

Day One and the Days of Genesis 1

¹ In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ² The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw the light, that *it* was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day. (Genesis 1:1–5)

How we interpret Genesis is an important barometer of how we interpret the Bible. And the feedback loop is this: how you interpret the rest of the Bible feeds back into Genesis 1. And of course, much of that comes to a head with what we are going to look at tonight, which is the meaning of the days of Genesis 1. How you understand the days of Genesis 1 will have at least three very important effects on your theology.

First, it's going to affect the way you interpret the rest of the Bible. The decision you make about the meaning of words, what is literal and what is figurative is going to affect more than Genesis 1, it will echo out to the rest of the Bible. It is going to affect just a few chapters later when we encounter the Flood, if it is global or not, if people really did live that long. It will definitely affect prophetic passages. And the question of days even affects the resurrection of Jesus.

Second, it is going to affect how you relate science to the Bible. We have already given a whole sermon to the question of science, true science, unbelieving science, and what is our final authority. What you decide about the days of Genesis will likely reveal who you believe first: Scripture or science, which one you think needs to be modified to fit the other, which one you think is verified fact. That means on questions such as the age of the earth, geological ages and fossils, the whole matter of death before the fall, you are going to take one as your primary source, and modify the other, or vice-versa.

Third, it affects whether you believe Adam was a historical person, whether the Fall was a real event, and whether death came before or after the Fall. Because if these days are not days as we know them, it is hard to imagine how you have a perfect couple, Adam and Eve, unfallen. It is also hard to understand why there was animal death, and plenty of suffering in the animal world if these days are not days, and actually millions of years of evolution. And if you don't have a literal first Adam, how can Christ be the Second Adam? If you don't have Adam's sin bringing death, how does Christ's death bring life? This ends up affecting the Gospel.

But the whole thing is fraught with danger. This week I came across a sermon where a preacher showed his people a picture of the earth being a disc within a rectangle. He said, the Bible teaches that the earth has four corners, so that means the earth is literally located on a squarish plane. Others have said that Scriptures like Job 9:6 "He shakes the earth out of its place, And its pillars tremble; (Job 9:6), that means the Earth is literally perched upon massive pillars. So does holding to a literal interpretation of Genesis mean you have to hold to a four-cornered flat earth on pillars with a dome over it?

It is a real problem of errors creating over-corrections that become more errors. As naturalistic, atheistic Darwinism took hold in the late 19th and 20th centuries, it began infiltrating pulpits. The correction to this growing Darwinism really took place in the 1960s when Henry Morris and John Whitcomb began recovering an approach to Genesis that was literal and biblical, and yet also, by some standards, scientifically plausible. But now in the third decade of the 21st century, the suspicion of all authorities and experts is at an all-time high, beliefs about high-level conspiracies dominate, and it is getting harder and harder for believers committed to a high view of Scripture to

find their way without being sucked either into atheistic science on the one side, or a kind of conspiratorial tin-foil hat anti-science on the other.

Today I want us to see what a sane, literal interpretation of Genesis looks like as we consider God's creative work on Day One, and then ask ourselves what Scripture means by Day in the whole chapter.

I. The Moments in the Days

We can identify six moments or elements in Day One of the creation week. Some of this we covered last time, but we'll proceed past verse 2 into 3, 4, and 5.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

First, God created all time-space and matter out of nothing. All the available matter and energy that can never be added to or destroyed was created on Day One. That includes those layers and dimensions of time-space that we cannot see, both visible and invisible, including, we think the angelic world. The first law of thermodynamics that says matter cannot be created or destroyed was first set in motion here with the introduction of all of it.

The earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* on the face of the deep.

Second, the initial creation of everything was in a kind of watery mix without light. It was unformed, unshaped. *And it was not differentiated.* All was mixed together, and the rest of the days of creation are days of separating one thing from another. It begins as a chaos, and has to be separated out into a cosmos.

The earth was not in the shape we know it now. It may have been a kind of unimaginable abyss of dark matter or dark energy. In fact Proverbs 8:27 tells us that it was not yet in a circular or spherical shape yet. "When He prepared the heavens, I *was* there, When He drew a circle on the face of the deep," (Proverbs 8:27).

So that leads us to the third element of Day One.

And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

The Spirit of God began preparing creation. The Spirit of God is seen. Some have tried to make this the breath of God, the wind of God, the energy of God. But as we see, the action here is not the impersonal, random action of a wind, but the very protective, constructive work of a person. The word is *hovered*, and the word has the idea of brooding, even vibrating, actively imparting to dark, cold matter what it would need. As the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters, that He was preparing it, shaping it into the forms and shapes that would be charged with light and energy. Some believe this is when the very laws of physics, the laws of electromagnetism, and gravitational motion are imparted to the proto-matter, and proto-energy of the cosmos.

Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

The fourth element of Day One is God speaking, "Let there Be Light", and light bursting forth everywhere. God Himself is said to be the Light, and dwells in light unapproachable, but here God makes light in its created form, all the visible and invisible wavelengths of light.

God's Word creates what He speaks. We see things and then name them; God names them and then

they are seen.

What this also means is that immediately there is light and sources of light, even if the source of that light is not the sun. In fact, this is not problem for a Bible believer, because the book of Revelation describes the new heavens and new earth as full of light and yet we are told that there was no sun or moon. The newly shaped earth begins to turn on its axis, one side facing the light source, the other does not.

And God saw the light, that *it was good*

The fifth element is God's estimate of His own works. He sees the light, that it is good. Of course, this doesn't mean morally good, as if the light is well-behaved, or submissive. This is good in the sense of beautiful, excellent, pleasing. But who decides what is beautiful? Isn't beauty in the eye of the beholder? Well, yes, if you spell beholder with a capital b. When God is the Beholder, the beauty is in His eyes, because He is the ultimate standard of truth, goodness, and beauty. He creates beauty, and then knows it is so, and declares it to be so. We, on the other hand, don't decide something is beautiful because we make it or want it to be so. We behold what is around us, and compare it to a standard of beauty found in God, to decide if something is beautiful or ugly. We learn from the created order, the laws of symmetry, harmony, clarity, usefulness, reflectiveness, and we judge something to be beautiful.

And it is worth thinking about. If God says something is good, and we say it is ugly, can we say to God, "Well, it is all a matter of taste?" Or should we say, "I know I should think it is beautiful, but I don't. What is it in me that needs to change so as to see what God sees? In other words, Genesis 1 is teaching us that beauty is real, beauty is an absolute value, just like truth, just like goodness.

and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night.

The sixth thing to see on day one is God's division of light from darkness and His naming of it. This separation is significant throughout Genesis 1. This is not a separation of good from bad, because everything is good at this point. But here God shows us the principle of distinction and order, even of opposites and absolutes. Light from darkness, water above from water below, land from sea, day from night, woman from man. Sin brings a different kind of separation, man from God, man from woman, man from the garden. But even before sin, God is teaching us the principle that one thing is not another. There is unity, but there is also distinction, difference, opposites, absolutes. Then God names the period of light on earth Day and He names the period of darkness on Earth Night.

Now comes the concluding statement. "So the evening and the morning were the first day." This statement is said after every day except the seventh, not because it didn't end, but because the Bible is emphasising that each of the six days of creation were complete and God's creating work for that day was complete. The seventh day was different in quality, but not in quantity to the other six.

Now this statement at the end of day one leads us to the major question we must solve before even tackling day two. What does the Bible mean by days in Genesis 1 and 2? Does it mean 24-hour days? Does it mean indiscriminate periods of time? Is it just a poetic metaphor that means stages, or moments, like movements in a symphony?

II. The Meaning of the Days

There are three major views on what these days of Genesis refer to. I'll outline them, and then spend most of our time just examining the text of Genesis 1 to determine which one is correct.

The three views are the Literary Framework Theory, the Day-Age Theory, and the 24-Hour theory.

The Literary Framework theory is a theory developed first by a Dutch professor and then by some professors at Westminster Theological Seminary. What they noticed is that the creation account has some beautiful symmetry in it. The six days appear to be divided into two. The first three days create the realms: heavens above, heavens below, sky, sea, dry land. The next three days create the rulers of the realms: the sun and moon and stars rule the heavens above on day four. Then the birds and the fish on day five to rule the heavens under the waters, and the fish to rule the waters. Finally day six, the land creatures and finally mankind to rule not just the land but all the earth.

What they then say is that this appears poetic, more like an artist using a poetic idea to communicate. So, in this case, the idea of a day is used to paint a picture of the Creator creating the cosmos in stages, but we are not meant to take it literally and think that He actually did so in six days. Instead, we are to realise this a poem, a literary construction filled with parallel ideas meant to show us the beauty and glory of God creating everything. It is teaching us theology, they say, not science. So, in essence, literary framework teaches us not to take the word *day* literally, and not to even take the sequence as literal, but the whole thing as a kind poem.

Day Age Theory is a theory that each day represents a long period of time. So what Genesis 1 describes is six ages, each lasting millions or billions of years. During these ages, God did acts of progressive creation alongside the natural process of evolution. That included using plant and animal death to move things along until homo sapiens appeared in the recent past, and from a pair of those, God gave two rational consciousness.

Day Age proponents point out the billions of years it takes for light to cross the universe, and yet we can see that light on earth. They also point out the ages of the rocks and fossils when they are dated. There are other apparent evidences for an old earth or an old cosmos, so they say Genesis 1 must be interpreted to mean something other than 6 literal days in the recent past.

They also say that you can't have actual days before day 4 when the sun is created, and also that there appears to be too much happening on day 6 to fit it all into one 24-hour period.

The 24-hour theory says that each of the days of Genesis 1 should be regarded as six, actual 24-hour days in which God created everything. Although God could have made everything in a split second, He chose instead to make the world in what we now call a week, if we include the seventh day of rest. In fact, it would say, the week as we now know it is modelled on the creation week, and every seven days, we recognise the period in which the world was made. Strictly speaking, the 24-hour theory tells you how long it took to create the universe; it does not tell you how long ago it was created. Nevertheless, most 24-hour proponents would hold to a fairly recent creation and a fairly young earth.

So how should we decide between these three theories? Let me point out seven features of the text.

1. The Hebrew word for day, and the word used throughout Genesis 1, *yom*, normally means a 24-hour day. When an ordinal number like first day, second day, or in the many references to the Sabbath, the seventh day, it always means 24-hour day. The Bible does sometimes use *days* plural to mean extended time, such as “the days of my life” or the “day of harvest”, but it never means vast ages made up of millions or billions of years. The Bible does use the exceptional term “The Day of the Lord” to refer to a period of judgement in the end times. But that is an extraordinary use of day, and it will not last for millions of years. It doesn't contradict the normal use of day in Genesis 1. What about 2 Peter 3:8 which says

one day with the Lord is as a thousand years? Peter is telling us that God does not experience time as we do. He is not saying that we can read that back into Genesis 1 and make each of those days into a thousand, several thousand or millions of years. There is another word in Hebrew, *olam*, that means age. The Bible could easily have used *olam* to signify the first age, the second, third, and so on. Instead, it uses *yom*, and a normal reading of it is that these refer to normal, solar days.

2. Throughout the passage, we keep reading “So the evening and the morning were the _____ day”. It's as if God included this phrase to deal with future misunderstanding. By using these words – morning and evening - , He shows that each of the six days were of the same duration, they were cyclical, and they began and ended with light and darkness marking them. We have the strong suggestion of cyclical days, rotation, day and night. It is hard to imagine what would be meant by the evening and the morning of a billion years.
3. When God explains the Sabbath commandment, He says, God created the world in six days and rested the seventh, so man as God's image bearer, must work for six and rest one day. It is hard to understand why we should rest one solar day, or even why we should have a week of seven solar days, if these have no time correspondence to God's creative activity.
4. While Genesis 1 clearly has beauty and careful structure, it is clearly in the style of a narrative, a telling of events, not a poem. It is not a psalm, not like Job, not like poetic sections of the prophets. It is not riddled with Hebrew parallelism. It flows as an historical account, using verbs that show consecutive flow.
5. We have already said that the Bible both opens and closes with a perfect world and yet no sun. We do not need a sun before day 4 in order for there to be days. It is not a problem for the first three days to be 24-hour periods without the sun, as long as there is a light source. Indeed, it makes sense that when the sun is created on day 4, it didn't change the rotation speed of the earth, but continued it.
6. In the day-age theory, each day is millions of years. But plants appear on day three and the sun on day 4. Plants could not have survived without the sun for millions of years. TO be fair, day age proponents usually place the sun and stars at the very beginning, and say that day four is when the atmosphere cleared and they were visible from earth. But even so, we would then have plants for millions of years with little or shrouded sunlight, which is unlikely.
7. As far as day six being too busy, the only thing which seems too busy is Adam naming all the animals, and its quite likely that Adam named only families of animals, or perhaps mostly those animals that would be domesticated. He certainly wouldn't have named all the fish or other creatures out of reach.

So how should we decide? It seems the normal, sane way of interpreting Genesis 1 is that the six days are literal, consecutive days of the same length as we know them today. There are poetic qualities to Genesis 1, but it is not just a poem or a story, it is an account. And the only reason to accept the Day Age theory would be because we have already accepted the millions or billions of years postulated by Big Bang cosmologists or Darwinian biologists. If we reject those ages, and seek out other explanations, we have no reason to regard the six days as six ages.

Now holding to a six, 24-hour day creation week simply means that: we believe God made all things in that space of time, in the order He described. It does not require that we hold that the earth has four literal corners. We recognise this as a figure of speech, just as we recognise the phrase rising of the sun to its going down as a figure of speech.

It does not require that we hold the earth is on actual pillars. Again, this is a poetic figure of speech, just like the phrase, the foundations of the earth is a figure of speech. The phrase the ends of the earth is a metaphor, it does not mean the Earth has an edge. The heavens spread like a curtain or

rolled up like a scroll does not mean the sky has a curtain rod holding it up or great scroll holder.

But how do you know? The answer is that phrase like those always occur in poetic books like Job, Psalms, or said in a poetic way. Genesis 1 is not a poem, it is not using images, metaphors, similes, Hebrew parallelism, things clearly meant to be understood as an analogy to something else. It is given to us as a straightforward 6-day week of creation.

Holding to a six, 24-hour day creation week also doesn't demand a certain age of the universe or the earth. Now when we put it together with some later chapters in Genesis, we definitely have a young human race, under 10 000 years, and the home God made for us is only five days older than we are, so we are pushed towards a young earth by deduction and the force of logic. Unless you insert some form of the Gap Theory, it appears the earth is not much older than mankind, and mankind is not that old. But strictly speaking, Genesis 1 does not give us a date, or give us the age of the earth.

But haven't people in the church had to correct their views? Didn't some on the Roman church insist that the Earth went around the sun? Yes, but as time went by, we came to see that those interpretations were not required by the text of Scripture. Having learnt from those experiences, we now look at the Genesis record and soberly ask, are we making the same mistake again? People like me say, no, best we can tell, we are not. We believe this is the normal, right way to interpret Genesis 1, and we believe the only observer who was there gave us this account. When it comes to the age of rocks, the dating of fossils, the problem of distant starlight, we recognise the problem, but we believe those conclusions are not settled the way other matters in the hard sciences are settled.

God's Word has been vindicated again and again, especially in the last three centuries, as critics assailed its history, its geography, its events. Again and again, archaeology has vindicated what the critics said was pure fiction and error in the Bible. We can once again wait for God's Word to be vindicated. I'm confident that as more and more data comes in, there will be more and more holes in those naturalistic theories that deny the Scriptural account.

In the matter of the days of creation, we will find again the words of Paul "Let God be true, and every man a liar".