

Was ‘Lucy’ killed in the post-Flood period?

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One task of many in constructing the stratigraphic sequence of events in the Creation/Flood framework is in understanding human anthropology and ape diversity. A recent proposal¹ seeking to address this relationship presents a chronology that we contend is both inconsistent with the physical evidence and unnecessary from a scriptural perspective. We review this model and offer an alternative which we believe remains consistent with Scripture and better satisfies the ideals of Occam’s razor.

The dispersion of apes followed by humans: A post-Flood proposal

Wise² proposed that ape diversity can best be understood in a post-Flood setting:

‘Before humans left Babel, it appears that apes had already spread over much of the Old World and had diversified into a large array of species.’

He further speculated that many of these apes were later killed and buried by local disasters; hence the stratigraphic horizons of the fossilized ape skeletons would be beneath those of human remains:

‘If we are correct about post-Flood rocks, apes were at their highest point of diversity and were buried in local catastrophes just before humans spread out from Babel.’²

‘Many ape fossils (such as “Lucy”) are found in layers lower than any layers with human fossils (such as “Turkana Boy”).’³

If this interpretation is correct, then what were these local disasters that created ‘thousands of feet’² of post-Flood sediment containing ape and human skeletal fossils? One possibility was described as:

‘... supervolcanoes, created excellent conditions for preserving fossils.’²

We have some familiarity working in this type of post-Flood paleoenvironment⁴⁻⁶ and believe this is an interesting proposition—one worthy of further examination. Can the fossil evidence for this proposal defend a post-Flood chronology, where the migration of apes is purportedly followed by humans? Are there other ways of defining the ‘stratigraphic’ relationship between apes and humans within the Creation/Flood framework?

What is the age of the skeletal-containing volcanic rocks?

The first and most obvious question is: how does Wise¹ age-date the strata containing the fossilized skeletons of apes and humans? They do not occur in close association (e.g. his examples of Lucy and Turkana Boy occur in the Awash Valley of Ethiopia’s Afar Depression and at Nariokotome near Lake Turkana in Kenya, respectively. These areas

are separated by hundreds of kilometres, are located in different volcanic strata, and are chronologically arranged solely by radiometric age-dates). Since the fossils are not contiguous, any stratigraphic relationship between them must be defined by the associated volcanic sediments. Therefore, he must assume that the relative (not numerical) radiometric age-dates assigned by naturalists to the volcanic sediments are correct. The use of this age-dating method has been rejected by most young-earth creationists and the reader is encouraged to review several creationist critiques⁷⁻⁹ for more specific information. Why should we accept radiometric age dates as relatively accurate when we do not accept the actual numerical dates? No explanation or analysis has been offered by any young-earth creationist to support this concept.

What data are we to accept for ape/human origins?

Time and again we are subjected to naturalistic anthropologists’ claims that they have discovered ‘the most important human ancestral fossil in all of human history.’ Most recently, this claim was made for a hobbit-sized purportedly ‘human’ creature in Indonesia. Surprisingly, Wise¹ accepted this claim and used the information to set the limits of human brain capacity and body size to those between ‘hobbits’ and Neandertals. We take issue with the apparent ease with which Wise so readily accepts such claims by naturalists. While originally hailed as an early hominid, subsequent studies of the hobbit creature’s wrist morphology indicate that it likely represents a species akin to the extant great apes.¹⁰ Many anthropologists no longer consider this creature either a hominid or an ancestor to humans, so why should young-earth creationists? [Ed.—but see also pp. 25–27].

In most instances, the ‘older’ the hominid, the fewer the bones found. The Lucy skeleton is a good example. Sometimes the bones are not even contiguous.¹¹ We urge caution and a healthy skepticism as naturalistic anthropologists will accept the smallest piece of bone as evidence of an early hominid or human (e.g. Nebraska Man). While anatomical variation in the ape kind appears to be substantial, no such levels occur in the human kind.



Figure 1. A fully articulated skeleton of the extinct barrel-bodied rhinoceros *Teleoceras major*. The skeleton is approximately four feet (1.2 m) long and is buried in volcanic ash. Many other plant and animal fossils have been found buried in this same volcanic ash layer at the Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park. All of the combined fossilized evidence supports the idea that this locale was once a post-Flood environment. We should expect nothing less in defining ape diversity and human anthropology in a post-Flood setting.

Human and ape skeletons: Are these Flood or post-Flood fossils?

Wise's¹ proposal that ape and human skeletons date to the post-Flood period lacks empirical evidence. What assigns these fossils to the post-Flood? The answer appears to be the skeletons themselves. This approach requires the same circular reasoning that evolutionists use to age-date rocks and correlate them to their uniformitarian geologic timescale.

We do not believe this to be an appropriate means of age-dating strata to either the Flood or post-Flood time frames and have proposed that *all* strata be defined locally within the context of changing geologic energy related to changes in Flood activity.^{12,13}

How does the 'Tower of Babel' fit in this story?

Wise¹ claims that the oldest ape skeletons (e.g. Lucy) date to a time after the Flood, but before God invoked human dispersion at the Tower of Babel. Where is the empirical evidence—beyond simple ape and human skeletons—that substantiates this claim? How is all of this linked to the Tower of Babel? Where is the evidence of a former post-Flood habitat as might be substantiated with other animal

and plant fossils? Without such data, this proposal cannot be credibly defended by evidence from good science or the Bible.

An example of a post-Flood site buried by a large volcanic eruption

We propose that empirical evidence defending a post-Flood setting should include more than just human and ape skeletons. Like Wise,¹ we reject any evolutionary link between apes and humans. A combination of paleontologic and stratigraphic evidence should direct the interpretation of ape diversity and human anthropology. A first step in this process would be to determine if an actual paleoenvironmental setting can be drawn from the physical evidence or has this determination been based on naturalistic assumptions?

We offer the following example demonstrating the integration of paleontologic and stratigraphic data in a manner that supports a post-Flood paleoenvironment. Several years ago, we reported on a large bone bed at Ashfall Fossil Beds State Historical Park, Nebraska.⁵ This site contains several different species of animals that were buried under volcanic ash and preserved as articulated or nearly complete three-dimensional skeletal forms (figure 1). This

setting is consistent with Wise's¹ expectations for killing and preserving fossilized ape skeletons in a post-Flood volcanic setting. At the Ashfall site, scientists excavating the ash discovered a diverse group of fossilized animals, fossilized plant seeds and plant fossils, and lacustrine sediments. Based on this combination of evidence, the naturalists proposed that this was a former pond where grazers congregated to drink approximately 10 million years ago.¹⁴ We visited the site, examined the physical evidence, and proposed that it was a post-Flood fluvial setting used by the various animals for drinking water and habitat. At some point during the post-Flood period, a volcanic eruption in Idaho dropped ash across the area killing and burying many of the animals and preserving the former paleoenvironment.⁵ All the preserved fossilized evidence (e.g. animals, plants, sediments) point to a fully functional former environment and builds a strong case for our belief that this was a post-Flood setting.

Conclusion

How much evidence do we need to accept naturalistic claims about human evolution? What portion of this information can we use in constructing the Creation/Flood framework? Wise¹ suggests that ape and human skeletal succession can be defined in a relative manner drawn from naturalistic interpretations defined by radiometrically age-dated sediments. We do not agree. The lack of any fossilized and preserved, supportive environmental evidence, combined with the unknown age relationship between skeletons separated by hundreds of kilometres, does not provide an adequate means of understanding possible ape diversification or human anthropology. Linking this chronological conceptualization to the Tower of Babel dispersion remains both unsubstantiated and inappropriate. Such stories only contribute confusion and misinformation. A careful reading of the proposal¹ reveals a confusing mix of biblical and naturalistic worldviews and geologic models. This is not the best means of defining Earth history within the context of Scripture.

Based on the poor preservation and piecemeal condition of most of the fossilized skeletons of extinct apes like Lucy, we believe that it is more reasonable to broadly interpret them within the context of the Flood. However, a more focused interpretation would be based on a range of criteria applied to site-specific conditions. Post-Flood human and ape skeletons should be buried in association with other physical evidence which would allow the reconstruction of a former paleoenvironment. Skeletons themselves do not document a former paleoenvironmental setting. We are not bound to follow the naturalists' worldview and should treat their philosophy as counter to the Creation/Flood framework. We still need to investigate the 'early hominid' African locales to determine how the rock record fits within the Creation/Flood framework, and in doing so, we should then be able to speak more definitively regarding the age of the strata and the nature of the fossilized skeletal remains.

References

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