

Re-interpretation

1. Maimonides (12th century Egypt), Guide of the Perplexed 2:25

Know that our flight away from the idea of a “first” [non-created] universe is not because of the Torah’s verses which speak of a created world. The texts which teach creation of the world are no greater than the texts which teach that Gd is physical, and the gates of interpretation are not sealed before us, and they are not withheld from us regarding creation of the universe. We could explain them, as we did in distancing the idea of physicality, and it may even be much easier, and further, we could explain those texts to support [the idea] that the universe was first, as we have explained texts to distance the physicality of Gd. In truth, what caused us not to do this, and not to believe it, are two factors...

2. Rabbi Abraham, son of the Rambam (12th-13th century Egypt), Statement on *Derashot Chazal*, Introduction

It is not mandated by the great stature of the talmudic sages and their wisdom, and the completeness of their wisdom in explaining the Torah and its minutiae, and the correctness of their explanations of its principles and details, that we argue for them and uphold their views in all of their statements about medicine, nature and astronomy, and to believe them in this as we believe them in explaining the Torah. The ultimate wisdom of Torah is in their hands, and to them was given the task of teaching it to humanity, as in Deuteronomy 17:11, “By the Torah they shall teach you, etc.”

3. Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (20th century Israel), *Igrot haRa’ayah* I 91

The Torah certainly sealed the act of Creation, and it spoke in hints and parables, for everyone knows that the act of Creation is among the secrets of Torah. If the account were to be understood simply, what secret would there be here?!

Drawing on classic sources: It Looks Complete

4. Talmud, Chullin 60a

Everything created was created at its full height, at its full intellect, and in its full form. It is written, “And the heavens and earth and all of their host [*tzeva’am*] were completed” – Do not read *tzeva’am*, but *tzivyonam* [their form].

Drawing on classic sources: Multiple Worlds

5. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 3:7

Rabbi Yehudah bar Simon said: It does not say, “There was evening,” but “And there was evening.” From here we see that there was a history before this. Rabbi Avahu said: This teaches that He created worlds and destroyed them, until He created these. He said, “These please Me; the others did not please Me.”

Rabbi Pinchas said: Rabbi Avahu’s source is “And G-d saw all that He had made, and it was very good.” “These please Me; the others did not please Me.”

6. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (11th century Spain), Commentary to Leviticus 25:2

“A Shabbat for Gd” – Like the day of Shabbat. And the secret of the days of the world is hinted here.

7. Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko (13th-14th century Spain), *Meirat Einayim*, Shuchat translation

“One [millennium] laid waste” - this means that there will be a time of absence of humans, fowl and animals, and their causes, which will stop their activity and their continuity and therefore will need and depend upon something to reinstate them.

8. Rabbi Yitzchak of Akko (13th-14th century Spain), *Otzar Chaim*, Shuchat translation

I have reason to write a great and divine secret, which should really be hidden. Know that Gd’s day is a thousand of our years, as it says: “For in your sight a thousand years are like yesterday that has past [*sic*]” (Psalms 90:3). Our [solar] year is 365 days and a quarter; therefore the [Divine] year above is 365,000 [and 250] years... And now I shall say something that needs meditation. It is that 100 years for the Holy One Blessed Be He, are 36 times 150,000 of our years. And since we said that the year above is 365,000 and 250 years . . . calculate for a 100 years and for a 1000 years and you will not need any more thought. Therefore, our eyes can see that the world shall exist for a very long time. This is contrary to those who say that it will exist only 49,000 years, which are seven sabbaticals.

9. Rabbi Yisrael Lipschitz (19th century Germany, Poland), *Or haChaim*, Shuchat translation

The Lord's secrets are for those who revere Him, for they have received [the tradition] that we are in the fourth world, which in order of the seven days of creation, parallels the fourth day in which Gd created the luminary bodies. Therefore, in this cycle, the light of Torah has arisen which is the sun that lights up the entire world. So even if the honor of the holy nation is at a low, the holy Torah stands as a luminous light on the horizon... for the whole world. However, if the Torah is the large luminary of the day, the small luminary is human reason that rules in this world. It, too, arises in this cycle, and in the coming years it will reach heights previously unknown to the human mind.

10. Rabbi Eliyahu Benamozegh (19th century Italy), *Em laMikra*, Shuchat translation

[N]owadays, we can even understand our Sages of blessed memory literally, and we do not need to sit in the shade of a parable, for it has been proven by natural scientists that before this creation of matter, plants and animals, that there was another order to the worlds, of very different matter, plants and animals. These worlds were literally destroyed and the remains of their destruction we can still witness today in the belly of the earth... all in accordance with the statement of Rabbi Yehudah Bar Simon.

11. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (19th century Germany), *The Educational Value of Judaism*, Collected Writings VII
Judaism is not frightened even by the hundred of thousands and millions of years which the geological theory of the earth's development bandies about so freely. Judaism would have nothing to fear from that theory even if it were based on something more than mere hypothesis, on the still unproven presumption that the forces we see at work in our world today are the same as those that were in existence, with the same degree of potency, when the world was first created. Our rabbis, the Sages of Judaism, discuss (*Bereshit Rabbah* 9:2) the possibility that earlier worlds were brought into existence and subsequently destroyed by the Creator before He made our own earth in its present form and order. However, the Rabbis never made the acceptance of this and similar possibilities an article of faith binding on all Jews. They were willing to live with any theory that did not reject the basic truth that "every beginning is from Gd."

Rejection: Adopting Minority Scientific Views

12. Letter from Rabbi Yitzchak Aizik Herzog to Dr. Emanuel Velikovsky (1953)

How can the Torah chronology be scientifically defended, in view of the aeons which science postulates for the existence of man upon this earth? There is, of course, the well known Midrash, "*boneh olamot u-maharivan*" [*Gen. Rabbah* 3:7, *Ecccl. Rabbah* 3:11], but this can only help if we assume that "*maharivan*" does not mean annihilation, so that we can assume that fossils of man asserted by science to be so many hundreds of thousands of years old are relics of a previous earth. Yet anthropology seems to assert upon internal evidence that the present man is already hundreds of thousands of years old!

Nevertheless, Aldus Huxley speaks of 12,000 years as the age of civilized man upon this earth. Even this is far too much for Torah chronology (less than six thousand years). It has been tried to fix 6,000 as the age since the discovery by man of agriculture. Of course, strictly literal interpretation of the Pentateuchal text is out of the question. But super literary interpretation should be resorted to only when reason absolutely rules the literary sense being utterly impossible...

By the way, I see in your Epilogue to Volume I that you are satisfied that the planets and their satellites are only a few thousand years old. Do you then accept the Torah chronology literally? Are you then, at least not convinced from the internal evidence of the history of man upon the earth, that man has been here for already millions of years?

Would the numbers of the human race and its technical perfection—writing, etc.— not militate, in your opinion against the acceptance of a less than six thousand years date for man here?

More reading

Dr. Raphael Shuchat, *Attitudes Toward Cosmogony and Evolution*, <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/715602/>

Dr. Raphael Shuchat, *Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog's Attitude*, <http://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/745804/>

Dr. Nathan Aviezer, *In the Beginning: Biblical Creation and Science*

Dr. Gerald Schroeder, *Genesis and the Big Bang*