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## Science Concerns & Questions

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## SCIENCE

### *Concerns & Questions*

*“Since the Gospel embraces all truth, there can never be any genuine contradictions between true science and true religion...I am obliged, as a Latter-day Saint, to believe whatever is true, regardless of the source.”*

– HENRY EYRING, *FAITH OF A SCIENTIST*, P. 12,31

*“Latter-day revelation teaches that there was **no death on this earth before the fall of Adam**. Indeed, death entered the world as a direct result of the Fall.”*

– 2017 LDS BIBLE DICTIONARY TOPIC: DEATH

*“4000 B.C. – Fall of Adam”*

– 2017 LDS BIBLE DICTIONARY TOPIC: CHRONOLOGY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

*“More than 90 percent of all organisms that have ever lived on Earth are extinct...At least a handful of times in the last 500 million years, 50 to more than 90 percent of all species on Earth have disappeared in a geological blink of the eye.”*

– NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC, *MASS EXTINCTIONS*

*“The idea that the religion of Christ is one thing, and science is another, is a mistaken idea, for there is no true religion without true science, and consequently there is no true science without true religion.”*

- BRIGHAM YOUNG, 1874

*“In these respects we differ from the Christian world, for our religion will not clash with or contradict the facts of science in any particular. ... [W]hether the Lord found the earth empty and void, whether he made it out of nothing or out of the rude elements; or whether he made it in six days or in as many millions of years, is and will remain a matter of speculation in the minds of men unless he give revelation on the subject.”*

- BRIGHAM YOUNG, 1971

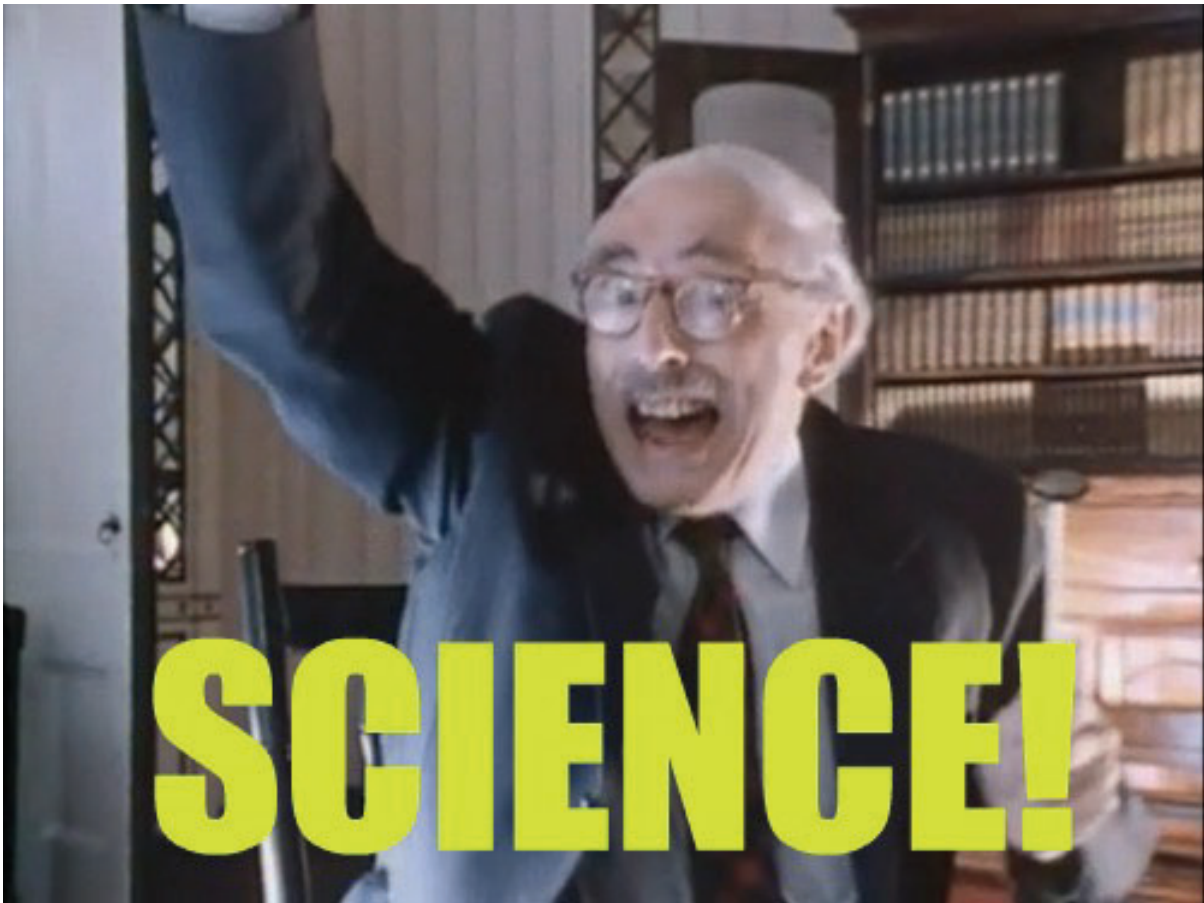
## **SHORT ANSWER:**

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**Latter-day Saint theology is remarkably accepting of scientific truth, and supposed conflicts between science and religion are largely matters of personal opinion, not Church doctrine. No one is required to reject science to be a faithful Church member, and evolution and geological time are taught at Church-owned universities.**

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## **LONG ANSWER:**



The problem Mormonism encounters is that so many of its claims are well within the realm of scientific study, and as such, can be proven or disproven.

No, the real problem is that you're about to make a lot of scientific claims for the Church that the Church doesn't make for itself.

To cling to faith in these areas, where the overwhelming evidence is against it, is willful ignorance, not spiritual dedication.

It's a good thing, then, that Latter-day Saints are not required to take a scientific position on what is figurative and what is literal in scriptural stories.

[1.2 Nephi 2:22](#) and [Alma 12:23-24](#) state there was no death of any kind (humans, all animals, birds, fish, dinosaurs, etc.) on this earth until the "Fall of Adam..."

Here's 2 Nephi 2:22:

And now, behold, if Adam had not transgressed he would not have fallen, but he would have remained in the garden of Eden. And all things which were created must have remained in the same state in which they were after they were created; and they must have remained forever, and had no end.

Where does this say there was no death of any kind on this earth before the Fall?

Here's Alma 12: 23-24:

And now behold, I say unto you that if it had been possible for Adam to have partaken of the fruit of the tree of life at that time, there would have been no death, and the word would have been void, making God a liar, for he said: If thou eat thou shalt surely die.

And we see that death comes upon mankind, yea, the death which has been spoken of by Amulek, which is the temporal death; nevertheless there was a space granted unto man in which he might repent; therefore this life became a probationary state; a time to prepare to meet God; a time to prepare for that endless state which has been spoken of by us, which is after the resurrection of the dead.

Where does this say there was no death of any kind on this earth before the Fall?

... which according to [D&C 77:6-7](#) occurred 7,000 years ago.

Here's D&C 77:6-7:

6 Q. What are we to understand by the book which John saw, which was sealed on the back with seven seals?

A. We are to understand that it contains the revealed will, mysteries, and the works of God; the hidden things of his economy concerning this earth during the seven thousand years of its continuance, or its temporal existence.

7 Q. What are we to understand by the seven seals with which it was sealed?

A. We are to understand that the first seal contains the things of the first thousand years, and the second also of the second thousand years, and so on until the seventh.

Where do these scriptures mention the date of the Fall of Adam?

This scripture has long fascinated me, as it refers to the seven thousand years of the earth's "temporal existence." What does that mean? Since we reject *ex nihilo* creation and believe the matter out of which the earth was made is eternal, surely that dirt is older than 7,000 years – it's so old, in fact, that it can't really be measured. Is that what D&C 77 is saying – the physical planet has only existed for 7,000 years? (Actually, the real number would be less than 6,000 years, because the last thousand years of the temporal existence would constitute the millennium in which Christ reigns personally on the earth.) Because that's not just inconsistent with science; it's inconsistent with scripture.

7,000 years isn't the chronological age of dirt; it's the length of earth's "continuance" or "temporal existence." So what does that mean?

I think of it in these terms. How old is the city of London?

According to Wikipedia, infallible source of all wisdom, the city was founded in 43 AD and first referred to as "Londinium" a little less than a century later. Did London exist prior to 43 AD? Well, physically, yes, of course it did. The Thames was flowing, but it wasn't called the Thames. All the dirt was presumably there, too, but it wasn't called London, because there was no one there to call it London. So it really wasn't quite London yet, despite its geographical relationship to the town and then city that would later occupy that spot of ground.



**Londinium circa 200 AD**

*Not too long after the start of its temporal history*

History is concerned with chronology and where there is no chronology, there isn't really any history to speak of, either. Anthropologists refer to the era prior to man's arrival as "pre-history," as in "prehistoric times." So when does history begin?

Specifically, if the chunks of matter that make up the earth have always existed, at what point did they participate in earth's "continuance" or "temporal," i.e. time-based, "existence?" I submit that the criteria is the same as that of when London began.

History began when people showed up who were capable of recording time, which would require mathematics, writing, and philosophy – in a word, civilization. It's not scientifically ludicrous to say that, regardless of biological origins, functional human civilization is somewhere around 7,000 years old, give or take.

In any case, I don't think the idea of earth's 7,000 year-old temporal existence mentioned in Latter-Day Saint scripture ought to be viewed through an *ex nihilo* filter, nor do I think it presents a significant intellectual roadblock to credible theories about the origins of both the

earth and the life upon it.

So where does the Fall of Adam fit into that timeframe? No idea. God has not seen fit to reveal the dates or the process, so I feel no responsibility to worry about it or to reject scientific evidence about both the age of the earth and the origins of life.

It is scientifically established there has been life and death on this planet for billions of years. How does the Church reconcile this?

It doesn't.

“Whether the mortal bodies of man evolved in natural processes to present perfection, through the direction and power of God; whether the first parents of our generations, Adam and Eve, were transplanted from another sphere, with immortal tabernacles, which became corrupted through sin and the partaking of natural foods, in the process of time; whether they were born here in mortality, as other mortals have been, are questions not fully answered in the revealed word of God.” (Improvement Era, August, 1908, 778.)

“The Church itself has no philosophy about the modus operandi employed by the Lord in His creation of the world” (Joseph F. Smith, *Juvenile Instructor* 46 (April 1911): 208-09).

That one's kind of fun, as Joseph F.'s son, Joseph Fielding Smith, wrote a book called *Man: His Origin and Destiny* to refute evolution and claim the earth was only a few thousand years old. He tried to get the Church to publish the book, but my great-grandfather David O. McKay, who was a firm believer in evolution, death before the Fall, and geological time, disagreed with Joseph Fielding Smith on just about everything in that book.

Here's a letter President McKay wrote on the subject:

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints  
47 E. South Temple Street  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
David O. McKay, President

February 3, 1959

Dr. A. Kent Christensen  
Department of Anatomy  
Cornell University Medical College  
1300 York Avenue  
New York 21, New York

Dear Brother Christensen:

I have your letter of January 23, 1959 in which you ask for a statement of the Church's position on the subject of evolution.

The Church has issued no official statement on the subject of the theory of evolution.

Neither 'Man, His Origin and Destiny' by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, nor 'Mormon Doctrine' by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, is an official publication of the Church...

Sincerely yours,  
[signed]  
David O. McKay  
(President)

How do we explain the massive fossil evidence showing not only animal death but also the deaths of at least 14 different Hominin species over the span of 250,000 years prior to Adam?

We explain it by teaching precisely that information in biology classes at church-owned universities like BYU and BYU-Idaho.

2. If Adam and Eve are the first humans, how do we explain the dozen or so other Hominid species who lived and died 35,000 – 2.4 million years before Adam? When did those guys stop being human?

That's a question that B.H. Roberts and James E. Talmage frequently asked, as they believed in the idea of "pre-Adamites," as they called them. It is true many prophets and apostles doubted evolution, but many more have not. The Church has taken no official position on the subject, so there's no need for it to "explain" any of this, as it's not spiritually relevant. The Church is concerned with why God created the heavens and the earth, not how.

3. Genetic science and testing has advanced significantly the past few decades. I was surprised to learn from results of my own genetic test that 1.6% of my DNA is Neanderthal.

I suspect mine would be higher. I'm quite the caveman. I often leave the milk out after eating a bowl of cereal.

How does this fact fit with Mormon theology and doctrine that I am a literal descendant of a literal Adam and Eve from about 7,000 years ago?

Given that there is no official Church theology that gives us a date for Adam and Eve, I'd say you don't have to worry about that in the slightest.

Where do the Neanderthals fit in?

Perhaps you should ask a BYU biology professor, who will likely give you an answer that is consistent with modern scientific thinking.

How do I have pre-Adamic Neanderthal DNA and Neanderthal blood circulating my veins when this species died off about 33,000 years before Adam and Eve?

Many Latter-day Saints have many different answers to that question. Officially, the Church has no position on the matter.

Other events/claims that science has discredited:

- Tower of Babel (a staple story of the Jaredites in the Book of Mormon)

Science has nothing whatsoever to say about the Tower of Babel. Nobody knows where it was, or when it was supposed to have happened. I think there was an actual Tower of Babel, but I neither know nor particularly care how much of the story that has been handed down is literal or figurative. I assume there are elements of both.

- Global flood (4,500 years ago)

There are fully active and faithful Latter-day Saints of every stripe who believe anything and everything that it is possible to believe about the story of Noah and the flood – some who insist that it is 100% scientifically accurate, and others who insist the whole thing is a fable, and everywhere in between. The Church does not require its members to believe any scientific information about a global flood, least of all that it took place 4,500 years ago.

- Humans and animals having their origins from Noah's family and the animals contained in the ark 4,500 years ago. It is scientifically impossible, for example, for the bear to have evolved into several species (Sun Bear, Polar Bear, Grizzly Bear, etc.) from common ancestors from Noah's time just a few thousand years ago.

It's cool that you really like bears. Why would they have had to evolve since Noah's time? Why couldn't there have been all those different bears on the ark? You're making assumptions here based on very little information.

Mind you, I'm not saying there were all those different kinds of bears on the ark - I don't know how much of Noah's ark is literal and how much is figurative, so I don't much care.

There are a host of other impossibilities associated with Noah's Ark story claims.

Maybe this makes me naive, but I feel no need to raise my hand in Sunday School and point out the scientific improbability of Noah's ark, but neither do I get indignant when a biology teacher describes the evolutionary process. There's room in the Church for people who believe all sorts of things about science, and there's no litmus test requiring any degree of literal scriptural interpretation. Latter-day Saint theology teaches that we should seek after truth wherever we can find it, which means we should learn more about science, not less.

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