

Catastrophism, or Uniformitarianism?
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As I sit here and read the articles on the Answers in Genesis website concerning fossils, I'm struck by one recurring theme in their writings. They constantly point to examples of catastrophic events, such as the rapid burial animals in Buried Birth, Fossil Jellyfish in Australia, and others. They use these examples of these animals being rapidly buried to prove their point that they were catastrophically buried during Noah's Flood.

Let's look at this a little closer at these "catastrophic" claims. The opposite viewpoint is referred to as "uniformitarianism," which is the view of old-earth creationists. What are the definitions of these two terms, catastrophism and uniformitarianism? They are:

Catastrophism – The belief that the past history of the earth and of living things has been interrupted or greatly influenced by natural catastrophes occurring on a worldwide or very extensive scale.¹

Uniformitarianism – The belief or principle that the past history of the earth and its inhabitants is best interpreted in terms of what is known about the present. Uniformitarianism explains the past by appealing to known laws and principles acting in a gradual, uniform way through past ages.¹

By its very definition, you cannot believe in uniformitarianism if you believe the earth was created by God in six twenty-four hour days. That is because when you look at the present, and the geological processes we can observe, you must conclude that the earth is much older than 6,000 years. However, how about turning it around the other way...can the uniformitarianist believe in catastrophism?

Sure they can. I can look at the fossil record, and see events that occurred, like the ones alluded to by young earth creationists, and prove that catastrophic events do indeed happen. In fact, looking at the definition of Uniformitarianism, if we see catastrophes in the present, then we use them to understand the past. The problem is, that young-earth proponents use these events to say the Flood caused it, and the old-earth proponents say these catastrophic events occurred, but not during a single flood event, but through many separate, local flood events. Essentially, both of us believe in catastrophism!

So, what does the creationist prove by saying that a fossil proves Noah's Flood? Absolutely nothing. Besides, how does the young-earth scientist know that the fossil was created during the Flood of Noah? Was he there? Of course not...so he cannot assume this to be true. Herein lies the main problem...the young-earth scientist "assumes" when there is no evidence to back up their assumption. Look at the jellyfish article...how does

the author know when the event occurred? It could have been before, during, or after the flood of Noah! The Uniformitarianist will say, "This jellyfish was catastrophically buried and fossilized," but he won't "assume" it was during the Flood; indeed, he will probably perform some test to clarify its age, and not "guess" as the young-earth catastrophist does.

Conclusion

Young earth creationists like to pull examples "out of context," in order to prove the Flood, when they in fact don't have a clue when these fossils were created. Yes, you can assume that fossils were catastrophically buried...but unless you were there, there is no way to tell which catastrophe caused it. You can't assume it was Noah's Flood, unless you saw it.

¹ Definitions from Essentials of Earth History, by W. Lee Stokes, Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982