

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #62:

WERE THE DAYS OF GENESIS 1 LITERAL 24-HOUR DAYS?

By John Temples

Over the past few decades, as the theory of evolution has gained more and more of a stranglehold on the public, Christians have been under increasing pressure to “cave in” and accept the evolutionary explanation of the origin of life, the main tenets of which are:

- The universe is not the result of a creation of God, but of a “big bang”—an explosive, random combination of primitive natural elements.¹
- All forms of life, including humans, have evolved from a few original primitive life forms by purely natural means.
- This random development, by necessity, has involved vast amounts of time. “Evolution is impossible if the Earth is young” (Bert Thompson, Reason and Revelation, August 1999). The current figure for the age of the universe is 13.8 billion years; for the earth, 4.5 billion years; and for mankind, six million years.

So right away, we Christians have a problem: the Bible emphatically declares that life was created by God, and that He did it in a short period of time—a week, to be exact. The Bible also implies that the earth is only about 6,000 years old. That’s obviously out of step with the prevailing view.

So how can I reconcile these two positions? How can I still believe the Bible but also acknowledge evolution as fact so as to be “in step” with modern scientific thinking? Is there a way to fit billions of years into the Biblical record?

Yes, there is, say an increasing number of religious people. It’s called the “day-age theory.” This theory says that yes, God created the earth and life in six days; but those “days” were figurative or symbolic days, really vast amounts of time corresponding to the geologic ages posited by evolutionists. So the day-age theory suggests that the days of Genesis 1 were not literal, 24-hour days, but

¹ The question nobody is asking, though, is where did those primitive “elements” come from? Also, when is the last time you heard of an explosion that produced ordered complexity?

could have been indefinite periods of perhaps millions of years each. Many Christians, not wanting to abandon the integrity of the Biblical account, yet not wanting to go against “science,” have adopted this view.

In this short article, we will not deal with the many problems with the theory of evolution or the billion-year dates for the earth and the universe. You can find many articles on those subjects on the Internet, written by qualified, credentialed scientists who are Christians.² In this article, we are dealing with one simple question: were the days of Genesis 1 normal, 24-hour days or could they possibly be descriptive of vast eons of time?

SOME PRELIMINARY MATTERS

First, let’s look at the word *day*. It has three meanings, both in modern usage and in Scripture:

1. A 24-hour period.
2. The part of the 24-hour period that is “light” (as opposed to the dark or night).
3. An indefinite or figurative period during which some condition prevails (such as “the day of the Lord” or “the day of reckoning”).

Most people have no trouble understanding which meaning is intended in any given context. Even day-age advocates are forced to admit that a casual reading of Genesis 1 leaves the impression that the “days” were normal days. In fact, until the theory of evolution became prevalent, nobody questioned the length of the days of the Genesis 1 record; everyone assumed they were 24-hour days.

The word *day* in Hebrew, the original language of Genesis, is *yom*. It is a very common word in the Old Testament, being used over 2,300 times; and it has the same meanings in Scripture that it does in modern English: a 24-hour period, the light portion of a 24-hour period, or an age or season. Which meaning is intended must be determined by common sense or context; but this is usually very easy (unless we are dealing with Genesis 1!).

² I particularly recommend Apologetics Press (www.apologeticspress.org).

Some people like to point to 2 Peter 3:8 as defining how God views a day. That verse says, "...one day is as a thousand years...." Ah! Some will say--there it is: God says a day is a thousand years. But that is not what the text says. It says that with God a day is AS (like) a thousand years. All Peter is saying is that God can view time in any "zoom" mode He chooses; He is not limited by time. Besides, if you read the rest of the verse, the argument cancels itself out: "...and a thousand years [is] as one day." Also, even if 2 Peter 3:8 is stating a literal mathematical equivalence, you still have only 6,000 years to work with in the creation (six days of creation at 1,000 years per day = 6,000 years).

I hope you are beginning to see the point that as much as some Christians would like for Genesis 1 to be speaking of vast eons of time, you simply cannot force that meaning on the text. You either have to accept that God was saying He created the world in six normal 24-hour days or deny the obvious meaning of the text altogether.

So let us look at...

TEN PROOFS THAT THE DAYS OF GENESIS 1 WERE LITERAL 24-HOUR DAYS

First proof: The days have definite boundaries. There are six creation days, each having its own beginning and ending points, and each marked by its own specific creative activity.

Second proof: The writer (Moses) defines the term "day" in the text. Genesis 1:5 says, "God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day." Each creation day consisted of:

- A period of light and dark
- An evening and a morning
- One day/night cycle.

We define a day in exactly the same terms. We don't usually call an indefinite period (especially a billion-year one) a "day."

Third proof: The context demands a literal interpretation of the term "day." Bert Thompson quotes a scholar named Rehwinkle as saying, "The language of the text is simple and clear. Honest exegetes cannot read anything else out of these verses than a day of 24 hours and a week of 7 days. There is not the slightest indication that this is to be regarded as poetry or as an allegory or that it is not to be taken as a historical fact There is no indication that anything but a literal sense is meant" (Bert Thompson, Reason and Revelation, Vol. XIV, No. 6, 1994).

Fourth proof: Each day has a number associated with it. (First day, second day, etc.) What is the significance of this? Simply the fact that every time the Bible has this grouping of terms, it means a 24-hour day. "[W]henever a limiting numeral or ordinal is attached to 'day' in the Old Testament (and there are over 200 such instances), the meaning is always that of a literal day" (Dr. Henry Morris, quoted in Reason and Revelation, July 2014). Bert Thompson quotes Arthur Williams as saying, "We have failed to find a single example of the use of the word 'day' in the entire Scripture where it means other than a period of twenty-four hours when modified by the use of the numerical adjective" (Reason and Revelation, June 1994).

Fifth proof: The phrase "evening and morning" connected with each creation day further bolsters the concept of a 24-hour day. "The only instances where evening and morning may not refer to defined portions of a 24-hour day are the relatively few times they are used in prophetic or figurative language (e.g., Genesis 49:27, Habakkuk 1:8). Otherwise, the evidence is overwhelming: when 'morning' and/or 'evening' are used in reference to a period of time...they always refer to regular 24-hour days (or parts thereof)" (Eric Lyons, "Creation and the Age of the Earth," Reason and Revelation, July 2014). Dr. Henry Morris says, "Having separated the day and night, God had completed His first day's work. 'The evening and the morning were the first day.' This same formula is used at the conclusion of each of the six days; so it is obvious that the duration of each of the days, including the first, was the same.... It is clear that, beginning with the first day and continuing thereafter, there was established a cyclical succession of days and nights--periods

of light and periods of darkness.... The writer not only defined the term 'day,' but emphasized that it was terminated by a literal evening and morning and that it was like every other day in the normal sequence of days. In no way can the term be legitimately applied here to anything corresponding to a geological period or any such concept" (Ibid.)

Seventh proof: At the conclusion of each day, the results were declared to be "good" (Genesis 1:10, 12, 17, 21, 25). Verse 31 pictures God as looking back over the six days of creation and pronouncing it as "very good." Ken Ham points out that "If God created the world over millions of years, there would have been death before the Fall—hardly the definition of a 'very good' creation. If the days of creation are really geologic ages of millions of years, then the gospel message is undermined at its foundation because it puts death, disease, thorns, and suffering before the Fall" (<https://answersingenesis.org/days-of-creation/>). Paul in Romans 5 declared that death came into the world through sin--that is, when Adam and Eve sinned (Romans 5:12). Thus, there could have been no death before that time.³ So the day-age theory requires Christians to deny not only the plain statements of Moses in Genesis, but also the inspired declarations of Paul in Romans.

Eighth proof: In the Genesis 1 account, a day is contrasted with a year. "Then God said, 'Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens [stars and planets] to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years....'" (Genesis 1:14). If a creation day was eons long, then what was a year??? The term "years" in Genesis 1 can be understood correctly only if the word "day" refers to normal days.

Ninth proof: Interpreting the days of Genesis 1 as billion-year periods creates major problems for the development of life. Eric Lyons notes, "If the 'days' of Genesis were not days at all, but long evolutionary periods of time, then a problem arises in the field of botany. Vegetation came into existence on the third day (Genesis 1:9-13). If each day of Genesis 1 was a long geological age composed of one period of daylight and one period of darkness (Genesis 1:4-5), how did plant life survive millions of years of total darkness? How would the plants that

³ This fact also puts to rest the idea that some have that there was a large gap of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 during which life evolved--the so-called "gap" theory.

depend on insects for pollination have survived millions or billions of years between 'day' three and 'days' five and six when insects were created?" (Reason and Revelation, July 2014).

Tenth proof: Later in the Old Testament, God used the six creation days of Genesis as a model for the Jews' workweek: work six days, rest one. Exodus 20:8-11 says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." There is an obvious parallel between the days of creation and the work/rest days of the Jews. If the "days" of creation were different from the "days" of work and rest, the comparison would be faulty and meaningless. Nobody would suggest we should work 6,000 years (or six long periods of time) before we get a day of rest!

Before we close this article, let me deal with two often-heard objections to a literal reading of Genesis 1:

Objection #1: If I don't accept the billion-year dates for earth life, I will be denying proven facts of science. No, you will be denying unproved, controversial THEORIES of science. In spite of centuries of trying, scientists are NOT agreed that life on earth evolved or on the mechanisms of such a process. Every major tenet of evolution (including the fantastic ages) is unsettled and disputed. The problem is, the disputes and flaws of the theory hardly ever see the light of day in the scientific literature and the popular media. The FACTS (not theories) of science are on the side of a young earth and an instantaneous, fiat creation. God will not take it kindly on the day of judgment if you say to Him, "God, I know you said you created the earth in six days, but scientists said it took billions of years, and I believed them instead of You."

Objection #2: "But God COULD have created the earth and all life over billions of years." Well, yes, He could have. He could have taken six billion years, or six

days, or six microseconds to create the universe. But what matters is not what God COULD have done, but what He told us He did! And He told us He did it in six days, and defined each of those days as a period of light and dark.

It boils down to this: the attempt to compromise the Genesis account of creation with the theory of evolution (particularly the day-age theory) is an exercise in futility. There is no logical way, nor is there a need, to stretch or twist the Biblical account to accommodate both ideas.⁴ So as a Christian, you and I can either believe what God said happened or deny the inspiration of Scripture and covet the praise of men. --John Temples

⁴ And remember what Peter said about twisting the Scriptures in 2 Peter 3:16.