

GENESIS and GEOLOGY

- a personal journey

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BEGINNINGS

I have been interested in God and His world for almost as long as I can remember. As a young boy I remember being riveted by a book on cavemen my mother read aloud to me and in due course I acquired the normal childhood fascination with dinosaurs. Articles in National Geographic about the moon, the sea, or fossils fascinated me even before I could read. I also built up collections of shells, rocks and minerals, and made systematic observations of the local weather. Learning to snorkel was an introduction to a whole new world and I spent many happy hours exploring the coral reefs and shallows round the tropical island where I grew up. Given a small microscope and telescope when I went to high school revealed further worlds to explore. The universe of the very large and very small were no longer something in books, but places I could see for myself.

I came to know the Lord personally when I was eight soon led me to develop an appreciation of His handiwork in creation. My own explorations served to increase my appreciation of His glory. Not surprisingly I started actively seeking out ideas on the relationship between science and faith from the time I was 13 onwards. I owe a great debt to my parents and many of their adult friends who during this time encouraged my diverse interests and did their best to either answer my questions or to steer me in directions where I could find answers of both a spiritual and scientific nature for myself.

STUDENT YEARS

By the time I entered university I had been providentially guided into geology, with all its complexity and inter-relationships with other sciences. This was a decision I have never regretted and I have been very grateful to the Lord for directing me into a field which has been both a career and a vocation.

I was blessed at college and uni in having Christian lecturers and teachers who provided both guidance and role-models as my understanding of science and faith increased. Student fellowship groups provided an ideal place for students to mature and begin to exercise leadership. The evolution-creation "debate" was not very heated at this time so that development of my own understanding took place in an open and non-threatening atmosphere, something which has been denied to all too many Christians since. I was particularly helped by the writings of Hooykaas, a Dutch Christian historian and philosopher of science. His books on the history of Christianity and science and the importance of the

theistic world view of the Bible were immensely helpful.

Returning to university as a postgraduate student was an interesting experience and very different to being an undergraduate. It was a time I enjoyed immensely as I researched limestones in the northern Flinders Ranges. Once again I was extensively involved in student groups and led several series of studies on science a faith with other science students. By this time the evolution-creation "debate" had heated up considerably, and a much narrower range of views were being argued and far less toleration was being shown to divergent views.

THE ABYSS OF TIME

First and foremost for me geology is fun! In the course of my professional life I have brushed snow off rocks in Tasmania, been bounced in light planes in South Australia, logged drill holes in 47 degree heat (in the shade) in Western Australia, fought off flies in the Territory, watched crocodiles in Queensland, explored the coastline of New South Wales, gone down mines in Victoria, dived along the coastline of southern Australia, and clambered over volcanoes in the Philippines. Life has not been dull.

However, far more than mere excitement and variety, being a geologist has brought me into contact with the awesomeness of the abyss of time that earth history reveals. Much of my work has been done on my own, and it is in solitude that the immensity of the history of God's creation can best sink in. To stand on the side of a mountain and read the story in the multiple strata of rock tilted on their sides like pages of a giant book is to catch a glimpse of the meaning of the title "Ancient of days". Examining the surface of one of those layers and seeing the sand ripples left by a long-vanished sea, observing how the falling tide planed off their crests, and seeing the little trails left by small sea creatures as they wandered over the surface in that long-ago instant is a humbling experience and arouses the same feelings that stirred David in Psalm 8 "What is man....?" The trees and the beasts of the field praise God, as the trilobites and dinosaurs in their day.

A CHRISTIAN AMONG GEOLOGISTS

Non-geologists often seem to think that the great challenges for a Christian geologist are theological-philosophical ones such as the age of the earth, moral dilemmas like uranium mining, or cultural problems such as aboriginal land rights. The reality is somewhat more prosaic. The real issues faced by a Christian geologist are much the same as those faced by anyone else, how to render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's, and the challenge of living as a Christian in a competitive and demanding work environment, often in close quarters with people very different from yourself, away from family, friends, and church.

Geologists are no more or less godless than the next person and I have enjoyed the company and support of many who have been fine Christians. Among the non-Christian geologists there are the usual mix of atheists, agnostics, and the just plain confused that one meets elsewhere. Even amongst those hostile to Christianity (and they are very few), I have never encountered any personal animosity and most geologists are prepared to listen to an explanation of our faith if the opportunity arises.

A GEOLOGIST AMONG CHRISTIANS

Sadly, owing to the polarisation caused by the so-called "creation-science" movement (summed up by my wife as being "neither creative nor scientific"), being a geologist among Christians has not been so happy. I have been labelled apostate, heretic, an under-miner of the faith, and been told that I am cursed by God. Such responses are fortunately fairly rare, more common is the assumption that I am ignorant of the truth regarding the age of the earth or the origin of rocks. The best comments of this type have been "the experts are always the hardest to convince" and "that is just your opinion" (I hope my customers get value for the \$50 an hour I charge them for my opinion)! Interestingly, these views always come from those who have no knowledge of the relevant sciences.

All this is doubtless very good for my humility and has taught me that we are truly justified by faith through grace and not by our theology (which is a work like anything else). Neither are we justified by other people's opinions of us, it is God who justifies. It is a pity that so much time is wasted on trivial issues like the how and when of God's creation, when there are much greater lessons in creation about God's sovereignty and our responsibility. However, the disappointments have been counterbalanced by responses of those who have not felt threatened by geological knowledge, and with whom I have been able to share the fascination of rocks, fossils, and minerals, and the mysteries of deep time. So next time you meet a geologist, be nice to them, they might even be a Christian and be able to share some of the glory of God that they have seen in Creation.