

The “Days” of Genesis One

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INTRODUCTION:

1. Renewed interest in the subject of Creation and the “days” of Genesis One.
2. Brief background of this presentation.
3. I believe the Bible teaches that God (including Jesus and the Holy Spirit) created the heavens and the earth. I am inclined to think He did it in six 24-hour periods, but I know there are some problems associated with this view. My first careful study of this subject was about 1956 in a course on the Bible and Evolution.

I. THE BIBLE DOES NOT GIVE THE DATE OF CREATION.

While not agreeing with the extreme age assigned by evolutionists, many Bible-believers have suggested that there is no conflict between a correct understanding of the Bible and a correct understanding of science. A serious error often made by people who claim to believe the Bible is to equate their understanding of the Bible with what they consider a correct scientific view (e.g., kind = species; flood = Wooley’s flood level at Ur; Noah’s flood = Flood Geology).

- A. Foy E. Wallace (*God’s Prophetic Word*, Rev. Ed. 1960: 16).
- B. Cecil Willis: “The Bible does not give the precise age of the earth. Hence, Science and the Bible could not conflict on this point” (*The Bible or Evolution* n.d: 6).
- C. John Clark: “The Bible does not give us any ‘date’ for the creation...” (*Studies in Evolution and the Bible*).
- D. Ferrell Jenkins in various sources.
 1. “Where Does Evolution Stand Today?” *Truth Magazine*, Nov., 1959: 18.
 2. In early editions of *The Theme of the Bible*, some of which were privately published and others published by Guardian of Truth Foundation, in a lesson on the Antiquity of Man. This lesson was not included in the revised edition of *The Theme of the Bible*. I plan to publish a revised version of this lesson.
 3. In an often-preached lesson I call *What is Man?*, I have this point: “The Time of Creation. The Bible only says ‘in the beginning.’ There is no further commitment.” After this I discussed Ussher’s chronology and the date of 4004 B.C.
 4. In both writing and speaking I have tried to avoid any discussion of the age of the earth (there is no discussion of this in the lesson on Creation in the revised edition of *The Theme of the Bible* (10-11) or in *Introduction to Christian Evidences*). In talking with unbelievers I prefer to discuss what I know rather than spend time speculating about theories that are doubtful.

II. HOW IS THE PROBLEM TO BE SOLVED?

Evolutionary science gives a date of about 4.5 billion years for the age of the earth. Most Bible students are willing to say that the date of 4004 B.C. for creation is not correct but that the earth is “young.” How can the two views be harmonized? Here is a summary of some major efforts.

- A. The days of Genesis 1 are not literal 24 hour days, but may involve long periods of time.
- B. There is a gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.
- C. There are gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11.
 1. This only allows a few thousand additional years at the most.

2. **Note:** Ussher studied the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11, which seem rather straight forward and clear, to build his chronology. A literal reading of these chronologies result in a date near 4004 B.C. for the creation of Adam.
- D. Scientific evidence indicates a young earth. Consider especially the work of organizations such as the Creation Research Institute. This is a relatively recent approach.

III. USES OF THE WORD “DAY” IN GENESIS 1 AND 2.

- A. Daylight (1:5).
- B. Day marked by evening and morning (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The first day was formed after the creation of the light by the interchange of evening and morning. “It was not till after the light had been created, and the separation of the light from the darkness had taken place, that evening came, and after the evening the morning; and this coming of evening (*lit.* the obscure) and the morning (the breaking) formed one, or the first day... The first day commenced at the moment when God caused light to break forth from the darkness; but this light did not become a day, until the evening had come, and the darkness which set in with the evening had given place the next morning to the break of day” (Keil and Delitzsch, I:51).
- C. Daylight in contrast to night (1:14). The greater light was to govern the day; the lesser light was to govern the night (1:16-18).
- D. A 24 hour day in the expression “and for days” (in contrast to years) (1:14).
- E. The entire period of creation (Gen. 2:4).

IV. VIEWS REGARDING THE “DAYS” OF CREATION.

(These views are discussed in many introductions to Genesis, but are summarized here from Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 51-57. Some other commonly used sources presenting this summary are Batsell Barrett Baxter, *I Believe Because...*, 97-102; James Hodges, *Creation Versus Evolution*, 1986: 29-31).

- A. Literal 24 hour day.
 1. Most obvious way to understand.
 2. Specialized expressions: light and darkness; day and night; evening and morning.
 3. Use of numerical adjectives (second, third, etc.) with day (*yom*).
 4. The use made of the seven days in Exodus 20:11.
- B. The Day-Age Theory. Also called the geologic day theory. Days are interpreted metaphorically. This view was advocated by William Jennings Bryan in the now-famous Scopes “Monkey” trial in Dayton, Tennessee, 1925. He said creation “might have continued for millions of years” (*The World’s Most Famous Court Trial* 302-3).
 1. Evening and morning = beginning and ending.
 2. Exodus 20:11 shows our seven day week is based on seven creative epochs.
 3. Creative acts seem to require more than 24 hours (cf. vs. 12).
 4. The law limiting solar measure was not established until the fourth day.
 5. Seventh day is a period of indefinite length (an age; cf. Heb. 4:1-11). The others *could* be ages.
- C. The Literal Day with Gaps Theory. The days of creation are separated by long ages.
- D. The Revelatory Day Theory. The creation was *revealed* in six days, not *performed* in six days. This view was advanced by Bernard Ramm in *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Eerdmans, 1955: 222). Ramm says, “We believe, in agreement with the authorities which we have listed, that creation was *revealed* in six days, not *performed* in six days. We believe that the six days are *pictorial-revelatory* days, not literal days nor age-days. The days are means of communicating to man the great fact that *God is Creator*, and that *He is Creator of all*” (222).

V. MUST WE DECIDE?

Several respected scholars, both in and out of Churches of Christ, who reject the extremely long ages demanded by modern evolutionary thought, have stated that we should not be dogmatic in our approach to this subject.

- A. James Hodges says, “We can believe the creation account in Genesis without deciding exactly how God did it or what the historical sequence was. For apologetic purposes, we need to demonstrate ways the account *can* be harmonized with scientific facts, but certainly is beyond achievement and always will be because of our limited information. How appropriate is the statement in Hebrews 11:3: ‘By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God’” (*Creation Versus Evolution* 31).
- B. Batsell Barrett Baxter said, “Rather than become dogmatically involved with any of the hypotheses of creation, it is well for the Christian to be aware of their possibilities and their limitations and to accept the Genesis account on faith... We can never know exactly *when* God created our universe, nor exactly *how* he did it” (*I Believe Because...* 101-2).
- C. O. T. Allis said of the days of creation, “We cannot be sure, and must not be dogmatic” (*God Spoke by Moses* 11).
- D. James Stephen Wolfgang completed a PhD dissertation, “Science and Religion Issues Among 20th-Century Restorationist Religious Groups,” in the History of Science and Medicine Program, University of Kentucky, 1997. He was invited to present two lectures on “Science and Religion in the Restoration” during the 2000 lectures. I sought not to intrude into his topic. A brief discussion of his topic may be found in “Creationism and Churches of Christ” in *A Tribute to Melvin D. Curry, Jr.* Wolfgang tells us that a senior staff writer for *Truth Magazine* in 1970 recalled that “H. Leo Boles [editor of the *Gospel Advocate* and twice president of Nashville Bible School] took the position that it was not contradictory of Bible teaching to recognize the possibility that the ‘days’ of Genesis 1 were long periods of time.”

In his classes, which followed mine, Wolfgang cited numerous Restoration thinkers who advocated to some extent, or at least allowed the possibility of an old earth. These included Alexander Campbell, Robert Milligan, Alfred Fairhurst, Tolbert Fanning, David Lipscomb, Hall L. Calhoun, W. W. Otey, Jack Wood Sears, Donald England, Rita Rhodes Ward.

- E. None of these examples are presented to suggest that the thinking of men serves as authority for us. They do show that highly respected, and widely used, brethren have held old earth views without being called false teachers or being exiled by others.

VI. THE GAP THEORY.

- A. Also called the “ruin-reconstruction” theory. This theory says verse 1 gives the complete story of the original creation. This *world* was blotted out and then we are told about the reformation or reconstruction of all things. The word *was* is translated *became*. Adam and Eve were told to *replenish* the earth, *i.e.*, repopulate it. Isaiah 45:18 is used to uphold the view.
- B. Why this theory? This was an honest attempt to avoid the fossil problem of geology, but it does not solve the problem unless there was a pre-Adamic race also (cf. Milligan, *The Scheme of Redemption*, 23-34. Milligan’s work was first published in 1868 and was widely used and highly praised by brethren. His work, *Reason and Revelation*, was also widely used.). Robert C. Welch says, “Prehistoric life is not denied in the Bible” and cites Milligan. He says, “The *order* of the universe as we know it was begun in Genesis 1:3” (*Living Faith and Modern Science* 7).
 1. **Note:** This theory can not be harmonized with the catastrophe theory of “Flood Geology” (Price, Nelson, Whitcomb, Morris, et al.). Flood geology is a fairly recent theory which has been accepted by many believers. See a critique of it by David E. Koltzenbah, a physics professor at Ball State University, in *Truth Magazine*, Nov. 19 & 26, 1970.

2. The gap theory was held by Harry Rimmer but it was rejected by G. M. Price.
- C. Numerous highly respected brethren of the twentieth century advocated the gap theory in an effort to harmonize the apparent conflict between the Bible and science.
1. Foy E. Wallace said, “In the beginning God’ is a phrase that defines a period of remote antiquity, hidden in the depths of eternal ages” (*God’s Prophetic Word*, Rev. Ed. 1960: 16). Wallace followed Harry Rimmer closely in his comments on science and Bible.
 2. C. R. Nichol and R. L. Whiteside said, “How far back in the remote ages of the past the heavens and earth were created, no one knows.” Of Genesis 1:2 they say, “This seems to have antedated the six days of creation mentioned in the following verses. How long this condition of things continued before the six days of creation began, no one knows” (*Sound Doctrine*, 1920: I:17).
- C. Some problems with the gap theory.
1. The Hebrew word in 1:28 (מָלַא, *male*) means “to fill” and carries no idea of repeating anything.
 2. Isaiah 45:18 is taken out of context. God did not intend for the land to be left desolate due to the exile of Israel.
 3. The argument is found in the blank space between 1:1 and 1:2. It took three chapters to tell about the flood!
 4. John W. Klotz, a Lutheran biologist, defended literal 24-hour days, but rejected the gap theory: “...this theory does not fit in with Scripture” (*Genes. Genesis and Evolution* 1955:90). He says that Genesis 1:1 provides a summary of what is to follow. “This is in keeping with the general style of Hebrew literature — to summarize in one sentence and then to go back to fill in details.”
- D. Allis has a response to the gap or interval theory in *God Spoke by Moses* (153-59).

CONCLUSION:

1. Is there a place in a local church for two brothers who strongly believe in creation but who hold differing views on the gap theory? Is there a place for the one who says he doesn’t believe that the gap theory is solution to the problem?
2. Is there a place for two brothers who strongly believe in creation but who hold different views on the days in Genesis one? Is there a place for the one who says he doesn’t know how to solve this problem?
3. David Koltenbah closed his critique of Flood Geology with the following admonition: “A trickle of dogmatism can grow to a tide of dogma in which are drowned true Christian liberty and the noble spirit of the Restoration Movement which ‘speaks where the Bible speaks and remains silent where the Bible is silent’” (*Truth Magazine*, Nov. 26, 1970: 7).
4. Can we stop being so “crisis minded” that we elevate every difference we have with a brother into a major issue?
5. Can stop being suspicious of the motives of one another?
6. Can we get busy trying to learn how to reach the unbelieving world? And then go about doing it?

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