

THE DAYS OF CREATION WERE SIX LITERAL DAYS

Did God take six days to create the universe? Some say that belief in a six day creation somehow limits God. **But endorsing a creation week of six literal 24-hour days is not limiting God.** It is simply accepting what God has said about the time for His creation week.

Man does not limit God by accepting six days of creation of 24 hours apiece. **God limited Himself.** In fact, the Bible teaches that God has put many limits on Himself beyond confining the time of His creation to six days.

I. Introduction

Evolution has many forms, ranging from the atheistic evolution of Charles Darwin to the theistic evolution popular among many Christian scholars, academics, and theologians. Perhaps 80% of Christian academics and Christian colleges¹ teach theistic evolution in various forms. **These accommodations claim that God in some way used evolution to bring the universe into existence.**

Ironically, accommodationists often call themselves "creationists," reasoning that, "God was behind it. I'm not an evolutionist because I believe in God." Nevertheless, all evolution, theistic or not, is a denial of the Word of God, for Psalm 33:6 states, "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made ..." – not by a long, gradual process of development.

II. Supernatural Creation Is Consistent with Literal Days

The main thrust of Genesis chapter 1 is not mere creation, but the power of the word of God to accomplish this creation. Nine times in Genesis chapter 1 there is the phrase, "And God said ..." The importance of this emphasis in Genesis 1 is revealed by Satan's first recorded utterance in Genesis 3:1: "Yea, hath God said ...?" Satan's strategy has always been to cast doubt on the word of God. His tactic has not changed with time. Satan draws draws men away from God by making human philosophy appear exceedingly attractive. This is ultimately the only way to understand the *Christian* rejection of the simple and straightforward creation sequence in Genesis 1.

It is no wonder that Jesus warned His disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane to "watch and pray, lest ye fall into temptation" (Luke 22:46). Today Christians continue to be tempted to deny Christ and the teachings of His Word when challenged by the claims of the world system.

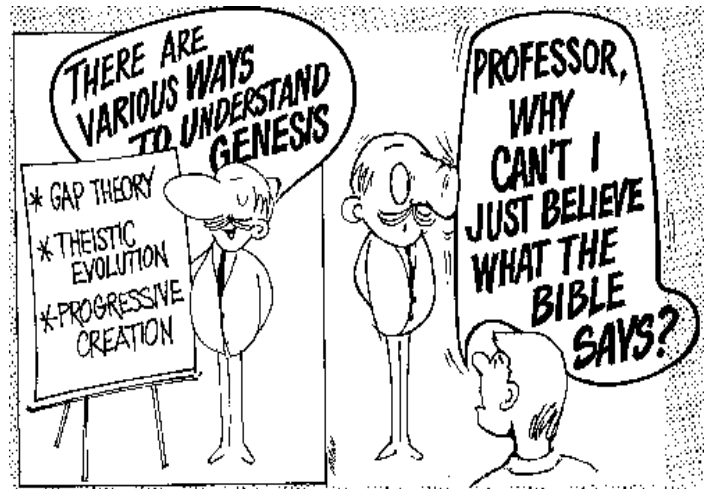
The phrase "and God said" is repeated in Genesis chapter 1 to the point of extreme redundancy. **God foreknew the truths that fallen man would most stumble over, one truth being the absolute power of His word to accomplish what natural processes never could.**

Another redundant phrase in Genesis 1 is the wording, "And the evening and the morning were the first day." A similar phrase is repeated at the end of each one of the six days of creation. God employed this redundancy to emphasize a truth that He foreknew that fallen man would tend to disbelieve. This is the truth of what could be termed "24-

hour days of creation," i.e., days corresponding to a time interval now defined as 24 hours. (The "hour" as a unit of time was not developed until some 2000 years after creation, in Egypt; an alternate description of creation days might be "literal days of creation.")

The need for the redundancy in Genesis is demonstrated by the fact that many Christian academics, theologians, scholars and Christian schools stumble over the six literal days of creation. **Christians often quote the first part of 2 Peter 3:8 as a rationale for making the days of creation indefinite.** The first part of this verse reads, "... [O]ne day is with the Lord as a thousand years ..." and this is supposed to mean that a day of creation is not really a literal day.

Aside from the fact that this verse is not addressing chronology, it is important to note what the last part of the verse says: "... and a thousand years is as one day." If this last phrase were taken chronologically, we could use it to claim that the evolutionary age of the universe is not the commonly accepted figure of 14 billion years, but only some 38,000 years! If this is absurd, so is the chronological claim based on the first part of the verse. **God may not be bound by human temporal expectations, as 2 Peter 3:8 indicates, but when He tells us how long He took to create, we are bound to accept that He limited Himself in His creation chronology.**



Courtesy icr.org 1/19/07

Even secular scholars acknowledge that the biblical text in Genesis 1 intends to convey that the days of creation were literal days of the same length we are used to. For instance, Eviatar Zerubavel states:

"For those who take the biblical account of the creation both seriously and literally, the length of the seven-day week presents no problem at all. ... It was first practiced by God when creating the universe."²

Zerubavel further points out that the week is not in any way tied to the lunar cycle: "Those who believe that our seven-day week has derived from the lunar cycle seem to forget that the latter is not really a twenty-eight day cycle."³ In fact, the seven-day week is not related to any celestial phenomena.

Zerubavel speaks of the week as dissociated from nature.⁴ **In other words, the week is tied to the literal creation week, not to the motion of any astronomical body.**

The week not only serves as the cycle of work days and rest days, but also commemorates the creation week.

The fact of six literal creation days makes any form of evolution, theistic or otherwise, utterly impossible.⁵ How else could creation be accomplished in so short a time if not by the word of the Lord? Furthermore, the seven-day cycle of six ordinary work days followed by one rest day has been shown to be the optimal time cycle for human work and productivity. This is true even at the poles where the solar cycle itself is not 24-hours long. **The human body is optimized to follow the cycle of days as defined in Genesis 1 regardless of the solar cycle where one might happen to live.**

It is true that the word "day" can be used to connote an indefinite period of time, or a definite span of time which is not specified in the immediate context. This is the usage of "day" in Genesis 2:1. However, this is emphatically not the usage anywhere in the first chapter of Genesis. **In Genesis 1 the word "day" is always modified by an ordinal number, as in "first day" and "sixth day."** It is recognized among (unbelieving) Hebrew linguists that this usage of the word "day" indicates a literal day in the way we commonly understand the term.

For example, Dr. James Barr, Hebrew scholar and Oriel Professor at Oxford University, wrote:

"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 through 11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that (a) **creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience**; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to latter stages in the biblical story; (c) Noah's flood was understood to be world-wide and extinguished all human and animal life except for those in the ark."⁶

The mention of the flood is appropriate here, because Christians sometimes deny the reality of the flood of Noah as vehemently as they deny the literal creation days.

For instance, theologian Lloyd R. Bailey asserts: "An ancient wooden structure high on a mountain in Turkey, even if boat-shaped and five thousand years old, is not *automatically* to be associated with the biblical Noah."⁷ The Bible clearly sets out the days of creation and the Flood both as literal, but with rejection of this testimony, no physical evidence is sufficient to remove doubts.⁸

III. More on the "Day" in Genesis One⁹

The Hebrew word translated "day" in Genesis chapter one is *yom*. *Yom* can have several meanings: (1) a period of light in an ordinary day/night cycle; (2) a specific period of time; (3) a period of a year; (4) a general or vague concept of time. It is apparent from the semantic range of *yom* that the word does not inherently possess the meaning of a day, though it is used in its solar sense more than any other in the Old Testament.

This fact has been used to argue that in Genesis 1 *yom* does not imply an ordinary day. However, the logic of

this assertion must be thoughtfully analyzed. If *yom* can mean several different things, how can it ever be known which definition is meant in any given sentence?

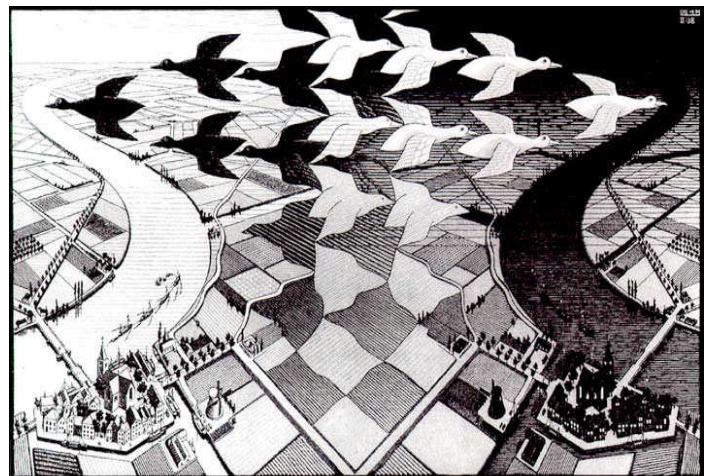
Meaning is determined by the context. In fact, most words can have two or more meanings depending on context. It is illogical to assert that because *yom* can mean something other than an ordinary day, it cannot mean an ordinary day in Genesis 1. **The question is, What are the words and context of Genesis 1 communicating to us?**

As mentioned, *yom* in Genesis 1 is found in the context with evening, morning, and number (e.g., first day, second day). The first day is also preceded by night. Outside of Genesis 1 in the rest of the Old Testament, *yom* is found in context with "night" 52 times. **Every time it refers to an ordinary day; why would Genesis 1 be the exception?**

Outside of Genesis 1 in the Old testament *yom* is found in context with number (e.g., "first" day) 410 times. Every time it refers to an ordinary day; why would Genesis 1 be the exception?

Outside of Genesis 1 *yom* is found in context with "evening" 23 times. Every time it refers to an ordinary day; why would Genesis 1 be the exception? Outside of Genesis 1 *yom* is found in context with "morning" 23 times. Every time it refers to an ordinary day; why would Genesis 1 be the exception?

In fact, "evening" and "morning" are such powerful modifiers that when they are found together outside of Genesis 1 even without *yom*, they mean an ordinary day (a total of 38 times). "Evening and morning" can mean only one thing in the Old Testament and that is an ordinary day.



A Recurring Theme in Genesis 1: Day and Night
by M.C. Escher (1938)

During the first day of creation, *yom* is found in context with evening, morning, and number. But even if *yom* were not mentioned in Genesis 1, one would still have to conclude that Genesis 1 is framed around six ordinary days.

Even with this contextual certainty about the meaning of *yom* in Genesis 1, the objection is sometimes made that

Genesis 1 is "poetry." The implication is that the word meaning in Genesis 1 are merely symbolic regardless of context. **But context cannot be pushed aside so easily.** Aside from ancient poetry's function as a memory aid for transmittal of literal content before the invention of printing,¹⁰ **the context of *yom* in Genesis 1 shows that Genesis 1 is meant to communicate that the days of creation were literal, not symbolic.**¹¹

For the scholar who cannot deny that the wording of Genesis 1 signifies ordinary creation days, there is the appeal to modern science (read "evolution") as the "proof" that the creation days cannot have been literal after all.

For example, scholar and commentator Gleason Archer has stated: "If we were to understand Genesis 1 in completely literal fashion - which some suppose to be the only proper principle of interpretation if the Bible is truly inerrant and completely trustworthy - then there would be no possibility of reconciliation between modern scientific theory and the Genesis account."¹²

So Gleason opts for trusting (evolutionary) science instead of the inspired linguistics of Genesis 1. But it is precisely the philosophies of the world, including evolution, that the Bible warns Christians against (e.g., as in 2 Corinthians 10:5).

The core issue here is man's authority vs. biblical authority. Martin Luther said: "When Moses writes that God created heaven and earth and whatever is in them in six days, then let this period continue to have been six days ... **But if you cannot understand how this could have been done in six days, then grant the Holy Spirit the honor of being more learned than you are.** For you are to deal with Scripture in such a way that you bear in mind God Himself says what is written. But since God is speaking, it is not fitting for you wantonly to turn His Word in the direction you wish to go."¹³

IV. The Calendar Week Commemorates Creation Week

Exodus 20:9 and 11, part of the Fourth Commandment, state a comparison between God's literal "work week" of creation, and the work week of man: "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work. ... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is ..." Despite special pleading to the contrary, it is evident that if the creation days were not literal days, the comparison of man's work week with God's creation week would have no real meaning. Indeed, Zerubabel acknowledges this connection.¹⁴

Furthermore, other analogous comparisons in Scripture are based on literal days. Jesus compared His three literal days in the tomb to Jonah's three literal days in the fish's belly, for example. Rarely do conservative Christians question the literal existence of these three day periods. **Likewise, if not for evolutionary pressure demanding more time, the seven days of God's creation week would be as easily seen to be as literal as the seven days of man's work week.**

A literal creation week also rules out the erroneous concept that the seventh day can be a non-literal never-ending sabbath which some use as a basis to question the literal reality of the other creation days.¹⁵

There is a common argument that since there was no sun until day four of the creation week, the absence of the sun on days 1-3 means that these days could not have been literal. **This conclusion overlooks the fact that God, not the sun, is the ultimate dispenser and controller of time.** The daily cycle was defined by God on day one, then the sun was created to abide by this pattern on day four, not the other way round.

God, not the sun, is the giver of time as well as the giver of light and life. Throughout human history, this has been a forgotten point, as shown by the prevalence of sun worship in many pagan cultures. In all of history, Judeo-Christianity has been virtually unique in relegating the sun to the status of a created body rather than making it a god.

We err, therefore, in assuming that the sun was necessary to define the time period covered in the first three creation days. Another fallacy is to confuse each creation day with the solar cycle, which is usually 24 hours but not always, as at the poles. **Again, neither the sun nor its cycles is the basis for defining the day in Genesis 1. God is..**

V. God Constantly Limits Himself

The person who does not wish to accept literal creation days may argue that we limit God by imposing a certain time frame on creation. This argument is sometimes asked as the question, "Since God is all-powerful and thus can do anything, how can a mere man presume to limit God to six literal days of creation?" The answer is supposed to be, "Why no, of course I can't limit God. Who am I to put a limit on the time God used?"

This argument overlooks the fact that it is not we who are telling God what He should have done in requiring six literal creation days. **God has told us what He has already done via the linguistic construction of Genesis 1.**

This argument has a second fatal flaw, the presumption that since God is all-powerful, He can do anything.

Because of God's holy and perfect character, He cannot lie (Titus 1:2). **Thus God cannot do everything.** To say that God who is omniscient can do anything He wants is to view God in the image of sinful man. It is we humans who envision power as widening our possibilities of action. The Greeks, for example, saw their gods as super-powerful humans who could be kind but at other times extremely cruel.

However, the more powerful a ruler becomes, the stronger must also be his sense of self-control which enables him not to do all he could do. God is the most powerful ruler of all. Powerful human rulers often fail in restraining the exercise of their power, thereby giving rise to harsh regimes. God, Who is perfectly good as well as all-powerful, never fails in His self restraint.

God's self restraint is manifested by the limitations He has placed on Himself throughout history. He limits Himself in the present and has limited Himself in the past. Here are some examples:

1. God limits Himself in whom He saves. It is His will that no one perish (2 Peter 3:9), but He does not force people to exercise saving faith in His Son against their will.

2. God limits Himself in giving the unsaved time to repent. "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Psalm 7:11), but He grants each person life to "they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him and find him" (Acts 17:27).
3. God limits Himself in not returning immediately to judge the earth. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).
4. God limits Himself by ordaining that the creation function predictably by "natural law" rather than by whimsically altering how the creation operates. However, God does on occasion cause creation to operate on principles other than natural law. These occasions we call "miracles." It is fortunate that miracles are not more common, or the behavior of nature would be fairly unpredictable and the reproducibility of scientific experiments might be impossible to achieve.
5. God in Christ limited Himself by going to the cross though He did not have to (Matthew 26:39; 26:53); He further limited Himself by not coming down from the cross once He was on it (Matthew 27:40).
6. God limited Himself by not killing the rebellious Israelites (Exodus 32:31-34).

Other examples of God limiting His power include such events as His not putting all the plagues on the Israelites which He imposed on the Egyptians; restraining the heavenly bodies in their courses ("ordinances", Jeremiah 31:35-35) rather than causing them to careen unpredictably; waiting seven days for the Israelites to march around Jericho before destroying the walls; waiting three days before rising from the tomb after His crucifixion; and allowing Satan and the demons exercise some power today though they are destined for the lake of fire.

The claim that we are limiting God by accepting what He has already said about the creation days is actually a subtle argument against biblical historicity. Indeed, this argument leads ultimately to a rejection of God's Word, not necessarily in the individual, but across several generations.

Careless handling of the Word of God may not seem so harmful until we recall the warning at the end of the Bible concerning those who try to change what God has said: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life ... " (Revelation 22:18-19).

This passage evidently applies most directly to those who, knowing and understanding full well what the word of God says, nevertheless proceed to alter and misinterpret it. **The Bible calls such activists "false teachers" (2 Peter 2:1-3), who pass as Christians but are not.** (Revelation 22:18-19 does not refer to those who misinterpret the word of God

because they themselves are misled by false teachers.) God regards tampering with His word as a great offense.

Furthermore, God's Word does not change merely because the great majority says it ought to. Indeed, one of the most emphatic refutations of human consensus is the statement from Romans 3:4, "Let God be true, and every man a liar."

Lest the objection be raised that Revelation 22:18-19 applies only to the book of Revelation and therefore is not relevant to what the Bible says about creation, it should be noted that **the principle of leaving God's Word unaltered appears throughout Scripture.** In Proverbs 30:5-6 we read, "Every word of God is pure ... Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." And years earlier, God had said regarding the Law, "Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it ..." (Deuteronomy 4:2). This last citation is most significant here, for the book of Genesis is part of the Torah, and as such has always been considered an integral part of the Law which is not to be changed to suit human reasoning.

Conclusions. God limited Himself to six days of creation as the word "day" is commonly understood in ordinary language. Hebrew scholarship has attested to this position, and the week itself is testimony, for the week has no basis in astronomy and has no explanation apart from the fact that it commemorates the original Creation Week. The linguistic context of Genesis 1 further affirms that the creation days were literal.

Notes. Bolding in quotations is added.

- 1 An estimate based on personal involvement in churches and schools.
- 2 Eviatar Zerubavel, *The Seven Day Circle: The History and Meaning of the Week*, Free Press, 1985, p. 6. 3 *ibid.*, p. 9. 4 *ibid.*, p. 11.
- 5 J. Henry, "An Old Age for the Earth Is the Heart of Evolution," *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, Vol. 40 no. 3, December 2003, p. 164.
- 6 Personal communication, James Barr to Ken Ham, April 23, 1984; in Ken Ham, *The Lie: Evolution*, Master Books, 1987, p. 53.
- 7 Lloyd R. Bailey, *Where Is Noah's Ark?*, Abingdon, 1978, p. 12.
- 8 The root difficulty is lack of submission to biblical authority as over against human reasoning, as discussed later in this paper. See J. Henry, "What Is the Age of the Universe?," <creationconcepts.org>, 2001.
- 9 For the wording of this section, I gratefully acknowledge the work of Vance Nelson, <creationtruthministries.org>. For a fuller treatment of the meaning of yom in Genesis 1, see J. Henry, "A Critique of Progressive Creationism in the Writings of Hugh Ross," *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, Vol. 43 no. 1, June 2006, pp. 17-18.
- 10 F.A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, University of Chicago, 1966, pp. 2-4.
- 11 J. Henry, "Did Death Occur Before the Fall?: A Further Critique of the Progressive Creationism of Hugh Ross," *Creation Research Society Quarterly*, Vol. 43 no. 3, December 2006, pp. 160-161.
- 12 Gleason Archer, "The Meaning of Yom," *Christianity Today*, October 8, 1982, p. 44.
- 13 E.L. Plass and E.M. Plass (eds.), *What Luther Says: A Practical In-Home Anthology for the Active Christian*, Concordia, 1959, Vol. 3, p. 1523.
- 14 Zerubavel, *op. cit.*, p. 7. 15 Henry, *op. cit.*, June 2006, p. 20.