible presupposes** a dynamic natural world into which God, from time to time, intrudes upon human affairs. It is a world with waters rolling back, burning bushes, and ax heads floating. God directs the course of history by simultaneously instructing Moses, regulating Pharaoh’s heart, and bringing unnatural disasters upon Egypt. God hands down laws on Mt. Sinai, and sends angels to defend Jerusalem against Sennacherib’s massive army.”

# Max Miller



- “*Modern* historians perceive the world to be more *orderly*, on the other hand; and another of the standard tenets of modern historiography is that *any* natural or historical phenomenon can be explained *without* reference to overt divine involvement. . . .we modern historians bring [biblical narratives] into line with the world as we perceive it. We leave out miracles, for example . . .” (emphasis added)

# Consistency

- If we are going to start inserting non-literal meanings into the Biblical text every time the text conflicts with the findings of modern science or historiography, then we must be consistent in the application from a hermeneutical perspective. This raises the question of how much are we willing to give up for consistency?

- Surrendering the historicity of the text means that *theological conclusions* which are based on an assumption of historicity, must also be given up. I remind my students that Adventist theology and all of the doctrines of which it consists, were formulated with an understanding that the texts presented actual historical situations in which God spoke and interacted with humankind – the giving of the 10 commandments, including the Sabbath and sanctuary at Mt Sinai, etc.

# Adventist losses

- For Adventists this includes the giving up the ten commandments (Sabbath), the sanctuary (there was no Mt Sinai experience), the immortality of the soul, the resurrection (ideas that did not exist in OT times); in terms of the NT we must abandon the second coming, and, especially significant, is denial of a literal blood atonement on the cross

# Historical/Literal Approaches (conservatives)

- Whole universe *and* earth created only a few thousand years ago in six 24 hour days
- The earth—its rocks, the solar system and life—were created a few thousand years ago; the rest of the universe may have been here longer
- *Life* on the earth was created *a few thousand years ago*; the rocks or matter of this earth may have been here longer as “unformed and unfilled;” rest of the universe existed prior to that time—perhaps for millions of years for some stars and planets



# Shedding light on each other



- The Book of nature and the written word shed light on each other. . . Inferences erroneously drawn from facts observed in nature have, however, led to supposed conflict between science and revelation; and in the effort to restore harmony, interpretations of Scripture have been adopted that undermine and destroy the force of the Word of God.

# Geology and Scripture



- Geology has been thought to contradict the literal interpretation of the Mosaic record of creation. Millions of years, it is claimed, were required for the evolution of the earth from chaos; and in order to accommodate the Bible to this supposed revelation of science, the days of creation are assumed to have been vast, indefinite periods, covering thousands or even millions of years. Such a conclusion is wholly uncalled for (*Ed* 128-29.)

# Ellen G. White



- “The lives recorded in the Bible are authentic histories of actual individuals. From Adam down through successive generations to the times of the apostles we have a plain, unvarnished account of what actually occurred and the genuine experience of real characters.” (4T 9)

# Ellen G. White



- “I have been shown that without Bible history, geology can prove nothing. Relics found in the earth do give evidence of a state of things differing in many respects from the present. But the *time* of their existence and *how long* a period these things have been in the earth, are *only* to be understood by *Bible history*.” SG III:93

# Ellen G. White



- “Infidel geologists claim that the world is very much older than the Bible record makes it. They reject the Bible record, because of those things which are to them evidences from the earth itself, that the world has existed tens of thousands of years.” SG III:92

# Where are Adventists?

- Orthodox-- Traditionally and officially Adventists have advocated the **grammatical-historical** approach to the text, including Genesis 1-11
- Not liberal (secular scholarly liberals)
- Not Neo-orthodox – reject existentialism
- *However, many Adventists are advocating positions identical to those of the Neo-Evangelical positions or Neo-Reformed, although I have never seen it acknowledged*

# Plantinga's Three Groups of Scholars

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Conservatives</b></li></ul>                               | <b>Liberals</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Evangelical/<br/>fundamentalists</b></li></ul> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Genesis author intended to be understood literally</li></ul> | Genesis author intended to be understood literally | Genesis author did <i>not</i> intend to be understood literally                           |

# Plantinga's Three Groups of Scholars

- **Conservatives**

- Genesis author intended to be understood literally

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Conservatives

Ellen White

- **Liberals**

- Genesis author intended to be understood literally

- **Evangelical/  
fundamentalists**

- Genesis author did *not* intend to be understood literally

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“Progressives”



# Empiricism vs Revelation

- Ultimately, the crises revolves to how do humans get information about reality – those who are skeptical base their world view on an empirical approach
- Those who disagree believe that Revelation (which can't be empirically verified and often contradicts conclusions that are empirically derived) is superior