

Extra-Biblical Evidence, General Revelation, And Scripture: A Response To Davis A. Young's *The Biblical Flood*¹

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Introduction

For the last several years, Davis A. Young and his colleagues in the Science Department at Calvin College² have been producing an impressive amount of literature dealing with the cosmological details of Genesis 1–11. For the most part the works posit cosmological theories which reject any notion of either a “literal seven, 24 hour day creation scenario,” any notion of a “young earth” or the possibility that the account of the Noachic flood in Genesis 6–9 is anything more than “hyperbolic language” used to “describe an event which devastated or disrupted Mesopotamian culture.”³ On the whole, the thrust of this literature has been to demonstrate that:

Contrary to the view held by many Christians, we believe that historical reconstruction [Young's view of cosmogony] by modern astronomy and geology are neither uncontrolled speculations nor founded upon unbiblical presuppositions. We hold that these reconstructions are firmly grounded in a wealth of carefully gathered data and have been repeatedly tested by the respected canons of science.⁴

These efforts have seemingly been motivated by twin purposes. Young believes that “continued promotion of these ideas [young earth, global flood, et al] will in the long run damage the credibility of Christianity and thus hinder our evangelistic and apologetic efforts.”⁵ He insists that “there is folly in going down that path, for we will guarantee that we will lose an entire generation of scientists to the gospel.”⁶ He adds that to claim validity for “flood geology” will “simply drive away every knowledgeable geologist.”⁷ In addition, as one reviewer points out, he is clearly concerned that the traditional or literal reading of Genesis will adversely impact Christianity's ability to “effectively witness to today's scientifically literate society.”⁸ Most clearly Young states:

If conservative orthodox theology is to remain vital and relevant to a world in need of the Christian gospel, conservative theologians will have to abandon their flirtation with flood geology and other forms of pseudo-science, reacquaint themselves with genuine scientific knowledge, and incorporate that knowledge into their thinking, secure in the realization that genuine insight into God's creation, whether discovered by Christians or heathens, is still a gift of God to be treasured.⁹

Secondly, and most importantly, Young is convinced that what he calls “extra-biblical evidence” is overwhelmingly conclusive no global flood ever occurred. He states that “geology provides no evidence whatever for a universal flood.”¹⁰ In answering those who have sought to “prove” a global flood from “extra biblical evidence he states:

In summary, several centuries of effort to locate physical remnants of the biblical deluge have completely failed. Any physical evidence that has been claimed to support a global flood have eventually been demonstrated to have a different explanation. The idea that the flood deposited the world's stratified rocks has been thoroughly discredited by numerous lines of evidence... All the evidence of the rocks tells us that they were not produced or arranged by a flood.¹¹

Most thoroughly Young states that:

Future wrestling with Genesis 1 and the flood story must come to grips with the mountainous data that indicates our planet is billions of years old and has undergone a complex, dynamic history. No longer can competent, aware Christian theologians naively insist on a recent creation by taking refuge in the so-called evidences for recent creation emanating from the scientific creationist camp. Those who do so do the Christian community a disservice. No longer can Christian theologians claim that the Genesis story talks about a geographically universal deluge that has left observable, physical remains all the earth's entire surface. No longer may we tell our children about the flood in which pairs of penguins from Antarctica, kangaroos from Australia, sloths from South America, bison from North America, pangolins from southeast Asia, and lions and elephants from Africa marched two by two into the waiting ark. The biogeographical data rule out such migrations of animals. Though it is difficult to make such assertions and very painful for evangelicals to accept them, the evangelical world must face up to the implications of the geological data that exist if we wish to do justice to the biblical text.¹²

Certainly Young has not been without his critics, particularly from those committed to the "creationist" position.¹³ Marvin Lubenow states that "Like [Bernard] Ramm, Young had many inconsistencies in his system. Although he claimed to be a creationist, the evolution Young denied with his right hand he accepted with his left."¹⁴ In summarizing Young's theories, Lubenow continues:

Davis Young is correct in saying that harmonization based on the old earth-old Adam position has failed. Because he does not recognize that his data has been placed in a philosophic framework alien to Genesis, he has nowhere else to go. He is suggesting that "...the Bible may be expressing history in nonfactual terms..." There is a name for nonfactual history: fiction. However, Young clearly does not intend to imply that. Hence, his words convey no information. We see the frustrations of a man who is utterly sincere in wanting to maintain biblical integrity but is unable to extricate himself from, the man-made philosophic framework of earth history.¹⁵

Henry Morris, for many years president of the *Institute for Creation Research* and a leading spokesman for "young earth" creationism, flatly sees Young as simply "following the

same path traveled by Charles Darwin over a hundred years ago;”¹⁶ noting that while Young started out “as a strict creationist, he converted to progressive creationism in graduate school, then to theistic evolution.”¹⁷ Morris clearly believes that the underlying problem with Young is a purposeful compromise with proponents of “evolutionary humanism”¹⁸ and a longing for approval from the secular scientific community.¹⁹ Morris states:

The same motivation constrains other evangelical compromisers, whether or not they admit it or are even aware of it. One of the most articulate and influential of these of Dr. Davis Young, professor of geology at Calvin College, another professedly evangelical college that has become notorious for its compromising position on evolution and related issues. On one of his books [*Creation and the Flood*, Baker Books, 1977], Dr. Young frankly acknowledges that the literal-day interpretation of Genesis is “the obvious view” and that the Bible [JCA 2:1 (Summer 1998) p. 7] teaches a universal flood. Nevertheless he rejects these plain teachings on the basis that “geology” (meaning geology as interpreted by the geological establishment) has disproved them.²⁰

While the questioning of motivation is perhaps an *ad hominem*, Morris does correctly identify the foundational issue; that is, Young’s preference of scientific evidence, which he calls “extra-biblical evidence”²¹ as over against Scripture.

Throughout *The Biblical Flood* Young uses the terms “extra-biblical evidence” and “general revelation” as synonymous terms, although there is no more than a cursory attempt to defend the synonymous usage.²² Young believes that general revelation includes any manner of human intellectual pursuit and the discovery of “truth.” If truth is discovered, then, that discovery is revelatory under the category of general revelation, or as Young more often calls, it “extra-biblical evidence.”²³ This is a vital consideration because Young bases all of his contentions on the validity of this premise.

This expansion of the scope and purpose of general revelation has been, and continues to be, the foundation for various “integrationist” proposals²⁴, which Young clearly favors. In the final chapter of *The Biblical Flood* Young calls for an exegetical methodology which integrates “discoveries” in the various academic disciplines and scripture as equals.²⁵

Operating within this definition, general revelation is granted the authority to inform Scripture or even correct it when necessary.²⁶ “Christians must always be ready to reexamine even settled interpretations when a wealth of external data call these interpretations into question.”²⁷ While admitting that for 1700 years Christians have interpreted Genesis 6–9 as referring to a global flood, Young’s expanded view of general revelation to leads him to declare, “The extra-biblical data pertaining to the flood have been pushing the church to develop a better approach to the flood story and indeed to all the early chapter of Genesis.”²⁸ Young admits that some years ago he believed that the “biblical data favored an essentially global flood;”²⁹ but elsewhere concludes, “The cumulative pressure of general revelation can be ignored for only so long”³⁰ [emphasis ours].

While the purpose of *The Biblical Flood* was to “sketch the broad outlines of the history of thought in the Christian world regarding the deluge narrative in the light of extra-biblical data;”³¹ there is a major flaw in his reasoning. It is found in assuming the

foundational aspect of his premise, a premise for which he offers no proof of a theological, hermeneutical, or exegetical sort.

This purpose of this article is to examine and challenge Young's position on the scope and nature of general revelation as presented in *The Biblical Flood*, as well as some of his other printed works. This paper will not delve into the relative merits of geologic and other scientific findings, or the interpretation of those findings. That discussion is certainly valuable in its own right, but is better left to other forums. As John Byl states, the creationist and non-creationist groups approach the interpretation of such data in entirely different manners:

The conflict between secular geology and scientific creationism can be viewed as one between competing research programs. The creationists start from the premise that scientific theories should be consistent with the literal interpretation of Genesis. Their basic rules for theory selection is that we should prefer those scientific theories that do not conflict with the biblical data. Thus they devise theories that allow for a young earth, a global flood, and the possibility of miracles. The secular camp, on the other hand, operates under the central theme that all the data is explicable in terms of natural, evolutionary processes.³²

The equation of the terms *extra-biblical evidence* and *general revelation* is contrary to historic Christian Theology. Additionally, Young's position is inconsistent with the historic Christian views of inspiration and inerrancy, and leads to hermeneutical confusion.

The Nature and Scope of General Revelation

General Revelation has a substantial place in the history of doctrine. Both the Westminster Confession of Faith³³ and the Belgic Confession of 1561³⁴ cover the subject in their introductory sections. Bruce Demerast provides the accepted evangelical definition of General Revelation:

That divine disclosure to all persons at all times and place by which one comes to know that God is, and what he is like. While not imparting saving truths such as the Trinity, incarnation, or atonement, general revelation mediates the conviction that God exists and that he is self-sufficient, transcendent, immanent, eternal, powerful, wise, good, and righteous. General or natural revelation may be divided into two categories: (1) internal, the innate sense of deity and conscience, and (2) external, nature and providential history.³⁵

During the first half of this century the concept of General Revelation came under substantial attack from Karl Barth, who in battling against a "two-source" theory of revelation (Scripture and Tradition), also rejected general revelation, particularly Article II of the Belgic Confession.³⁶ Berkouwer states that "For Barth general revelation and natural theology are inseparably united. The root idea of Barth's violent attack lies in the fact that he considers them to be on the same plane."³⁷ Erickson states that "for Barth, revelation is always and

only the revelation of God in Jesus Christ: the Word become flesh, apart from the incarnation there is no revelation.”³⁸

In this day it is not the *elimination* of General Revelation that is at stake, but rather, its *expansion*. Gootjes, in commenting on the work of the *Committee on Creation and Science of the Synod 1988 of the Christian Reformed Church*, stated:

During the same period [middle of the 20th century], a tendency to expand general revelation became noticeable. In general revelation, God not only makes known himself and his will, but also facts concerning nature. W. J. A. Schouten spoke of general revelation in the realm of nature. We owe our knowledge of God’s revelation in nature to natural sciences.³⁹

This expansion of general revelation is clearly the position of Young in *The Biblical Flood*. Most tellingly he states:

As we have seen, the idea of a universal deluge was the settled interpretation of the church for nearly seventeen centuries, but that has changed as a body of compelling evidence undercutting that interpretation gradually accumulated. *The cumulative pressure of general revelation can be ignored for only so long* [emphasis ours].⁴⁰

Elsewhere Young makes similar points. In arguing that his views are not in conflict with the Reformation principle of *Sola Scripturae*, he states that “this view of the Bible does not rule out the use of extra-biblical information, for Reformed theology has also stressed the value and importance of God’s *general revelation* of himself through his creation” [emphasis ours].⁴¹

The manner in which Young would utilize the results of scientific investigation and discoveries of general revelation, is to inform and correct not only the “settled interpretations”⁴² of a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, but to correct the writers of Scripture as well. Two examples of this from *The Biblical Flood* serve to illustrate this point. Speaking of the Old Testament Young states:

Jewish writers unhesitatingly assumed that the Old Testament story was literal history. In view of their very limited knowledge of geography, biology, and geology, the ancients gave hardly any thought to questions that so sorely vex conservative Christians today about the extent of the flood or the capacity of the ark... Early Jewish adherents to the Old Testament cared little about sources of information external to Scripture. The Old Testament was regarded as the self-authenticating voice of Yahweh and needed no independent verification.⁴³

In relation to the New Testament writers he states:

These New Testament writers clearly assumed the historical existence of Noah and the deluge, and they viewed the deluge as a unique event: they used different terminology to distinguish the Noachic flood (*kataklysmos*) from all other floods (*potamos*, “river”). Probably the most familiar of the texts referring to the latter is Matthew 7:25, which contains the parable of the wise man who built his house on a rock so that it would be spared when the “floods” came. Although some of the New Testament writers, especially the highly educated Paul, may have known about the Babylonian and Greek deluge traditions and various reports of the existence of the remnants of the ark, no New Testament author appeals to such sources of information to document or defend the Genesis account. For the New Testament writers as for the earlier Jews, the Genesis story was self-authenticating divine Scripture. The story of the flood stood on its own and needed no corroboration.⁴⁴

Although couched in carefully worded language, Young is clearly rejecting the inerrancy of the Scripture at this point. The inspired writers viewed the flood account in its totality as the “self-authenticating voice of Yahweh.” However, Young is saying that if the writers had the revelatory information now available through science (to use his model of general revelation) they would not have naively accepted the literal reading of Genesis nor have written about the flood in the manner in which they did. While the NT writers and early Christians may have believed the Scripture taught a universal deluge Young states, “in light of the bio-geographical, geological, and palaeontological evidence available today, however, this approach is a great deal more problematic.”⁴⁵ However, as Demarest states in this approach “special revelation becomes superfluous and general revelation overriding.”⁴⁶

Historically, the nature and scope of general revelation have been defined exclusively by the parameters of *Special Revelation*, and the nature and scope of general revelation was limited exclusively to, as both the Westminster and Belgic Confessions state, “leaving men without excuse” (Rom. 1:20). Gootjes, after summarizing the views of Berkhof, Berkouwer and Demarest, synthesizes those views in the following manner:

As to content general revelation shows God in his work in the world, his power, his care, his will, and his anger. Special revelation, which centers on God’s salvation-work, includes these too, while also showing an aspect of God not revealed in general revelation... General revelation is connected with God’s providential care of the whole world and uses nature and history as its means... we can say that general revelation is more comprehensive in number of hearers and special revelation is more comprehensive in content and means. Finally we have three similarities. General as well as special revelation has its origin in God who is actively making himself known. The goal of all revelation is that man learns to know God and to serve him. And thirdly the result of general and special revelation are the same. As a sinner man rejects general and special revelation. But when God has changed a man’s heart, he will recognize God and grow continually in knowledge and love of God, not only through special, but also through general revelation.⁴⁷

General revelation has been seen as having a singular and specific function, as Paul states in Romans 1:18–21, that all men may be held accountable to the knowledge of God, which is both internally (vs. 19) and externally (vs. 20) manifest by general revelation.⁴⁸ General revelation has the singular purpose of displaying God through His creation so His attributes are “understood through what has been made” so that all people “are without excuse.” Calvin states, “this knowledge of God, therefore, which avails only to prevent men from making excuses, differs greatly from the knowledge which brings salvation.”⁴⁹ As Moo also points out, the scope of general revelation is limited in terms of its efficacy:

The last clause of v. 19 explains *phaneron estin*: what can be known of God has been made visible, because God has made it known. The clause guards against any notion that people have access to true knowledge of God through their natural capacities. Only by an act of revelation from above—God “making it known”—can people understand God as He is.⁵⁰

B. B. Warfield makes this same point as he points out that “without special revelation, general revelation would be for sinful men incomplete and ineffective, and could issues, as in point of fact it has issued wherever it alone [*JCA 2:1 (Summer 1998) p. 13*] has been accessible, only leaving them without excuse (Rom. 1. 20).”⁵¹ Moo, in his excellent excursus on general revelation, summarizes this well:

But it must be insisted that this knowledge is both limited and imprecise; it is confined to those basic attributes of God that may be discerned in nature (v. 20) and is so mixed with false perceptions that it is almost immediately perverted. Further, it is vitally important, if the passion of Paul’s gospel is to be correctly appreciated, and the argument of this section correctly understood, to see that the knowledge of God that people possess outside special revelation is woefully inadequate, of itself, to save. Paul makes clear that, rather than being a help to people in their search for God, the evidence of nature and conscience (cf. 2:14–16) serves only to render them “without excuse” before a wrathful God. That this is the result of natural revelation follows from the sinfulness of man, who without grace is unable to respond appropriately to whatever knowledge of God he may possess. Paul, then, teaches a natural revelation, but, at least in this passage, the purpose and effect of that revelation are wholly negative.⁵²

Engelsma points out that “the justification for allowing science to set aside Scripture (Young prefers to speak of science forcing the church to “re-interpret” Scripture) is that science is God’s general revelation by which Holy Scripture must be judged.”⁵³ Young himself makes this point very clear when he states:

When so many scientists of such a diverse array of worldviews are able to achieve a virtual consensus regarding a given body of evidence, we had better pay attention. When for the past two centuries thousands of geologists, including numerous Biblical-believing Christians, insist from a lifetime of experience in looking at fossiliferous rocks that those rocks are extremely old and had nothing to do with a global deluge, the church must listen.⁵⁴

This statement appeals to the fallacy of *argumentum ad populum*, and as Byl points out that “when Young states that the literal reading of Genesis is contrary ‘to the conclusions of the scientific enterprise’ or to the ‘results of science’ he implies that all scientists are agreed on this matter. But that is hardly the case.”⁵⁵ Byl continues:

Perhaps Young is thinking of the “scientific establishment” in terms of national organizations as the National Academy of Science. This organization has certainly made official pronouncements to the effect that Genesis is incompatible with the conclusions of science. However, when we consider the rationale for such decisions it is clear that this stance is based on a prior commitment to a particular philosophical position. For example, two of the main objections to creationism by the National Academy of Science are that creationism “subordinates evidence to statement based on authority and revelation” and that “it accounts for the origin of life by supernatural means.” Such assertions illustrate that scientific theorizing is not the objective, value-free exercise that many deem it to be.⁵⁶

John Frame agrees with this assessment of the scientific community when he states “non-Christian science is widely deified and worshipped.”⁵⁷

This attitude certainly seems to characterize Young, and he responds towards scientists who reject his views with unusual antipathy bordering on disdain. In *The Biblical Flood*, while spending considerable time discussing John Whitcomb and Henry Morris’ *The Genesis Flood*, he does so at a rather superficial level. He calls their conclusions “obviously incorrect”⁵⁸, based on “untested and untestable speculations that have a more solid grounding in the imagination than in God’s creation”;⁵⁹ and their handling of the evidence “highly prejudicial”;⁶⁰ however, he never actually interacts with their substantive discussions. Young also mistakenly contends that only “Whitcomb and Morris have attempted to address the serious problems posed [to a global flood view] of biogeography and anthropology,”⁶¹ ignoring the extensive work of scientists connected to such institutions as the *Creation Research Society* and *The Institute for Creation Research*, among others. Pejorative terminology and a condescending spirit generally characterize Young’s summary of the views of modern commentators who favor a universal flood.⁶² He also displays a consistent antipathy towards “flood geology” and the notion of a “young earth.” Flood Geology is referred to as a “pseudo-science”⁶³ and “reactionary science,”⁶⁴ in which “scientific competence, sophistication and integrity” are lacking.⁶⁵ The proponents of flood geology are described as those who are “typically self-taught and lack the requisite qualifications for discussing geology.”⁶⁶ He states:

This case study of the flood suggests the need for more humility and less dogmatism in interpretation. The arrogant attitude displayed by some commentators who have lacked the appropriate scientific knowledge, especially in this century, is appalling.⁶⁷

This antipathy is most clearly observed on pp. 274-76 where a discussion between Stephen A. Austin of *ICR* and Donald Boardman of Wheaton College is supposedly introduced, but only the conclusions of Boardman are expounded.

By advocating “extra-biblical evidence” as equal to general revelation Young, and those who follow his lead, step outside the boundary of what general revelation has historically understood to encompass. In arguing for a traditional and scriptural limited view of general revelation Bookman states this:

My contention is that by reason of the proper definition of the theological category “general revelation” and by reason of the intrinsic and [\[JCA 2:1 \(Summer 1998\) p. 17\]](#) divine integrity and authority that must be granted to any truth-claim that is placed under that category, it is erroneous and misleading to assign to that category humanly deduced or discovered facts and theories. The issue is larger than appropriate taxonomy. In fact, to assign such humanly determined truths to the category of general revelations introduces a two-fold fallacy into the argument when it is used as a rationale for the integrationist position. First, there is the fallacy that might be termed falsely perceived validity. Revelation is from God; thus it is by definition true and authoritative. To assign human discoveries to the category of general revelation is to imbue them with an aura of validity and consequent authority that they do not, indeed, they cannot merit. Thus, to assign a concept to the category of general revelation when that concept is in fact a theory concocted by a person is, in effect, to lend God’s name to a person’s ideas. That is fallacious, no matter the intrinsic truth or falsehood of the theory under question. The second fallacy might be called crippled accountability. That is, once it is acknowledged that these theories are revelatory in nature, the issue of challenging them becomes moot. Much may be said about testing the ideas thus derived before acknowledging them as part of that august body of truth that God has communicated in the natural order of things, or about honoring the distinction in intrinsic authority between general and special revelation but to craft an argument for integration based upon the equal merits and authority of general revelation and special revelation is functionally to short-circuit such efforts and to deny such distinctions. Very simply, if it is revelation, then God said it; if God said it, then it is true; when God speaks truth, mankind’s responsibility is not to test that truth but to obey it. It is self-contradictory to insist that general revelation can include truths that must be studied and examined for their trustworthiness.⁶⁸

While Bookman’s focus is the integration of psychology and the Scriptures, the point is the same in every area where “integration” is sought between theology and any of the various disciplines; Scripture in general and a normative hermeneutic in particular are devalued. Young is clearly desirous of this kind of “integration” in the arena of biblical exegesis. He states:

If the fruits of that improved understanding [from general revelation] are to be communicated to the Christians in the pews, their preachers will have to do the communicating. And this means that the theologians and commentators who educate the

preachers have an obligation to consult more frequently with Christian scholars in other disciplines before making pronouncements on matters in those areas. What marvelous insights into Scripture might await the church if from now on the theologians and exegetes would work side by side with biologists, archaeologists, anthropologists, geologists, linguists, astronomers, sociologists and paleontologists!⁶⁹

The problem for Young is that he fails to prove his expansive and authoritative view of general revelation from the Scripture; and even those from within the Reformed tradition and his own denomination have lined up against him. Gootjes, again commenting on the Synod 1988 of the Christian Reformed Church, skillfully demonstrates that the leading theologians in the history of that tradition (Calvin, Kuyper, Bavinck, Berkhof and Berkouwer) can give no support for an expanded role of general revelation. He states:

Synod 1988 pointed to general and special revelation as the place wherein to discuss the problems between biblical interpretation and scientific results. The Report supported this by stating that this approach is in accordance with the Reformed tradition. It would have been better if the Committee had questioned their mandate, since no such Reformed tradition exists.⁷⁰

Beyond this David J. Engelsma, professor at Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, in his review of *The Biblical Flood*, takes Young to task stating, “First he is mistaken when he identifies human analysis of rocks and other physical phenomena with God’s general revelation. To put it bluntly, Davis Young’s reading of rock strata is not general revelation.”⁷¹

Throughout *The Biblical Flood* Young offers no support of his view on general revelation, he simply assumes it to be true and asserts his position based on that assumption. Beyond this Young’s views of the flood, and Genesis 1–11 as a whole, seem to put him at odds with the traditional Protestant views on the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture.

Implications for Inspiration, Inerrancy and Hermeneutics

Commendably, throughout his writings, Young has affirmed a commitment to a high view of Scripture. “I write as one who is firmly committed to the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture and in full agreement with historic Christianity.”⁷² Young also clearly seems to understand the historical-grammatical method of interpretation. For Young the problem arises when the findings of science, which again he views as revelatory under the construct of general revelation, conflict with a normal, literal reading of certain portions of the Scripture, particularly Genesis 1–11. The options in handling that conflict, according to Young, are to move “either toward a reinterpretation of the Bible based on acceptance of extra-biblical evidence or toward a reaffirmation of literalistic biblical interpretations and associated attempts either to dismiss or to discredit the extra-biblical evidence.”⁷³ He further states:

I submit that there is something inherently flawed in any hermeneutic that prevents us from reading God's handiwork properly and that repeatedly puts us at odds with the established conclusions of a scientific community that is composed not just of opponents of Christianity but also confessing Christians."⁷⁴

However, Young's hermeneutic is clearly nothing more than what Hays calls the "hermeneutic of suspicion."⁷⁵

Again because of the revelatory status he has granted scientific investigation and his antipathy towards any scientific work which runs counter to his own theories, Young is forced to abandoned a "literal interpretation" of the text and the historical-grammatical method of hermeneutics. This is also a demonstration of the *either-or* fallacy in his theory. The truth, and unquestionable truth, of scientific discovery is assumed and unchallenged. Young never seems to consider that his interpretation of the scientific data could be erroneous. However, he is quick to warn his readers against the scientific interpretations of those who take a literal reading of Scripture. "Christians must also be cautious in using extra-biblical data for apologetic purposes, since their data may eventually be supplanted by better information that demands a different interpretation."⁷⁶

Young readily admits that a literal reading of Genesis will yield both a "young earth" and a "global flood," and that exegesis by scholars ranging from John Calvin to C. F. Keil, produced such views.⁷⁷ However, Young states that these opinions were formed in a day when "extra-biblical data did not force [them] to struggle with the text as thoroughly as [they] would today."⁷⁸ He goes on to say "many fine exegetes adopted literalistic views in part because they did not sense the force of geological data and thus assumed an ultimate compatibility of geology with recent creation and global flood."⁷⁹ "I would suggest that the evangelical community would be well served if commentators would familiarize themselves with the history of literalistic interpretations of details which have not meshed with the discoveries about our planet."⁸⁰

In holding this view it also seems that Young must maintain a sort of "progressive" or "continuous" understanding of general revelation. Since new discoveries and reinterpretations of established scientific data occur with some regularity, one is forced to the conclusion that general revelation is not only progressive, but transitory as well. As one cliché puts it "absolute truth in [insert the desired discipline here] is generally good for about ten years." While speaking of the Charismatic movement's view of "progressive revelation" MacArthur's comments seem applicable here as well:

If evangelicalism allows that view to gain a foothold, the uniqueness of Scripture will be sacrificed, and the basis for all we believe will be compromised. That is precisely what is happening today... . Once a congregation sees Scripture as less than the final, complete, infallible authority for faith and practice, it has opened the doors to theological chaos. Anyone can claim to be speaking God's revelations—and almost anything can be passed off as divinely revealed truth.⁸¹

Which is exactly what science, according to Young, does.

Young is apparently on the horns of a dilemma. On one hand he wishes to maintain adherence to “infallibility and inerrancy” of Scripture, but on the other hand he has another category of “revelation” which seemingly is driving him to abandon what he acknowledges is the “plain reading of the text.”⁸² His answer is to opt for a dichotomy between Scriptural statements on matters of faith (theology) and matters touching other disciplines (science, history, etc.). In interacting with Frame, Young states:

Frame is right to wish to protect, for example, the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of providence, the two natures of Christ, and the concept of God’s saving grace in Christ. Indeed, the church should always adhere to such teachings and many others —no matter what—simply because Scripture teaches them.⁸³

However, he then goes on to ask:

...does Frame really want to insist on accepting a traditional interpretation of the Bible in the face of a mass of conflicting extra-biblical evidence when the issue is a matter of a more historical, geographical or scientific character? I suggest that such an approach cannot be sustained forever.⁸⁴

This is the same kind of reasoning that E. J. Young argued against in his work, *Thy Word is Truth*. E. J. Young stated:

Where does ‘faith’ end and historical details begin? What, in other words are the precise limits of ‘faith’ in the first chapter of Genesis? What are matters of ‘faith’ herein revealed concerning which we may say the Bible is infallible? And more than that, we may ask, who is to tell us what is and what is not a matter of faith?⁸⁵

E. J. Young also stated, “If God has communicated wrong information even in so-called unimportant matters, He is not a trustworthy God,” and “If, as a matter of fact, the revelation of God is not free of error, the message of Christianity must ever remain in doubt.”⁸⁶ Englesma states it correctly when he says regarding *The Biblical Flood*:

The book is an attack on Scripture —its clarity, its reliability, its authority, and, thus, its inspiration by God the Holy Spirit... Young claims to be urging, not a rejection of Genesis 6–9 but a “re-interpretation” of the passage. The claim is false. Denial of a flood that covered all the earth of that time, in favor of a local overflow of a river or other body, is not re-interpretation of Genesis 6:19–20, but flat contradiction of it.⁸⁷

Charles Hodge perhaps states it best: “It would be a lamentable spectacle to see the Church changing its doctrines or its interpretations of Scripture, to suit the constantly changing representations of scientific men as to matters of fact.”⁸⁸

Conclusion

Davis Young has assembled an impressive array of factual data and evidence in an attempt to prove that the Genesis flood could not have occurred in the manner in which it was recorded in and later commented upon in Scripture. In seeking validity for his theory he claims an elevated status for that “evidence,” a status of revelation; a claim that general revelation neither demands, nor does special revelation grant to it. As a result of abandoning the centrality of the text he is left with a bifurcated view of the Scripture and multiple hermeneutical approaches to the Scripture, all in an effort to reconcile what clearly cannot be reconciled.

Even more unfortunately Young admits that the New Testament writers who comment on the flood (see Matt. 24:37–39; I Pet. 3:19–21; II Pet. 2:5, 3:5–6; Heb. 11:7), viewed these events as global and Noah and his family as real, historical people.⁸⁹ However, he also strongly implies that the New Testament writers were mistaken.⁹⁰

In taking such a view Young has certainly abandoned any honest claim of belief in the “inerrancy and infallibility” of the Scripture. Beyond this, biblical exegesis is clearly reduced to an inferior status, as the text can no longer be seen as primary. As Erickson states: “It was not primarily exegetical considerations which moved theologians to observe that, of the various possible meaning of the Hebrew word *yom*, “a period of time” might, in the case of interpreting the creation account, be preferable to the more literal and common “twenty-four hours day.”⁹¹

However, as the late Gerhard F. Hasel points out in his masterful article:

The cumulative evidence, based on comparative, literary, linguistic and other considerations, converges on every level, leading to the singular conclusion that the designation *yom* “day,” in Genesis 1 means consistently a literal 24-hour day. The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal “day” than the ones that were chosen. There is a complete lack of indicators from prepositions, qualifying expressions, construct phrases, semantic-syntactical connections, and so on, on the basis of which the designation “day” in the creation week could be taken to be anything different than a regular 24-hour day. The combinations of the factors of articular usage, singular gender, semantic-syntactical constructions, time boundaries, and so on, corroborated by the divine promulgations in such Pentateuchal passages as Exodus 20:8–11 and Exodus 31:12–17, suggest uniquely and consistently that the creation “day” is meant to be literal, sequential, and chronological in nature.⁹²

In short Young must agree with James Barr who states that the early record of Genesis “is not scientifically true.”⁹³ Young has built his conclusions on an erroneous view

of general revelation, and has rejected, at least in substance, the orthodox and historic view of both general and special revelation. He has failed to answer the foundational question, “to what degree are the findings of natural science or nature ‘truth’ or a form of general revelation?”⁹⁴ The result of Young’s conclusions is the same bifurcation of special revelation which plagued neo-orthodox and liberal theologies of the past generation and the necessity of abandoning the grammatical-historical method of hermeneutics, a method Kaiser states “has served us all very well”⁹⁵ substituting the “hermeneutic of suspicion.”⁹⁶

Endnotes

¹ Davis A. Young, *The Biblical Flood: Case Study of the Church’s Response to Extra-biblical Evidence* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). For reviews critical to Davis’ position see: David J. Englesma, *Protestant Reformed Theological Review* 29:1 (November 1995), 54–60; and Dennis M. Swanson, in *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 7:1 (Spring 1996), 145–47. For reviews favorable to Davis’ position see: John W. Burgeson, *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 47:4 (December 1995), 282; R. Dennis Cole, *Theological Educator* 55 (Spring 1997), 158–60; and C. S. Rodd, in *The Expository Times* 107:2 (November 1995), 53.

² Young is currently Professor of Geology at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

³ Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 312. In fact these three items are the key contentions for Young in his works.

⁴ Davis A. Young, “Where are We: Perceived Tensions between Biblical and Scientific Cosmogonies,” in *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World’s Formation*, ed. Howard J. Van Till (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 11.

⁵ Davis A. Young, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 10.

⁶ Davis A. Young, “Theology and Natural Science,” *The Reformed Journal* 38:5 (May 1988), 15.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ John W. Burgeson, review of *The Biblical Flood: A Case Study of the Church’s Response to Extra-biblical Evidence*, by Davis A. Young (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), in *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, 47:4 (December 1995), 282

⁹ Davis, *The Biblical Flood*, 215.

¹⁰ Young, “Theology and Natural Science,” 15.

¹¹ Ibid., 310-11.

12 Davis A. Young, "Scripture in the Hands of Geologists (Part Two)." *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), 296.

13 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, ix-x.

14 Marvin Lubenow, *Bones of Contention* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 230.

15 *Ibid.*, 234.

16 Henry M. Morris, *The Long War Against God: The History and Impact of the Creation/Evolution Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 108.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*, 101.

19 *Ibid.*, 108.

20 *Ibid.*, 101.

21 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 309.

22 *Ibid.*, xi-xii. In attempting to show that extra-biblical evidence is to be equated with general revelation he really begs the questions as he states, "I do not intend here to burden the reader with appeals to Calvin, Kuyper, or Hodge to confirm my contention" (xi) and instead gives brief quotations from Dan McCartney and Moses Silva of Westminster Seminary.

23 *Ibid.*

24 The integrationist movement has been most notable in the area of psychology-theology. See C. L. Deinhardt, "General Revelation as an Important Theological Consideration for Christian Counseling and Therapy," *Didaskalia* 7:4 (Fall 1995), 40-60.

25 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 313.

26 *Ibid.*, 308.

27 *Ibid.*, 309.

28 *Ibid.*, 310.

29 *Ibid.*, 272.

30 *Ibid.*, 309.

31 Ibid.

32 John Byl, "Scripture and Geologists," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989), 147.

33 Chapter One, Article I states: "Although the light of nature and works of creation and providence, do so far manifest the goodness, wisdom, and power of God, as to leave men inexcusable; yet they are not sufficient to give that knowledge of God, and of his will which is necessary unto salvation." Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom With a History and Critical Notes* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1931, reprint Baker, 1990), 3:600.

34 Article II states, "We know him by two means: first by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most elegant book, wherein all creatures great and small, are as so many characters leading us to contemplate the invisible things of God, namely his eternal power and Godhead, as the Apostle Paul saith (Rom. I.20). All which things are sufficient to convince men, and leave them without excuse." Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:384.

35 Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), s.v. "General Revelation" by Bruce A. Demarest. The reader should also consult Demarest's *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955); and H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700–1960* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

36 For an excellent review of Barth and Natural Theology see: Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Unabridged one-volume edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 163–70.

37 Berkouwer, *General Revelation*, 33.

38 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 164. Erickson does note that later in life Barth modified some of his earlier dogmatism on this point. He states: "It is true that in later portions of *Church Dogmatics* Barth seemed to modify his position somewhat. Here he granted that although Jesus Christ is the one true Word and Light of life, the creation contains numerous lesser lights that display his glory. Barth, however, does not speak of these as revelations, reserving that designation for the Word. He retains the word *lights*. It is also notable that in his later summary statement, *Evangelical Theology*, Barth made no mention of a revelation through the created order. Thus it seems to have made little or no real practical impact upon his theology" (p. 165).

39 Nicolaas General Revelation" by Bruce A. Demarest. The reader should also consult Demarest's *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955); and H. D. McDonald, *Theories of Revelation: An Historical Study 1700–1960* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

For an excellent review of Barth and Natural Theology see: Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Unabridged one-volume edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 163–70.

Berkouwer H. Gootjes, "General Revelation and Science: Reflections on a Remark in Report 28," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995), 95.

40 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 309.

41 *Ibid.*, xi.

42 *Ibid.*, 309.

43 *Ibid.*, 12.

44 *Ibid.*, 15.

45 *Ibid.*, 30.

46 Bruce A. Demarest, *General Revelation: Historical Views and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 20–21.

47 Nicolaas H. Gootjes, "General Revelation in its Relation to Special Revelation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 51 (1989), 368.

48 John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Romans and Thessalonians* (translated by R. Mackenzie), edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 8:30–32.

49 *Ibid.*, 32.

50 Douglas Moo, *The Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary: Romans 1–8* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1991), 99.

51 B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), 75.

52 Moo, *Romans*, 122.

53 Engelsma, "Review of *The Biblical Flood*," 55.

54 Davis, *The Biblical Flood*, 310.

55 Byl, "Scripture and Geologists," 146.

56 *Ibid.*

57 John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 87.

58 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 311.

59 Ibid., 265.

60 Ibid., 262.

61 Ibid., 265.

62 Ibid., 280-93. Throughout this section Young sets up as foils commentators such as J. Vernon McGee, John R. Rice and John Phillips, who are writing commentaries designed to be popular and non-technical.

63 Ibid., 215.

64 Ibid., 244.

65 Ibid., 266.

66 Ibid., 244.

67 Ibid., 309. However, this statement is entirely disingenuous in light of the dogmatism of Young's own interpretations and his descriptions of those who disagree with him.

68 Douglas Bookman, "The Scriptures and Biblical Counseling," in *Introduction to Biblical Counseling*, by John F. MacArthur Jr., Wayne Mack and The Faculty of The Master's College (Waco, TX: Word Publishers, 1994), 74-75.

69 Young, *The Biblical Flood*, 313.

70 Gootjes, "General Revelation and Science," 107.

71 Engelsma, "Review of *The Biblical Flood*," 56.

72 Davis, *Christianity and the Age of the Earth*, 10.

73 Davis, *The Biblical Flood*, 30.

74 Ibid., 309-10.

75 Richard B. Hays, "Salvation by Trust? Reading the Bible Faithfully" *Christian Century* (Feb. 26, 1997), 218.

76 Ibid., 309.

77 Davis A. Young, "Scripture in the Hands of Geologists, Part I," *Westminster Theological Journal*.

78

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid.

81 John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 56.

82 Davis A. Young, *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 44.

83 Davis, *The Biblical Flood*, 308.

84 Ibid.

85 Edward J. Young, *Thy Word is Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 101–2.

86 Ibid.

87 Engelsma, “Review of *The Biblical Flood*,” 55–56.

88 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1871, reprint: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1946), 1:57.

89 In a recent article Young has also questioned in writing the historical character of Adam and Eve. See “The Antiquity and the Unity of the Human Race Revisited,” in *Christian Scholars Review* 24 (1995): 380-96. This seems to be a logical, but theologically devastating conclusion of Young’s views.

90 Davis, *The Biblical Flood*, 15, 29–30.

91 Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 72.

92 Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” in *Origins: A Publication of the Geoscience Research Institute*, 21:1 (1994), 30–31.

93 James Barr, *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 175. It is readily admitted that Barr would go much farther in his rejection of the inspiration and authority of Scripture than Young apparently would.

94 Deinhart, “General Revelation,” 52.

95 Walter Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 28.

96 Hays, “Salvation by Trust,” 218.

