

# A Sabbath Conversation

---

## How Old is the Earth?

By Jeffrey J. Meyers

As Adam and Eve walked to the center of the Garden of Eden to meet with the LORD on their first Sabbath they conversed about the origin and age of the earth.

Adam: You know, honey, we spent a lot of time yesterday making preparations for this house, and we still have an awful lot of work left to do. My arms are tired from all of that chopping. This wood is tough stuff. And, then, tomorrow I still have to dig down into this soil so that I can anchor the foundation. I'm glad we get to rest today. Eve, I've been thinking about a lot of things. Do you remember what God said about the origin of all of these things we're working with.

Eve: I sure do. You told me while we were working. God told us that he created us early yesterday morning. He also told us that he created these huge trees just four days ago. What's your point?

Adam: Well, just this: it sure does seem like these trees are a lot older than a few days, doesn't it? Look at this stump. What do you suppose all of those rings mean?

Eve: I'm not sure, but have you noticed that not all of the trees are the same size in the garden?

Adam: Yeah, I have. What's the connection?

Eve: If I remember right. . . sure, look here. . . the smaller trees have fewer rings. See?

Adam: I guess I would have expected that. After all, they ARE smaller. We have observed small and large animals, so it only makes sense that there are small and large kinds of trees.

Eve: Sure, but some of these smaller trees are the exact same kind as the older ones. Look at this. Both the smaller and the larger of these two trees have the same leaves and the same bark patterns. What do you make of that?

Adam: Hmm, interesting. If I didn't know better, I'd say that the smaller one is younger and the larger one is older. Eventually, the smaller ones must become bigger. It looks like these plants grow. I think that much is implicit in God's own description of them to us yesterday. How did he put it?

Eve: Let's see. He used the language of "seed-bearing plants and trees" and said something about their reproduction "according to their kinds."

Of course! Why didn't I see it before! These funny looking things hanging on the branches are seeds. They must eventually fall to the ground and produce little trees. Amazing!

Adam: So far so good, dear — a brilliant analysis! But this only complicates what I have been thinking about all day. I've been meditating on what God has said to us. I think that's part of what he wants us to do today. Anyway, I see a problem that I can't seem to understand.

Eve: What's that, honey?

Adam: All of these trees, big and small, have rings. They are all at various levels of maturity. These things must take years and years to reproduce. It may even be that each of these rings represents the growth of a whole day! Can you imagine that? This big one here has about 25 rings. And even these little ones have more than 4 rings in them. Do you see my point?

Eve: I sure do. These trees are *old*. At least that's what it looks like. It seems like they are much older than just four days. But God has told us, Adam, that he created these trees only four days ago.

Adam: Yeah, I know. That's *exactly* what I've been thinking about. How can that be?

Eve: You know, dear, it's not just the trees.

Adam: What do you mean?

Eve: I have the same question about *everything*. Look at how organized the Garden of Eden is. We didn't do that? We've taken our lumber from outside of the garden where everything is disorganized and — well, what should I call it? — “wild.” Yeah, that's a good word for it: “wild.” My point is: who planted and arranged this garden? It has taken us hours just to get the wood piled up to work on our house; how long do you think it took someone else to get this garden to look like it does?

Adam: God himself planted and arranged this garden, dear. I was planning on talking to you about that later on today. I haven't been able to tell you everything that happened to me yesterday before you were created. Just before God brought the animals to me to name, I watched as he planted and organized this entire area. It's one of the first things I remember doing. I think he did it like that so we could learn something about our own mission in the world.

Eve: O.K. I figured that was the case, but I wasn't certain. It's better to hear it directly from you, since you saw Yahweh do it. Nevertheless, my point still stands. At first glance, it certainly *appears* like this garden took someone many days, maybe even weeks to create, but actually God did it himself in about an hour or so. It doesn't have to be any older than a few hours, even though it may *look* as if it is the product of many weeks of hard work.

Adam: Precisely. But you said that this problem extended to *everything*. What did you mean by that?

Eve: I meant that everything seems to be older than it really is. You've already probed the soil. What did you find?

Adam: You saw me do it. There appears to be layers of dirt and rock. Some of it looks like it oily black leaves. As if the leaves that fall from the trees eventually end up in the soil. Something like that. But I can't be sure. But your point seems to be that the soil also looks like it has developed from a long process. Is that right?

Eve: You got it. It looks old. That's what I meant when I said that I have the same question about everything. Not only that, but look at you and me.

Adam: You weren't there yesterday when I was naming the animals, but let me tell you something strange. Maybe it's related to what we are talking about. Yesterday, when I was studying the animals, I found out that every animal has a mate. Of course, you know that. I've already told you. But what I didn't tell you was that I noticed that within the same animal "kind" there were some specimens that were larger than others. So, some kangaroos were as tall as you and me, but others were much smaller. They looked like little copies of the two big original animals.

Eve: Little copies?

Adam: Yep, little copies. This has been bothering me ever since I noticed it yesterday. And now this conversation with you has triggered a possible hypothesis to account for it. Now follow me on this. We're looking at these trees, all of which are different sizes, right? On analogy with the different sizes of animals, I conclude that these smaller trees must be "growing" into the size of the larger ones of the same kind. The little animals, too, are no doubt "growing" up. Remember, how each of the larger animals are paired up, just like you and me? Well, the little animals tended to hang around the male/female pairs. I even observed some of

the male and female animals physically unite just like we did yesterday afternoon. You know what I think?

Eve: I bet I do. You're thinking that these animals were pairing off in order to reproduce themselves. God must have created these little animals that you saw yesterday so that there would be "families" right off the bat, but he gave the same command to the animals as he gave to us: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." God's not going to create little animals *ex nihilo* every time there's a need for a new family. Right?

Adam: That is exactly what I was thinking. And more! This means that these male and female animals somehow reproduce themselves by this act of physical connection. Exactly how that will occur remains to be seen. Nevertheless, it's pretty clear to me that the result will be little copies of the two big original animals. Little copies. Small reproductions. Apparently they grow up and mature into adults and the process repeats itself all over again. That must mean that we will reproduce ourselves the same way. I mean, it follows, doesn't it?

Eve: Of course it does. When you learned that you had no suitable helper like all of the animals, then God created me. It's only logical that we will reproduce in a similar way. It seems as if everything in creation is connected to everything else in some deep and mysterious way. Observing the animals helps us discover something about the trees and the trees in turn illumine our own condition, but when all is said and done we are on our way towards discovering something of the sublime ways of our Creator.

Adam: Boyoboy, woman, you are one intelligent helper! I would never have figured this out if it weren't for your intellectual stimulation. But back to my original point. You and I are full grown. Once again, it *seems* as if we are older than we actually are. Who knows? When we eventually reproduce ourselves with a little copy, it might take *days* for one of our little replicas to grow to our size. The animals that I have observed don't seem to grow much faster than that. But God has told us that we are only one day old!

Eve: I guess the more I think about it the less of a problem it really is. How else would God have created the world? I suppose he could have created everything so that it would have a developed to maturity over time. But even then, whatever God would have created, it seems to me that it would of necessity have the appearance of age.

Adam: Hey, I like that phrase "the appearance of age." Let me try to rephrase what you're saying, dear. Given the concept of creation *ex nihilo*,

there does not seem to be anything logically, philosophically, or theological suspect about the notion of apparent age. How does that sound?

Eve: Hey, I like those big, fat, juicy, Latinate words! This is fun, isn't it.

Adam: More fun than chopping wood, that's for sure! We'll have to come up with a name for what we're doing here. But, to continue: the "appearance of age" seems almost to be a corollary to the notion of supernatural creation. How else would God create, unless we are going to strap God with the necessity of using process? Did he have to create everything little and wait for it to develop into maturity? Is it somehow logically, philosophically, or theologically contradictory that God would create without any processes?

Eve: No it is not. And that is my point. But, now, sweetie, how would you answer this objection? The idea of apparent age is theologically and scientifically dubious because it is *deceptive*! Is God trying to deceive us?

Adam: My dear wife, my little shrew! Playing the devil's advocate, are you? Is God trying to deceive us? I would think not. Maybe it would be a good idea if I stated this in language that was a little more abstract. After all, we are going to have to make a record of this for our children. They are surely going to ask the same kinds of questions. That the earth exhibits "the appearance of age" is not surprising since we accept the fact of divine revelation: a mature creation would not deceive man if God made it clear that he created the world in six normal days in the not too distant future. Now, we know, don't we, Eve, that this is exactly what God has done? He has told us that we were created yesterday and that the animals and trees and everything else were all created within the last week. That's settles it. What do you think?

Eve: I think you are right. But let me take a stab at what you have called "abstract language." You can't have all the fun you know. We women have brains, too! What if one of our children one day challenges us on this issue with another dilemma. What if after many, many days of human life, one of our children studying some aspect of the earth reasons like this: "God told me to study the earth and to learn from it. He even tells me that he reveals himself truly to me by means of the creation. But when I look at and study creation I discover what appears to me to be a very old world. Possibly hundreds or thousands of weeks old. But, now, I read in these scrolls passed down to me from my ancestors that the earth is only dozens of weeks old. How could that be? I believe these books to be the true and accurate Word of God. Does God expect me to ignore and override the apparent evidence of my senses and believe what is written in

these scrolls? What about the truthfulness of nature's testimony?" Do you understand where I'm going with this, Adam?

Adam: I certainly do. But I'm waiting to hear how you would formulate an answer to this objection.

Eve: Here goes: the issue here involves the very possibility of an extra-natural Word of God giving us information that is not available to our senses (the age of the earth is not observable or testable in the strictest sense of scientific methodology). There is no reason to reject this possibility. Once again, there is nothing inherently deceptive about God creating a mature earth — as long as he tells us how old it is. Appearance of age seems to be inherent in the very nature of creation *ex nihilo*. Or at least there is nothing logically contradictory about this possibility.

Adam: Bravo! So here's the conclusion of our reasoning. See if you agree. On the morning of our first full day of life, as we reflected upon God's world and his self-revelation to us, we might have scientifically concluded that we are about thirty days old, according to our best guess. But God has told us just yesterday that he created us only one day ago! Now, here's the crux: what will we trust? Or better, *who* will we trust? Our own powers of reasoning and deduction or God's special revelation to us? Will we trust God's Word to us or the evidence of our senses?

Eve: Very well put, my lord. This is the real issue isn't it. Will we trust what God has told us even though we can't completely understand exactly how he has created the world in six days or will we reject God's Word and trust our own mental resources? You know honey, it seems easy for us. After all, God has just yesterday spoken to us. You heard him. You actually talked to him. For us to believe what he says is not really all that difficult. But I suspect our children will have a much tougher time.

Adam: Hey, what's that over there? It's coming into the Garden. What did I call those reptilian animals yesterday anyway? Oh, yeah, that's a dragon or a serpent. I wonder what it's doing?

Eve: Come on, let's go see.

Adam: Should we really stop now? We're almost at the Tree of Life. I can see it just up the next rise.

Eve: Let's just take a minute to find out what this magnificent creature wants. Look, he's beckoning us.

Adam: Well, I guess no harm can come of it.