

The Genesis Creation “Day”
Is it an Ordinary Day, or Millions and Billions of Years?
What Does the Bible Say?
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July 2006

What does the Bible say about the Genesis creation “day”? Is it an ordinary 24-hour day, or is it a long period of time of millions and billions of years? Included in this paper are some of the Scriptural arguments for and against an ordinary, literal, 24-hour day. Those who believe in a Biblical creation hold to an ordinary, literal, 24-hour day. Those who insist that the universe and the earth are billions of years old (Theistic Evolutionists and Progressive Creationists) must interpret the Genesis “day” as long periods of time. What does the Bible really teach?

“BIBLICAL” EVIDENCE FOR THE WORD “DAY” AS AN ORDINARY DAY

To determine the correct meaning of the word “day” in Genesis 1, as it relates to creation and time, one must evaluate several areas, such as definitions, content, context, grammar, relevant passages from Scripture, and the intent of the author.

The Hebrew word for “day” (yowm, yom), can have different meanings just as it can have different meanings in English. Listed below is the Hebrew lexicon for “day”:

day: Hebrew: yowm {yom}, yamin, pl.; Strong’s # 03117 ([Blue Letter Bible](#))

- 1) day, time, year
 - 1a) day (as opposed to night)
 - 1b) day (24 hour period)
 - 1b1) as defined by evening and morning in Genesis 1
 - 1b2) as a division of time
 - 1b2a) a working day, a day's journey
 - 1c) days, lifetime (pl.)
 - 1d) time, period (general)
 - 1e) year
 - 1f) temporal reference
 - 1f1) today
 - 1f2) yesterday

The number of times “day” is used as: an ordinary day, 2008; time, 64; chronicles, 37; daily, 44; ever, 18; year, 14; continually, 10; when, 10; as, 10; while, 8; full, 8; always, 4; whole, 4; misc. 44.

As shown in the Hebrew lexicon above, “day” can be used to convey many different meanings and references to periods of time. The question is which meaning and interpretation of “day” is correct for the creation “days” of Genesis chapter 1?

Word studies can be done to examine if the consistent use of “day” *outside* of Genesis 1 supports the same consistent usage *in* Genesis 1 to determine the correct meaning. If the consistent usage of the word “day” *outside* of Genesis 1 supports a normal, literal reading of the text to mean an ordinary 24-hour period of time, then the same normal, literal reading of the text *in* Genesis 1 supports and substantiates an ordinary day. If you look at the word “day” all by itself there is no easy conclusion, but when you evaluate “day” and its usage with other associated words and phrases, the meaning becomes clear.

“Day” is consistently and repeatedly used with a numerical modifier (first day, second day, third day, etc.) throughout the creation week. *Outside* Genesis 1, in the Old Testament, one can examine the relationship and meaning of “day” with the same exact numerical modifiers used in the creation week. In a word study, the word “day” is used 79 times *outside* of Genesis chapter 1 with the same numerical modifiers. “Day” is used with the numerical modifiers, “first” (27 times), “second” (12 times), “third” (27 times), “forth” (5 times), “fifth” (3 times), and “sixth” (5 times). Without exception, when “day” is used with the same numerical modifiers as in the six creation days, it always indicates an ordinary day. (Miller)

The word “day” is used with a numerical modifier 359 times *outside* of Genesis 1 in the Old Testament. It always indicates a normal 24-hour day. (Stambaugh)

One can also look at the relationship and meaning of “day” with “evening” (‘ereb) and “morning” (boqer). The Old Testament records 38 times when “evening” and “morning” are used in the same verse. Each time they occur, the meaning must be that of a normal day. (Stambaugh)

“Evening” (‘ereb) and “morning” (boqer) are used with “day” (yowm) *outside* of Genesis chapter 1 in the Old Testament 23 times. Included in that number, “evening” and “morning” are found 8 times with “day” and a “numerical modifier.” Without exception, when “day” is used with “evening” and “morning”, it always refers to an ordinary day. (Miller, Widener)

With a careful study of the usage of the word “day” in the creation week, and comparing it to the usage of “day” in the rest of the Old Testament, looking at its content, context, etc., with numerical modifiers and phrases (“evening” and “morning”), the only logical conclusion is that the “days” of Genesis chapter 1 are standard and customary days.

There is no Biblical indication that “day” is used differently in the beginning chapter of Genesis than it is throughout the rest of the book, or the rest of the Old Testament. A careful examination of the Hebrew word usage of “day” in Genesis 1 can support only one honest conclusion – that the Genesis creation “day” is an ordinary 24-hour day.

The author’s intent

If Moses, the author of Genesis, wanted to use other words to indicate long periods of time, he certainly could have. He could have used *’olam* (long duration, ancient times, long time), or *’arak* (prolong days), or *rab* (many, much, long), or *qedem* (days of old), or *shaneh* (year, division of time), or any combinations of these words with *yowm*, to indicate, “many days”, “much time”, or “long days”. But he did not!

In Genesis 1:14 it says, “... let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night, and let them serve as signs to mark *seasons*, and *days*, and *years*.” (NIV) Moses clearly differentiates between “days” (*yowm*), “seasons” (*mow’ed*), and “years” (*shaneh-pl* form). Moses not only differentiated the words, but he also clearly demonstrated that he could have used other words to represent longer periods of time if that was what God instructed him to communicate.

Professor James Barr (Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford University), who himself does not believe Genesis is true history, nonetheless admitted as far as the language of Genesis 1 is concerned that, “So far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any

world class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience..." (Ham, Barr)

In Exodus 20:1, 8-11, when giving the Ten Commandments to the nation of Israel, Moses said, "And God spoke all of these words... For in **six days** (yamin, plural of yowm) the Lord made the heavens and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested on the seventh **day** (yowm) and made it holy." (NIV) God affirmed his six day creation time frame.

Moses reiterated the same message in Exodus 31:17, "...for in **six days** (yamin) the Lord made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh **day** (yowm) he abstained from work and rested." (NIV) The word "day" used by Moses in Exodus is the exact same word and usage for "day" that he used in Genesis 1. God said it, and Moses believed that God created in six ordinary days and that is the message he communicated to the nation of Israel.

All of these accounts written by Moses are simple historical statements of fact using straightforward language that clearly denotes that "day" in the creation week of Genesis 1 is an ordinary 24-hour day.

What did Jesus teach?

In Mark 10:6 Jesus said, "But at the beginning of the creation God made them male and female." (NIV) Jesus clearly says that "at the beginning", not somewhere billions of years later, man and woman were created. "At the beginning" does not refer to the beginning of time for humans, but it says that man was created from the very beginning of creation (and time). With this statement by Jesus, an ordinary "day" is the only logical interpretation.

Conclusion

Based upon a careful examination of the Hebrew word usage, Moses' intent, and Jesus' teaching, the only valid interpretation of the word "day" in Genesis 1 can be an ordinary 24-hour day. God said He created in six days, Moses believed God did it in six days, and Jesus taught He did it in six days. If Scripture is your authority, there are no other logical or honest conclusions.

COMMON ARGUMENTS AGAINST A "BIBLICAL" 24-HOUR GENESIS "DAY"

Scripture records a factual and historical account of creation in six normal days. Science (evolution) teaches that the universe and earth are billions of years old. Sadly, many Christians (Theistic Evolutionists, Progressive Creationists, and many "Intelligent Design" proponents) embrace uniformitarian evolutionary teachings and "Old Earth" notions. Entertaining such beliefs requires that "day" can not be biblically interpreted as an ordinary day, so they must reject a biblical "six day creation" and reinterpret Genesis to fit their biases. ***Listed below are some common arguments against a biblical ordinary "day."***

** The Hebrew word for “day” can have many literal interpretations other than an ordinary day. “Day” can be taken to literally mean a long period of time.*

To apply the term “literal” can sometimes be deceiving. The Hebrew word for “day” can have different meanings just as it can have different meanings in English. You have to look at how the word is used in the text. Generally speaking, “literal” is taken to mean the “plain” or “normal” reading of the text. Another important consideration is “What was the intent of the author?” If you carefully investigate the word application and the intent of the author, the Hebrew word “day” in Genesis 1 can only mean an ordinary day.

Hugh Ross, a Progressive Creationist, (and a few others) goes to great lengths to try to convince Evangelical Christians that his interpretation of Genesis is “literal.” His definition of “literal,” as he applies it to Genesis Chapter 1, is certainly different than most. Very few “Old Earth” Creationists attempt to make this claim (most say that it is “poetic” or “figurative”). Unfortunately, Ross has made great inroads into Evangelical churches and seminaries presenting “Old Earth” uniformitarian evolution as being completely compatible with a “literal” Scriptural interpretation. This is where the great deceit lies.

** There are no Hebrew rules of grammar that demand “day,” when used with a number, has to mean an ordinary day.*

It is true that there are no Hebrew rules of grammar that apply. However, no rules of grammar are necessary for it to be interpreted as an ordinary day. This is a smoke screen. Ross also says that the application of “day” with a number is valid only for days of human activity rather than days of divine activity. Again, there is no Biblical indication that you can make these assumptions. In fact, just the reverse is true. The use of the word “day,” with a numerical modifier, is used with exact meaning and consistency throughout Genesis and the Old Testament.

** The word “day” in Genesis 2:4 obviously indicates a period longer than 24-hours. Therefore, “day” can mean a long period of time in the creation week.*

“Old Earth” Creationists use this verse to say that since “day” used in Genesis 2:4 can mean a long period of time, then other verses in Genesis can also indicate a long period of time, as in the creation “day.” The use of the word “day” in Genesis 2:4 clearly does indicate a longer period of time. However, it is being used to recount a previous event, the six days of creation. “Day” (yowm) in this verse is not used with a numerical modifier, “morning” and “evening,” light, or darkness, in this passage. This clearly gives a different usage to the word and meaning.

The words translated here are, “. . .**In the day**” (KJ) or “**When**” (NIV). The word usage is very important to note. As you change the word usage and how it is used with other associated words, the meaning is very different. The word “day” in Genesis 2:4, indicating a long period of time, can not be used to support the interpretation of “day” in Genesis 1 to also mean a long period of time. This is not a valid argument.

** The length of God’s days are different from man’s as described in II Peter 3:8 and Psalms 90:4.*

“Both of these verses are using figures of speech to show that God is not constrained by

the same time parameters as are humans.” (Stambaugh) “In II Peter 3:8 ‘one day is ‘like’ (or as) is a figure of speech, called a *simile*, to teach that God is outside of time.” (Sarfaty) “Psalms 90:4 is *synonymous parallelism*, where a long period of time of a thousand years is contrasted with two short periods of: day and a night watch.” (Sarfaty)

If these phrases are taken out of context (which they should not be), then 1 day equals a 1000 years, which still is not enough time, since “Old Earth” proponents need billions, not thousands of years. These verses have nothing to do with the Genesis “day”.

* *In Exodus 20:8-11, Moses is speaking in terms of “models” of time.*

The six creation days of Genesis 1 are a model for the Hebrew week. This does not discount that they were actual ordinary days. In fact, it is an exact model. The exact same Hebrew words used for “day” and “days” in Genesis 1 are the exact same words used by God and Moses in Exodus 20. If Moses believed that “days” were long periods of time, why would he mislead Israel into believing that they were ordinary days? God and Moses were reminding the nation of Israel of God’s creative work and the time frame in which He did it. What better model than one that is exact in its example, and in its time frame.

* *The Bible is true; but God has written other truths as well. (Hugh Ross)*

“What other truths is Ross talking about?” “Hugh Ross, and other Progressive Creationists, believe that science has shown that the earth and universe are billions of years old, therefore the “days” of creation *must* be long periods of time.” (Ham) Here is where Ross and others like him show their true beliefs and biases. Ross believes that nature, as revealed and interpreted by science, is as authoritative as is the Holy Scriptures on the subject of creation!

“According to Ross, *general revelation* (the display of divine glory that is evident in creation) is every bit as essential and as authoritative as *special revelation* (the truth God has revealed in Scripture).” (MacArthur) Ross believes “***The facts of nature may be likened to a sixty-seventh book of the Bible.***” Unfortunately, the “facts” that Ross and others want to canonize are interpretations of atheistic evolutionary notions from science.

Charles Ryrie, in *Basic Theology* states, “...the only infallible canon for determining truth is the written Word of God. Nature, though it does reveal some things about God, is limited and can be misread by mankind.”

John MacArthur states in his book, *The Battle for the Beginning*, “...the revelation of God in nature is not as powerful, as enduring, as reliable, as clear, or as authoritative as Scripture. Scripture is a *sufficient* revelation; nature is not. Scripture is clear and complete; nature is not. Scripture therefore speaks with more authority than nature and should be used to assess scientific opinion, not vice versa.” God’s Holy Word is the one and only reliable account of creation.

In reality, many “Old Earth” Creationists place a greater value on man’s fallible science than on God’s infallible Holy Scriptures. Because of this, they are willing to adulterate the Word of God to fit their biased “Old Earth” beliefs. “Jesus Himself expressly debunked the notion that nature and Scripture are equivalent forms of revelation when He said, ‘Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away’. (Mathew 24:25)” (MacArthur)

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH?

If you read Genesis 1, as written without any extra-Biblical influence, the only logical conclusion is that the Genesis “day” is an ordinary 24-hour day. The Hebrew word usage, the author’s intent, and what Jesus taught – all support an ordinary day and a “young earth.”

Theistic Evolutionists, Progressive Creationists, and many “Intelligent Design” proponents insist that the Genesis “day” has to be a long period of time (billions of years). Because of extra-Biblical influence, they impose their predetermined biases of atheistic evolutionary notions of an “Old Earth” into the interpretation of the Bible or disregard the text all together.

“Absolutely nothing in the text of Genesis 1 speaks of evolution or long geological ages in the creation process. The text itself is in fact a straight-forward refutation of all evolutionary principles... Only by denying key expressions or interpreting them in a nonliteral sense can the Christian read any degree of evolution or “progressive creation” into the Genesis account.” (MacArthur)

Josh McDowell, in his book, *A Ready Defense* states, “The message of the Bible is clear for those who will read it and seek to find out its meaning. The problem comes when people bring their preconceived notions to the Bible and attempt to make the Word fit their ideas. This is not the fault of the Bible, but of the persons who force the Bible to say what they want it to say.”

Creation was a miracle. Miracles cannot be explained by man’s known physical laws of science. Hebrews 11:3 says, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” (NIV) Creation truly was a miracle, and it does not require, nor can it be completely explained by modern views of science.

“Old Earth” uniformitarian evolution (“day” equals millions and billions of years) is a Satanically inspired deception, whose purpose is to supplant God’s biblical creation.

John MacArthur states the problem and the warning very clearly: “Evangelicals who accept an old-earth interpretation of Genesis have embraced a hermeneutic that is hostile to a high view of Scripture. Those who adopt this approach have already embarked on a process that invariably overthrows faith.”

“Bible believing Christians ought to expose such lies for what they are and oppose them vigorously.” (MacArthur)