

## Fact Sheet for “Uniformitarianism” Acts 11:1-18

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Uniformitarianism is the assumption that the same natural laws and processes that operate in the universe now have always operated in the universe in the past and apply everywhere in the universe. It has included the gradualistic concept that "the present is the key to the past" and is functioning at the same rates.

Uniformitarianism has been a key principle of geology and virtually all fields of science, but naturalism's modern geologists, while accepting that geology has occurred across deep time, no longer hold to a strict gradualism.

Uniformitarianism was formulated by British naturalists in the late 18th century, starting with the work of the geologist James Hutton, which was refined by John Playfair and popularised by Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* in 1830. The term *uniformitarianism* was coined by William Whewell, who also coined the term catastrophism for the idea that Earth was shaped by a series of sudden, short-lived, violent events.<sup>1</sup>

This assumption of uniformitarianism, and even catastrophism, is at odds with the early biblical record. The bible records the *average* natural life span from Adam through Noah at 912 years. There was an immediate drop to almost half that after the flood, and average life spans dropped to less than 200 years after seven generations. Abraham would only live 175 years. This is neither uniformitarianism no catastrophism.

In Genesis 1 we read of something that does not exist today (Gen. 1:6-8). This water above the firmament apparently came down at the flood (Gen. 7:11-12). This could explain the drop in life spans.

The church, right from its very beginning, has wrestled with its own form of uniformitarianism. **“This is what your worship should look like!”**

From the day of Pentecost (one of the seven Jewish feasts of Leviticus 23) to Peter's interaction with Cornelius in Acts 10 the church was Jewish. Believing Jesus to be the Messiah, the Christ, was stretch enough. Imagine what it would have been like, after Peter's interaction with Cornelius, to accept Gentiles as fellow believers! Shouldn't they have to accept the worship requirements of the Jewish believers? Today we have the opposite side of the coin. The church is mostly gentile. Shouldn't Jewish believers worship like the rest of the church? Why would Christians want to value Jewish worship forms?

This Christian form of uniformitarianism is seen in other areas (music, liturgy, neckties, etc.). What is “sacred”? What should be followed by every Christian, no matter their background?

This passage shows the thick of the church's early wrestlings with this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Wikipedia (underlining and highlighting mine).

<sup>ESV</sup> <sup>1</sup> ¶ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. <sup>2</sup> So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, <sup>3</sup> "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them."

Now Peter would explain. But remember that Peter would also be influenced by them to incorrectly adjust his behavior (Gal. 2:13-14).

<sup>4</sup> But Peter began and explained it to them in order: <sup>5</sup> "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision, something like a great sheet descending, being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to me. <sup>6</sup> Looking at it closely, I observed animals and beasts of prey and reptiles and birds of the air. <sup>7</sup> And I heard a voice saying to me, 'Rise, Peter; kill and eat.' <sup>8</sup> But I said, 'By no means, Lord; for nothing common or unclean has ever entered my mouth.' <sup>9</sup> But the voice answered a second time from heaven, 'What God has made clean, do not call common.' <sup>10</sup> This happened three times, and all was drawn up again into heaven. <sup>11</sup> And behold, at that very moment three men arrived at the house in which we were, sent to me from Caesarea. <sup>12</sup> And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house. <sup>13</sup> And he told us how he had seen the angel stand in his house and say, 'Send to Joppa and bring Simon who is called Peter; <sup>14</sup> he will declare to you a message by which you will be saved, you and all your household.' <sup>15</sup> As I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell on them just as on us at the beginning. <sup>16</sup> And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'

See Acts 1:5

<sup>17</sup> If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?" <sup>18</sup> When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

This however was not the end of the discussion (see Acts 15).

Uniformitarianism – You need to worship like I do! In Peter's day – You need to worship like a Jew. Today – You need to worship like a Gentile.

Let me give you 4 guidelines. *The first three apply to everyone alike.*

1. The Bible alone and the Bible in its entirety is the standard for God's truth.
2. Its meaning is resident within its words. Be careful to interpret it well.
3. Apply it!
4. Beyond this follow your heart, but don't require others to follow the same way.

As you speak to others keep truth in mind...

<sup>ESV</sup> **Galatians 5:22-23** But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

It is OK not to be uniform in our worship (see Jeremiah 35).

I will continue to wear ties