

Did Dinosaurs Roam the Earth?

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Dinosaurs: Is it likely that they roamed the earth?

Coal and oil: Might these have been formed by decaying plants?

Noah's Flood: Did it most likely lay down fossil bearing rock layers?

Volcanic islands: Were they likely formed by magma from the sea floor?

Ice age: Is it possible that ice sheets once covered much of North America?

Many in the WELS answer "Yes."

They probably attribute most fossils to the Flood.

Some in the WELS answer "No."

They probably attribute most fossils to special creation by God.

Flood Apologetic

Most Christians who believe in a 6-day creation think it likely that the Flood drastically changed the surface of the earth. The Flood probably laid down most of the geologic column with fossil containing rock layers found on every continent and on the tallest mountains.¹ Coal oil, and natural gas are probably the remains of preflood vegetation. Massive ice sheets probably sculpted the North American landscape during the years after the Flood. There may have been a single preflood continent that God broke apart during the Flood to form the Atlantic Ocean.

SUMMARY: These creationists claim that evolutionists are *incorrectly* interpreting geological and fossil evidence. These creationists see these things as happening quickly, during the Flood and in the years immediately following it, while evolutionists think it took 500 million years.

Created Fossil Apologetic

Some Christians who believe in a 6-day creation think it likely that God placed fossils, coal, oil, natural gas, and most or all of the geo-

¹ For details, see "Geologic Column" on pages 20-31 of the winter 2018 LSI Journal. www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter (accessed 1-3-20)

logic column in the ground.² Most of these Christians think God did this during creation week, while others claim later times such as when God cursed the ground after Adam and Eve sinned. Many of the fossils God placed in the earth (such as dinosaurs and trilobites) represent creatures that never existed as real living things. Ice sheets never covered North America; God simply made it look like that happened by creating ice age formations. The pre-flood continents were essentially the same shape and size as the continents we have today. The Flood was tranquil so as not to disturb the fossil-containing rock layers.

SUMMARY: These creationists claim that evolutionists are *correctly* interpreting geological and fossil evidence—evidence that God placed in the ground to give the earth *appearance of a history that did not take place*.

Survey of WELS Pastors and Teachers

Do you agree or disagree: “It is likely that God placed dinosaur bones in rock layers during creation week”? In a 2015 poll of nearly 1,000 WELS called workers, 7% of pastors and 16% of teachers answered “agree” or “somewhat agree.”³

This degree of support for created fossils was unexpected, since WELS publications rarely propose created fossils or the related tranquil Flood view. It is common for WELS publications to describe dinosaurs as once living creatures and to attribute their fossils to the Flood,⁴ while it is rare for them to propose that God may have placed fossils in the ground.^{5,6}

² *An idea first proposed in 1857 by Philip Henry Gosse in “Creation (Omphalos) –An Attempt to Untie the Geological Knot.” This was two years before Darwin published his famous book. Free pdf at (accessed 1-3-20)*

<https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/147016#/summary>

³ *Survey report is at www.LutheranScience.org/survey (accessed 1-3-20)*

⁴ *Some examples are listed at the end of this article including quotes from four books in The People’s Bible series.*

⁵ *In a single paragraph about fossils, one book seems to mix both apologetic views, “But the flood certainly changed the earth and altered rock formation. ... [but by the end of the sixth day of creation] sedimentary rock layers may have already been in existence.”*

Richard L. Gurgel, *This We Believe—Questions and Answers*, (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2006), 47.

⁶ *I can recall only one other WELS publication ever advancing created fossils. There were two or three articles in Forward in Christ around a decade ago. In no more than a sentence or two, they briefly mentioned several possible origins for*

It is common for WELS publications to describe the Flood as destructive,⁷ while it is rare for them to propose a tranquil Flood.⁸

A new book self-published by two prominent WELS authors, “Clearing a Path for the Gospel,” spends over a dozen pages developing the claim that creation by God is the *only possible* origin for fossils.⁹ The book already has wide circulation among faculties at our WELS high schools and colleges. This may be the most prominence that the created fossil apologetic has ever received in the WELS.

Reasons to embrace the created fossil apologetic are provided in that book, but there are also reasons to reject the created fossil apologetic. Let’s look at some of the theological and scientific issues involved.

Symbols of Sickness and Death Before the Fall

Most advocates of created fossils claim God placed fossils in the ground during creation week. Fossils include the remains of dead animals. Some fossils even show signs of cancer. This means there would have been uncountable trillions of symbols of death and suffering in the earth when God said creation was “very good.” Some created fossil advocates go farther than others and claim God did this as a statement of law: “If you sin you too will die.”¹⁰ Yet Adam and Eve had a sinless understanding of God’s law—their consciences were not yet corrupted by sin. God had already given Adam and Eve a clear understanding of the law. Why would God additionally use a less clear, and maybe even unnoticed, conveyance of the law: fossils buried in rock layers below the ground, giving the appearance of past death and suffering?

fossils, including their creation by God.

⁷ Some examples are listed at the end of this article including quotes from *The People’s Bible* series.

⁸ I am unaware of any WELS publication which has ever proposed a tranquil Flood. I suppose there may be conference papers where a tranquil Flood is advocated.

⁹ “To the Christian, the source of these fossils is also clear; namely, the God of the Bible put them where we are finding them. ...What we can be sure of is that it did not happen primarily by the natural processes of which we are now aware.” Arthur A. Eggert and Geoffrey A. Kieta, *Clearing a Path for The Gospel—A Lutheran Approach to Apologetics*, (Sun Prairie WI: Terra Pax Lutheran Publishing, 2019), 120, 121.

¹⁰ Multiple Christians have made this claim while discussing the topic with me.

We know that sickness and death are a result of the fall and curse (Romans 5:12). All of creation, animals included, is suffering under the curse and its “slavery to corruption” (Romans 8:19-23, EHV). Would God place fossils in the ground—giving the appearance that the curse, and its slavery to corruption, had been in effect in the past—a history that never actually took place?

The authors of “Clearing a Path for the Gospel” react to this in a footnote on page 121, mentioning that fruit in Eden when picked would die, and that soil as we know it is composed of dead plants, so there were symbols of death in a sinless world. Yet Scripture describes plants as “withering,” “finishing,” or “drying up,” not as dying¹¹ (Psalm 90:6, 129:6, Isaiah 15:6,¹² 19:6-7, 24:7, 40:7-8, Jeremiah 12:4, Ezekiel 17:10, Matthew 21:19, Luke 8:6, and many more). Only people and animals have the “breath of life,” and those that have the “breath of life” are given plants to eat (Genesis 1:29-30, 6:17-19, 7:15-16, 7:22). For this reason, it is clear that plants perishing (“withering”) are not signs of death before the fall. Also, soil today is produced through bacterial action (as the authors describe in a footnote on page 111). Scripture does not address bacteria (other than indirectly through ceremonial laws), but it seems from the preceding discussion that God may not consider bacteria as living or as dying in the same way he considers animals with the “breath of life” as living and dying. The unfallen world probably required that bacteria perish (for instance in the digestive process and in soil). That does not mean that bacteria were symbols of death in a sinless world.

Thorns Before the Fall

There are fossils of thorns. Could these have been in the ground when God declared everything “very good”? Thorns are a result of the fall and curse (Genesis 3:18). Would God place thorns in the ground—giving the appearance that the curse had previously been in effect?

¹¹ *In John 12:24, Jesus compares His own death and resurrection to a seed dying as the new plant grows from that seed. No plant perished in that metaphor. Only the seed husk perished, and that is simply a part of a “living” thing, not the living thing itself.*

¹² *The EHV translation of Isaiah 15:6 applies both the words “withered” and “died” to plants. A literal translation of the Hebrew would be “finished” or “done,” which the EHV renders as “died,” reflecting modern English usage.*

Eating Meat Before the Fall

Fossils show tooth marks, indicating that animals ate each other. People and animals were vegetarians before the fall (Genesis 1:29-30). Could bones with tooth marks have been in the ground when God declared everything “very good”? Would God place evidence of animals killing and eating each other in the ground—giving the appearance that the curse had previously been in effect?

Extra-Biblical Miracles

God tells us nothing about fossils. Proposing that God placed fossils in the ground during creation week evokes an extra-biblical miracle. Once we go down the path of inventing extra-biblical miracles, anything goes. For example: We know God provided for Adam and Eve by making a garden for them. Eden provided them with food and a place to worship (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil). Could we propose that God also provided Adam and Eve with a house and a soft bed on which they could sleep? How is this conjecture any less valid than speculating that God created fossils? The authors of “Clearing a Path for the Gospel” demonstrate that anything goes when they write,

We might be further curious to learn when God buried the fossils around the earth. The Bible does not tell us; therefore, it is not important for our salvation. Certainly, he could have done it at creation; he could have done it after the fall, he could have done it in conjunction with the Flood. Or he could have done it over a period of many years.¹³

Bones of Imaginary Animals

Many fossils in the earth are of extinct marine creatures such as trilobites, ammonites, and orthoceras. Many fossils are found of other extinct creatures like dinosaurs. If God placed fossils into the ground during creation week, then these hundreds of animal kinds [trilobites, dinosaurs, etc.] never existed as real living creatures. Why would God include the fossils of imaginary creatures with the fossils of actual creatures? The authors of “Clearing a Path for the Gospel” address this question when they write,

¹³ Eggert and Kieta, 121.

...perhaps he [God] wanted to show us what other creatures he could have given us to deal with in our lifetimes; perhaps he did it to test us to see if we trust his Word; perhaps he had some reason that we would never guess on this side of eternity. ...the Lord is the set director for the human saga, then there is no need that the props which he provided for us must be real, only that they must look real.¹⁴

Tranquil Flood

Some advocates of created fossils claim that Scripture describes a “tranquil” Flood that would not disturb the fossil bearing rock layers. Their claim is contrary to the very violent Flood described in WELS publications. See quotes from WELS publications at the end of this article. The violent Flood revealed in Scripture would be expected to dramatically change the surface of the earth as the waters come and again as the waters recede. Tidal action would move the waters constantly. Fossils of marine creatures are found everywhere on earth, including on the tallest mountains. That is exactly what would be expected from a planetary flood that killed all but a handful of the people and animals on earth.¹⁵ Supporters of created fossils deny that the Flood laid down the continental sized sedimentary rock layers¹⁶ that cover the entire earth.

If God placed fossils in the earth during creation week or just after the fall, then these fossils and the rock layers bearing them would have to be preserved during the Flood. In addition, some mechanism would have to prevent the Flood from depositing massive new fossil containing rock layers. It is apparent that God would have to miraculously do this. This calls for an additional extra-biblical miracle.

¹⁴ Eggert and Kieta, 121, 122.

¹⁵ For details, see “Geologic Column” on pages 20-31 (especially page 27) of the winter 2018 LSI Journal. www.LutheranScience.org/2018winter (accessed 1-3-20).

¹⁶ “Rock that has formed through the deposition and solidification of sediment, especially sediment transported by water (rivers, lakes, and oceans), ice (glaciers), and wind. Sedimentary rocks are often deposited in layers, and frequently contain fossils.” <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/sedimentary-rock> (accessed 1-3-20).

Apparent Age

The claim of created fossils is often defended by pointing out that God created a world with apparent age: Adam and the animals were created as adults, the earth's soil and atmosphere were fully developed, and the starlight was visible even though those stars were too far away for that light to travel to the earth in a few hours. Those advancing created fossils ask (or at least imply): Since these had apparent age, might God also have placed fossils in the earth to show apparent age?

The defect in this line of reasoning is that people, animals, soil, atmosphere, and starlight had to be mature to fulfill their God given roles. Adam, the animals, and the trees and plants needed air. Plants needed soil. Adam and the animals needed trees bearing fruit and other vegetation for food. Starlight had to be visible from earth to serve its God given purpose for separating day from night and to serve as signs for seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14). To argue that God placed fossils in the ground to give the earth apparent age does not easily follow from God giving apparent age to people, animals, soil, air, and starlight; since people, animals, soil, air, and starlight had to be mature to fulfill their God given roles. God reveals nothing in Scripture about fossils. God reveals no purpose for fossils. It is pure conjecture to claim God placed fossils in the earth. We can easily reason from Scripture that people, animals, soil, air, and starlight were mature on day seven of creation week. We cannot so argue that God placed fossils in the ground.

Furthermore, can you imagine a way that God could have created without apparent age? Imagine that God made all the vegetation start from seed. Those seeds would have an apparent age, because as we all know, seeds come from plants. Imagine that God made all the birds grow from eggs. Those eggs would have an apparent age, because as we all know, bird eggs come from a mated pair of birds. The created fossil apologetic claims that since God *chose* to create apparent age, maybe God also made fossils with apparent age. But it seems that God *had to* create with apparent age, since we can interpret anything and everything as having an apparent age. God did not have to create fossils, as there are other possible reasons for the existence of fossils, such as the Flood. The “apparent age”

reason for created fossils falls apart in this way.

Created Fossils: *Our Only Option*

Many who advance created fossils say that it is our only option. They reject all other explanations, such as fossils being a result of the Flood. I have found such Christians invariably have too high a regard for science in general and for evolutionary science in particular.¹⁷ Evolutionists claim that 3.5 billion years of common descent, driven by mutations,¹⁸ produced all the earth's plants and animals from a bacteria-like ancestor. Christians advancing created fossils see the evidence for billions of years as so extremely solid, that our explanation for fossils *must* be that God created them.

These Christians ask us to accept created fossils as the *only* explanation for fossils, even though there are many theological reasons to reject created fossils. They ask us to accept created fossils on their reason-based claim that the evolutionary model is so solid and compelling. Prominent scientists, including those who champion evolution, describe all science as a biased and subjective process that does not produce final truth, and evolutionary science as especially questionable in the models it creates.¹⁹

Evolution is based on countless unprovable presuppositions. Three primary assumptions are no God, no Flood, and deep time (millions and billions of years). These assumptions and others force the evolutionist to reject any conclusion that would imply a creator or a young earth. These assumptions even change the way measurements and observations

¹⁷ For example, the authors of "Clearing a Path for the Gospel" write, "What we can be sure of is that it did not happen primarily by the natural processes of which we are now aware. Geologists have gathered evidence from many thousands of sites and have been able to create a model of how the world works which is consistent with the fossils being buried naturally over the course of almost a billion years. Obviously, God did not use this process, so he must have used a supernatural process or changed the rules of nature." Eggert and Kieta, 121.

¹⁸ In this context, a mutation is a change in inheritable genes (inheritable DNA). Mutation causes include radiation and chemicals.

¹⁹ For six extensive quotes from leading evolutionary scientists see "The Nature of Science" on pages 26-30 in the fall 2018 LSI Journal (www.LutheranScience.org/2018fall). More quotes by evolutionist champions are on page 23, 24, and 32 in the winter 2017 LSI Journal at www.LutheranScience.org/2017winter.

are taken. See “Assumptions of Evolutionists” on pages 7-16 of the fall 2017 *LSI Journal* (www.LutheranScience.org/2017fall).

The Christian apologist can also point out that some major models of evolution are being questioned and some are being revised. After a century of stability, the common descent family tree for dinosaurs is probably changing. There are now three very different dinosaur family trees and the same evidence fits each (www.LutheranScience.org/2018spring, pages 22-24). The human family tree is also in disarray. Many of the leading paleoanthropologists now view all known human ancestor fossils as either fully human or fully ape (similar to the creationist view). These paleoanthropologists cannot agree on how to draw the human/ape family tree (www.LutheranScience.org/2018spring, pages 25-27).

The evidence for the truth of common descent and millions of years is rather weak in many places. The Christian apologist can also point this out. For example, champions of evolution often provide very weak evidence that natural selection can produce new kinds of plants and animals. See the article, “Evolutionists and Creationists Often Agree – There are many points of agreement on natural selection” on pages 17-32 at www.LutheranScience.org/2019spring.

With all this in our creation apologetic, why resort to created fossils with all its theological problems?

My personal view is that the created fossil apologetic is the least likely explanation for fossils. Nevertheless, if someone finds that believing in created fossils blunts the temptation of evolution for them, then let them believe in created fossils. They should though, become acquainted with the many theological problems posed by created fossils.

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Appendix

WELS authors describing dinosaurs as once living creatures

There are skeletal remains of dinosaurs, and those remains are proof that such large animals existed for a period of time after creation.²⁰

The evolutionist talks as though God was not yet present when dinosaurs walked on the earth.²¹

But even if they did not die out before the flood, the ark was large enough to accommodate young, smaller sized dinosaurs so that they could ride out the flood in safety.²²

There is no reason in Scripture to reject dinosaurs. Our failure to recognize dinosaurs as possible extinct creatures is unnecessary and unwise.²³

WELS authors attributing fossils to the Flood

(most also describe the Flood as very destructive)

The great flood at the time of Noah produced changes in the earth's crust. ...totally rearranging water and land masses. ...It appears that ocean basins were lowered, bringing about corresponding shifts of huge land masses. This may very well account for the formation of our highest mountains, most of which are fossil bearing, strong evidence that they were formed by the action of water.²⁴

The destruction wrought by this flood is a tale very likely reflected by the sedimentary layers and fossils found in

²⁰ Rudolph E. Honsey, *Job—People's Bible*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 324.

²¹ Arno J. Wolfgramm, *Kings—People's Bible*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001), 59.

²² John A. Braun, *Noah—Obedient Builder* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 28.

²³ Paul R. Boehlke, DINOSAURS, GOD'S CREATURES, *The Lutheran Educator*, 31 no. 3 (February 1991) 53, 54.

²⁴ John C. Jeske, *Genesis—The People's Bible*, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2001), 16, 85, 87.

the rocks around the world. ...What happened to the land under the pounding of this destructive flood? ...The sedimentary layers testify to disastrous lava flows. ...Fossils tell us that the world destroyed by the flood contained many dinosaurs.²⁵

When estimating the number of kinds on the ark, we should allow “for possibly extinct families whose fossil remains may not yet have been discovered or which may never be discovered. ...It was noted previously that when Moses described the onset of the flood, he used a number of striking verb constructions to accentuate the increase and the violence of the waters. ...It may have been at this time also that the continents took their present shape.”²⁶

Negative Bible critics and unbelieving scientists ...ignore the powerful evidence of the Flood furnished by the fossil finds and the coal deposits.²⁷

This must have created imbalances in the earth’s crust effecting tectonic movements, by which the land masses were thrust upward to form our present high mountains. This is not fantasy, since our higher mountains are principally fossil bearing rock formations; but the vast fossiliferous rock layers do not lie horizontally but are tilted in varying degrees. This seems to indicate that while the fossils were imbedded in molten rock masses and laid down in sedimentary layers during the duration of the flood, the present position in which we find them must have been brought about after these rock formations had been hardened.²⁸

²⁵ Cleone H. Weigand, *Creation—God Made All Things—The People’s Bible Teachings* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000), 68, 69, 77.

²⁶ Carl J. Lawrenz and John C. Jeske, *A Commentary on Genesis 1-11* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 2004), 253, 266.

²⁷ Werner H. Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary—Old Testament*, (Milwaukee: WELS Board for Parish Education, 1980), footnote on page 77.

²⁸ Carl Lawrenz, “God’s Unique Judgment of The Flood,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 71, no. 4 (Oct. 1974): 290.



The fossil quarry exhibit at Dinosaur National Monument in Utah shows sauropod dinosaur neck vertebrae sections (above) and front legs (below) partially quarried out of the sandstone sedimentary rocks where they were found. Park website: <https://www.nps.gov/dino/index.htm> (accessed 1-3-20).

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