

**The "Days" of Creation in Genesis 1:  
Literal "Days" or Figurative "Periods/Epochs" of Time?**

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**Introduction**

The increased focus of recent decades on creationism, "creation-science," "origin science, and "theistic science" has created a climate in which old questions have arisen anew with specific focus and additional sophistication. One of those questions concerns the meaning of the term "day" in Genesis 1:1 and 2:3.

The nature of the Genesis account of creation, with its six "days" (Gen. 1:5-31) followed by the "seventh day" (Gen. 2:2, 3), is of special interest, since it is customarily understood to mean one literal week. Such a short time in the creation account has come under debate on the basis of the current naturalistic theory of evolution. The contrast is between the brief period of the creation account and the long ages demanded by naturalistic evolution.

This chapter will seek to accomplish several interrelated tasks: to provide some methodological observations with a brief history of interpretation; to cite representative recent published opinions suggesting that the "days" of creation are long epochs or periods of time and not literal 24-hour days; to present the data in Genesis 1 in relationship with other evidence found in the Old Testament; and to apply to the data of Genesis 1 the standard linguistic and semantic investigations requisite in sound scholarship, based on the best current knowledge.

## **Methodological Observations and the History of Interpretation**

A knowledge of some aspects in the history of interpretation of the "days" of creation in Genesis 1 may prove to be helpful. Historical information assists the modern interpreter to recognize that it is incorrect to suggest that only since the publication of Charles Darwin's epochal work *On the Origin of Species* (1859) have interpreters transposed the Genesis creation "days" into nonliteral periods of time. Earlier extrabiblical considerations led previous scholars to depart from the literal meaning of creation "days."

### **Some Medieval Understandings of Creation "Days"**

The Alexandrian church father Origen (c. A.D. 185-c. 254), and accomplished practitioner and defender of the allegorical method of interpretation, has received credit for being the first to understand the creation "days" in an allegorical and nonliteral manner.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430), the most famous of the Latin fathers, followed Origen in arguing that we should approach the creation "days" allegorically rather than literally. Scholars understand Augustine to teach that God created the world in a single flash of a moment.

At this point it seems appropriate to reflect on some methodological matters. Neither Augustine nor Origen had any evolutionary concept in mind. They took the creation "days" as nonliteral, standing for something else, because it was philosophically mandatory to assign to God creation activity unrelated to human time. Since the "days" of creation are God's work, they argued, such "days" have to be representative of philosophical notions associated with God taken from their philosophical perspectives.

Greek philosophy regards God as timeless. Since the creation "days" are part of divine activity, the two church fathers assumed that they also should be understood in a timeless

sense. Philosophy, not scientific speculation, influenced the thinking of Origen and Augustine, leading them to reinterpret the creation "days."

What this approach has in common with modern attempts, which also take the creation "days" to mean something other than what the face value of the terminology seems to suggest, is that both derive from influences outside the biblical text itself. Medieval theologians, who assumed the creation "days" to be nonliteral, based it on nonbiblical, pagan philosophical modes of thinking.

Today still another influence from outside the biblical text leads interpreters to change what seems to be the plain meaning of "days." At present a naturalistically based scientific hypothesis, the modern theory of evolution, prompts such changes.

The Alexandrian allegorical method of interpretation shaped the thinking of medieval Catholic theologians. They adapted the fourfold sense of Scripture for medieval times, one that still has support in current official Roman Catholicism. The three nonliteral meanings of the fourfold sense of Scripture (i.e., allegory, anagogy, and tropology) dominated Christendom for more than a millenium, providing the hermeneutical means for the reinterpretation of the literal sense of the creation "days."

### **Reformation Understanding of Creation "Days"**

The sixteenth-century Reformers agreed that the fourfold sense of Scripture compromised the literal sense of the Bible, making its authority for faith and life null and void. They insisted that the single, true sense of Scripture is the literal sense, the plain meaning of the text.

One of the major achievements of the Protestant Reformation was the return to Scripture itself. It meant that Scripture has no need of an external key for interpretation--whether that key be the pope, the church councils, philosophy, or any other human authority.

Scripture's perspicuity became the norm of the day. Protestantism considered a reading from within its own context as paramount. We must not superimpose external meaning on it, as had been the practice during medieval Catholicism. Rather we should approach the Bible in its literal and grammatical sense.

Martin Luther, accordingly, argued for the literal interpretation of the creation account: "We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created in six days, as the words read." The other Reformers understood the creation "days" in the same way. Such literal and grammatical interpretation, sometimes called the historical-grammatical method, remained the norm for biblical interpretation more or less into the nineteenth century.

### **Changes Under the Influence of Modernism**

As the concept of long time periods made its way into the understanding of earth's origins in the wake of publications of James Hutton (1726-1797) and Charles Lyell (1797-1875), some Christian concordist interpreters started to interpret the Genesis "days" of creation in a nonliteral manner. The Bible itself did not demand it, but rather the new worldview of uniformitarianism and its concept of origins that required long periods of time.

The understanding of the creation "days" as "days of restoration," "days of revelation," aside from taking a "day" for an "age" ("day-age" theory) or an epoch/era, goes back to this period and the changes in time frames required by the new geology. A nonliteral reinterpretation of "days" was typical of concordists who had accepted long ages for the origin of earth. In view of such developments, we cannot avoid concluding that the need to provide for geological ages became the catalyst for the reinterpretation of the "days" of creation.

## **Recent Changes in Interpretation Among Broad Concordists**

Broad concordists of the past 10 years have increasingly attempted to interpret the "days" in the Genesis creation account in nonliteral ways, in order to harmonize the long ages called for by the evolutionary theory with the time implications of the biblical record of divine creation in Genesis 1.

It is an acknowledged fact that the long and checkered history of the relationship between science and Scripture has affected the understanding of the Bible. The shift from the Ptolemaic worldview to the Copernican one is probably the most celebrated example.

Christian medieval theologians had adopted the non-Christian Ptolemaic worldview as the correct Christian and biblical view. It conceived of the earth as the center of the solar system, and often of the whole universe itself. Thus it became a first-class dilemma when the heliocentric Copernican worldview became seemingly irrefutable.

From a methodological point of view the interpretational model the scientist uses as the key to understand data observed in nature will predetermine to a large degree the outcome of the enterprise itself, as well as the meaning of data derived from nonnatural sources, including the Bible. Many recognize that "scientific theories do affect biblical interpretation at least to the extent that they become the occasion for reassessing the interpretation of a few passages (Gen. 1, 2, 6-8)." The decisive question, then, is whether the reassessment superimposes a meaning on the biblical text that is alien to Scripture and its own context.

At least two major options seem to present themselves: 1. A reassessment on the basis of "scientific" conclusions could lead to an interpretation of biblical texts appropriate to the framework of the context and intention of the totality of Scripture. In such a case the reassessment does not violate Scripture. 2. Reexamining a biblical passage could likewise produce a conclusion that does not agree with what a current scientific hypothesis holds. Those who accept full biblical authority could reassess the conclusion(s) drawn from the

scientific interpretation of natural data. The latter approach, in turn, may affect the scientific theory, or science broadly perceived, "at the very least by leading us to reassess whether all the conclusions drawn from a scientific theory are warranted, or in some cases to ask whether the theory as a whole is suspect."

### **The Inherent Authority of Scripture**

Some have taken the stance that a scientific theory, by its very nature and the breadth of its acceptance, has priority over Scripture. It is far beyond the confines of this chapter to unfold the complexity of such a question. Suffice it to say that if we understand Scripture to be the result of divine revelation and written under inspiration, the Bible will have a dimension of authority not found in the so-called book of nature. Based on that higher level of authority, Scripture can assist us in understanding the book of nature, providing a more comprehensive model of interpretation than we might expect from a purely naturalistic model.

Scripture, if we are to maintain its own integrity, can hardly accommodate every interpretation that science, sociology, history, or any other discipline comes up with. Based on its own nature and authority, the Bible has its own integrity of meaning and its inherent truth claims. They emerge ever more clearly through careful study employing sound methods of interpretation that harmonize with and root themselves in the testimony of Scripture itself. This implies that Scripture's authority resides in itself--it is based in revelation and ground in inspiration.

Such self-sufficiency of Scripture does not mean that we cannot discuss any question raised in other areas of investigation, such as science, history, or sociology. But a vast difference exists between asking new questions of Scripture and superimposing new meaning on the Bible.

## Representative Arguments of Long Ages

Scholars often clearly state the real purpose of current attempts to interpret the "days" of Genesis 1 in terms other than their face value. A few citations from respected individuals will speak for themselves.

John C. L. Gibson, a British scholar, argues that we should take Genesis 1 as a "metaphor," "story," or "parable," and not as a straightforward record of events of creation. He writes in his 1981 Genesis commentary as follows:

"If we understand 'day' as equivalent to 'epoch' or 'era,' we can bring the sequence of creation in the chapter into relationship with the accounts of modern evolutionary theory, and so go some way towards recovering the Bible's reputation in our scientific age...In so far as this argument begins with an attempt to go beyond the literal meaning and to take the week assigned to creation as a parable of a much longer period, it is to be commended."

In 1983 the German commentator HansJorg Braumer stated: "The creation 'day' which is described to contain 'morning and evening' (sic) is not a unit of time which can be determined with a watch. It is a divine day in which a thousand years are equal to but yesterday (Ps 90:4). Day one in creation is a divine day. It cannot be an earthly day since the temporal measure, the sun, is still missing. It will, therefore, do no harm to the creation account to understand creation in rhythms of millions of years."

D. Stuart Briscoe, an American progressive creationist, addresses the issue in his commentary on Genesis as well:

"The natural scientist talks convincingly in terms of millions of years and evolutionary eras while the Bible believe looks at the six days and wonders what on earth to do...It is not at all unreasonable to believe the 'day' (Hebrew *yom*), which can be translated quite literally as 'period,' refers not to literal days but to eras and ages in which God's progressive work was being accomplished."

We could endlessly duplicate such explanations. Typically they come from scholars in the concordist camp. More precisely, they belong to the branch of 'broad concordists' who in recent times have become associated with progressive creationism.

### **Analysis and Evaluation of Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8**

*Psalm 90:4.* Let us begin with Psalm 90:4. Interpreters have invoked the passage again and again to indicate that the creation 'days' are to be nonliteral, standing for long periods/epochs/ages of time. The passage reads: "For a thousand years in Thy sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or [lit. "and"] as a watch in the night" (NASB). Of immediate interest is the comparison of the long time period of 1,000 years with but "yesterday" and "a watch of the night." The passage contains a comparative particle in the original Hebrew, rendered into English either as "like" or "as."

From the point of view of Hebrew syntax, the comparative particle serves not only the expression "yesterday" but also the phrase "as a watch in the night," demonstrating that the comparison is not between a 'day' being like 1,000 years. A thousand years with God are "like" yesterday, that is, the past day, or "like" "a watch of the night," even a briefer period of time than "yesterday." The point is that God reckons time differently than the way humans do.

Genesis 1 is not interested in depicting how God defines time. The Genesis context of creation speaks of "days" in the sense of creation time during which God made our world and whereby He set the rhythm of the week. Thus Genesis 1 does not explain or address how God calculates time on His scale, but how the creation "days" set the norm for subsequent days in the weekly cycle of time.

Furthermore, Genesis 1 lacks any comparative particle such as "like" or "as" in connection with its usage of "day." The absence in Genesis 1 of a Hebrew comparative expression with either the word "day" or the expression "evening and morning" indicates that

the passage intends no such comparison. The issue in Genesis 1 is not one of comparison. Rather it is the amount of time God uses to create the world and whether the time period is identical to the seven-day week, the rhythm of historical time.

From contextual as well as grammatical-syntactical and semantic points of view, the application of Psalm 90:4 to Genesis 1 simply does not work. It lacks any appropriate linguistic and phraseological criteria of comparison. Those who link the two texts ignore contextual, linguistic, and phraseological criteria. In a way, those who relate the "days" of Genesis 1 with the "yesterday" and the "watch of the night" or the 1,000 years in God's scale of time are comparing apples with oranges.

Another approach that some have used in attempting to make the creation "days" into long period of time is that if one should read the "sixth day as the sixth epoch of creation, this opens the door to some kind of pre-Adamic *homo sapiens*." In other words, the long-age substitution for a literal "day" does away with the view that Adam and Eve were the first human beings whom God created on earth.

A third difficulty relates to the fact that Psalm 90 is not a creation psalm. Contextually speaking, Psalm 90 does not address the issue of how God regards the "days" of creation, but rather how humans are to regard time when compared to time in the realm of God.

Fourth, Psalm 90 does not even employ the term "day" by itself. It uses it in a linguistic relationship in verse 4 that syntactically joins two words together. The English language has one word for that linguistic relationship, "yesterday." But "yesterday" in Psalm 90:4 is in parallelism with the expression "as a watch in the night," that is, a very short interval of time. It means that the psalm does not compare the 1,000 years simply to a day, but in fact to a shorter interval of time.

In short, Psalm 90:4 does not define the meaning of the designation "day" in Genesis 1. In view of the problems cited and other difficulties, it is not surprising that many of those who currently employ the "day-age theory" as a solution to the tension between science and

religion ignore Psalm 90:4. When read on its own terms, the text does not address the issue of the length of the creation "day."

*Second Peter 3:8.* Broad concordists have also used 2 Peter 3:8, "with the Lord one day is a thousand years" (NASB), to support the day-age theory. Some have taken it as a "biblical" mathematical equivalent: "one day equals a thousand years" literally. Others regard the 1,000 years to mean an indefinite long period, an age, or the like. In that case, some argue, "one day equals a long period of time" or "one day equals an age."

We should point out that those who invoke this text face several major problems: (1) 2 Peter 3:8 has no creation context; (2) 2 Peter 3:8 has a comparative particle lacking in Genesis 1; (3) 2 Peter 3:8 becomes nonliteral when we take the 1,000 years to mean an "age" or the like; (4) 2 Peter 3:8 reveals that God is not limited to time or subject to it in fulfilling his promises.

Lloyd R. Bailey, a broad concordist himself, clearly expresses the intent of the passage: "The text of 2 Peter (3:8) has been misused by those who would bring it to bear upon the word 'day' in Genesis 1....Rather, the purpose of that text is to point out that 'The Lord is not slow about his promise... But is forbearing...not wishing that any should perish....' (3:9; cf. Verse 4). That is, God is not subject to time in the sense that humans are ('...as some count slowness,' verse 9). The intent, then, is to make a statement about God's fidelity to promises, and not to define the meaning of the word 'day' as it is used in Genesis 1."

It seems best to let 2 Peter 3:8 make its own point and not to use it for something topically, contextually, and linguistically unrelated.

### **"Days of Revelation?"**

A few still hold the theory that the creation "days" are actually "days of revelation." The Scottish geologist Hugh Miller made the concept prominent during the nineteenth

century. In this century P.J. Wiseman revived it in his 1946 publication *Creation Revealed in Six Days*, later reprinted in 1977.

According to this interpretation, God did not create the world in six days, but He instead "revealed" and explained in six literal days what He had already done over many spans of time. Its proponents take the recurring phrase "and God said" as support for their concept that the "days" of creation are actually "days of revelation." In this theory the world does not require a relatively recent origin nor creation in six literal 24-hour days.

Many have noted that the "days of revelation theory," also called the "vision theory," rests to a large degree upon a "misunderstanding of the word 'made,' in Exodus 20:11," for which Wiseman claims the meaning "showed." But "showed" is not a valid meaning for the Hebrew term *'asah*. No Hebrew-English dictionary supports such a possible translation. The Hebrew term *'asah*, used more than 2,600 times in the Old Testament, indicates "to make, manufacture, produce, do, etc.," but never once "to show" in either the Old Testament or in extrabiblical Hebrew. The meaning "to show" evolved for the sake of the theory. In view of this fact, it is not surprising that the "days of revelation theory" has not found much support.

In summary, current broad concordists seek to interpret Genesis 1 in some sort of "figurative, symbolic, or otherwise loose reading--such as the idea that the 'days' of Genesis 1 may be interpreted as long periods of time." Their goal is to accommodate the evolutionary theory's need for long periods of time. Based on this time frame hypothesis, they reinterpret Scripture in ways that they believe will harmonize the claims of both the biblical creation account and naturalistic evolution. Those who seek to adjust Scripture for the sake of concordism are known as broad concordists.

In contrast, strict concordists are scholars of equal erudition and skill. They are also interested in harmonizing science and religion. However, they are unwilling to give the biblical text a "loose reading." They agree that a meaning of a text must rest on the internal criteria of language and its usage according to the commonly accepted standards of

linguistics. To them the context of Scripture is primary, and linguistic standards need to follow sound grammatical-syntactical conventions. Thus strict concordists are fully aware of the tensions, but resist forcing a meaning on the biblical text not supported by appropriate linguistic analysis.

### **Literary Genre/Form Argument**

The recent Genesis commentary by evangelical scholar Victor P. Hamilton takes the position that we must regard the 'days' of Genesis 1 as nonfigurative and nonmetaphorical, that is, as literal solar days consisting of 24 hours. However, as a broad concordist he is already committed to long ages and remains interested in finding harmony with modern naturalistic science. In order to do so he appeals to "a literary reading of Genesis 1 [which] still permits the retention of 'day' as a solar day of 24 hours." How does he accomplish this?

Hamilton speaks of a "literary reading" of the Genesis creation account. The "literary reading" allows him to understand the "days" of creation "not as a chronological account of how many hours God invested in His creating project, but as an analogy of God's creative activity." In his view the 24-hour "days" in Genesis 1 are but an "analogy" based on a "literary [nonhistorical] reading" of the Genesis creation account.

The "literary reading" view derives from Charles E. Hummel. Hummel argues that even if the passage means the "days" in Genesis 1 to be 24-hour solar days, which he concludes they are, "the question still remains whether the [literary] format is figurative or literal, that is, *analogy* of God's creative activity or a chronological account of how many hours he worked." He believes that the "who" and "why," but not the "how," of creation are important (following Bernard Ramm) and that, therefore, the "analogy...provides a model for human work."

The "analogy" theory involves understanding the literal "days" as "a metaphor" that uses "the commonplace (or commonly understood, if you wish) meaning of a word" (viz. The word "day") "in a figurative manner." The analogy theory removes the schema of six days of work and one day of rest from a chronological piece of information and transforms it into a broad pattern of work-and-rest applicable to humanity.

As appealing as the theory seems to be, it still ignores the contextual and literary problems. We cannot simply take "day" as just analogous for work/rest. Hummel finds himself forced (followed by Hamilton) to redefine the literary genre of Genesis 1 from that of a straightforward creation account to one he designates as a semipoetic narrative." This falls under the "historical-cultural" approach to creation.

It is evident that form criticism and its genre method of interpretation have greatly influenced such broad concordist scholars. Form criticism, a submethod of the historical-critical method, began with Herman Gunkel at the turn of the century. Gunkel raised the question "Are the narratives of Genesis history or legend?" His premise was that "many things reported in Genesis....go directly against our better knowledge." The idea of "our better knowledge" is an admission on Gunkel's part that a naturalistic evolutionary worldview provides the authoritative norm of what history or legend. Thus he suggested that the literary genre of Genesis is not history, but "legend." Gunkel was the first liberal scholar to assign to the creation account in Genesis a literary genre other than as history in the sense of a factual account. Other liberal scholars, neoorthodox theologians, and now also in part neo-Evangelical broad concordist scholars have followed him.

Although we need not attempt to exhaustively cite the literary genre categories proposed for categorizing Genesis, we should look at some major representative examples. Karl Barth, the father of neoorthodox theology, regards Genesis 1, 2 as "saga" and of course, nonhistorical. S. H. Hooke, the leader of the myth-and-ritual school, says that the Genesis

creation account is "cultic liturgy." Gordon Wenham, a neo-evangelical scholar, believes it to be a "hymn." Walter Brueggemann, a liberal nonconcordist, suggests that it is a "poem."

We need to make several essential observations in view of the plethora of current opinions on the nature on of the literary genre of the Genesis creation account:

1. The obvious consensus is that there is no consensus on the literary nature of Genesis 1. It makes the literary genre approach for a nonliterary reading of Genesis 1 suspect of special pleading.

Since no consensus exists, the careful interpreter will cautiously avoid jumping on the bandwagon of literary genre identification in an attempt to redefine the literal intent of Genesis 1. Form-critical genre description, from its beginning (the time of Gunkel to the present), has sought to remove the text of Genesis 1 from the realm of history and fact.

2. The "literary genre" approach reveals it to be another way, at first used by nonconcordists, to prevent the creation account of Genesis from functioning as an authoritative, literal text, with implications for the relationship of science and the Bible. Noel Weeks has rightly suggested that "the way in which God revealed the history of creation must itself be justified by Scripture" and not by appeal to a form-critical literary genre description from which we have removed any element of historicity.

3. Interpreters following the "literary genre" approach interpret the "days" of creation in a literal and grammatical way. But the use of the "literary genre" approach restricts the meaning of Genesis 1 to a thought form that does not demand factual, historical reading of what took place. The "literary genre" redefinition of the creation account thus prevents it from informing modern readers on how, in what manner, and in what time God created the world. Instead, it simply wishes to affirm minimalistically that God is Creator. And that affirmation is meant to be a theological, nonscientific statement, with no impact on how the world and universe came into being and developed subsequently.

As we have seen, the "literary genre" approach employs a literary critical methodology that reduces the creation account to a nonhistorical or nonfactual role. In this case it does not matter whether we regard the creation "days" as literal 24-hour days, because the account as a whole, including the creation "days," has a meaning other than a historical or factual one.

### **Genesis 1: Figurative or Literal?**

The question still remains whether the creation account of Genesis 1 is literal or figurative as a whole. Often interpreters take Genesis 1 as part of a larger unit of Genesis 1-11 to determine its nature, purpose, and function. It is an acknowledged fact that the chapters at the beginning of the book of Genesis contain singularities, that is, unrepeated, one-time events that have no immediate analogy in present experience.

How does the modern historian handle such singularities? The standard position of modern historiography rests on the principle of analogy (cf. Ernst Troeltsch), that is, nothing in past experience can be reckoned to be historical except as it corresponds to present experience. Such an approach derives from the notion of the basic uniformity of human experience and historical events. The principle of analogy holds that we can understand the past only by borrowing from the present and applying it to the past. But to consistently do so means that we must deny the historicity and factuality of most of Genesis 1-11, including the creation account of Genesis 1.

Can and should the uniformitarian principle of analogy reign as the supreme norm for understanding the past? "A problem arises when the uniformity [of past and present] is raised to a universal principle that makes some evidence inadmissible," writes a strong supporter of the principle of analogy and modernistic historiography. His admission of the problem calls for great caution in how we apply the uniformitarian principle of analogy.

Human beings know of many experiences in present reality that are singular and without parallel in the past. For example, a quarter of a century ago the first human beings walked on the moon. That had never happened before. Another example is the use of atomic bombs for the destruction of two Japanese cities in 1945. Such destruction had never happened before and still stands unique to the present. We could mention many other singularities.

Do singularities exist today that are either human-made or part of another order, that is to say, that are real events and situations that have no analogy in the past, thus allowing us to postulate singularities in the past that have no analogy at present? For example, R. G. Collingwood, the famed British philosopher of history, noted that the ancient Romans engaged in population control by exposing newborn infants to die. It is a singularity that has no analogy at present in population control attempts.

When we keep these limitations of the principle of analogy in mind, we recognize that it is not sound to reject the creation account as nonhistorical and nonfactual just because we know of no analogy at present. Genesis 1 contains singularities that may be perceived to be just as real, historical, and factual as the singularities of another kind either in the present or the past.

We have good reasons for maintaining that Genesis 1 is a factual account of the origin of the livable world. The biblical record is accurate, authentic, and historical.

### **Considerations from Dictionaries**

Magne Saeboe writes in the acclaimed *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* that "day" (*yom*) in Genesis 1 has a literal meaning in the sense of "a full day." He does not even consider another meaning or alternative.

Ernst Jenni, an acclaimed twentieth-century Hebrew scholar, states in the most widely used theological dictionary of the Hebrew language that we must understand "day" in the Genesis creation account in its literal meaning as a "day of 24 hours in the sense of an astronomical or calendrical unit of time."

### **Considerations based on Singular Usage**

The Hebrew term *yom* appears in the Hebrew Old Testament 2,304 times, of which 1,452 usages occur in the singular. The five books of Moses (Pentateuch) have it 668 times, and the book of Genesis employs it 152 times. Genesis has the singular form of "day" 83 times, with the remainder in the plural.

As Genesis enumerates the six "days" of creation it uses "day" consistently in the singular. One plural usage appears in the phrase "for days and years" in Genesis 1:14 (NASB), which is, of course, not a creation "day." Such a plural application in verse 14 hardly enters the discussion of making creation "days" long periods of time since calendrical usage of "days and years" keeps it literal itself. Without doubt, verse 14 means literal days of 24-hour days, just as we likewise understood the "years" as literal ones.

The additional appearances of "day" in the singular in Genesis 1 occur in verses 5 and 16. "And God called the light day [*yom*]" (verse 5, NASB) and God made the "greater light to govern the day" (verse 16, NASB). Verse 5 employs the term in the sense of the literal daylight period of the 24-hour day, in contrast to the night part, "the night" (verse 16), of the same segment of time. Both "day" and "night" make a "full day."

We have to recognize the fact that the term *yom* in every one of the six days has the same connection: (a) it is used as a singular; (b) it has a numeral; and (c) it is preceded by the phrase "There was evening and there was morning." This triple interlocking connection of singular usage, joined by a numeral, and the temporal definition of "evening and morning"

keeps the creation "day" the same throughout the creation account. It also reveals that "time is conceived as linear and events occur within it successively." To depart from the numerical consecutive linkage and the "evening-morning" boundaries would take extreme liberty with the plain and direct meaning of the Hebrew language.

### **Considerations Based on Numeral Usage**

The six creation "days" in each instance have an accompanying numeral in the sequence of 1 to 6 (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The day following the "sixth day," the "day" on which God rested, Scripture designates as "the seventh day" (Gen 2:2 [two times], 3).

What seems of significance is the sequential emphasis of the numerals 1-7 without any break or temporal interruption. This seven-day schema, the weekly pattern of six workdays followed by "the seventh day" as rest day, interlinks the creation "days" as normal days in a consecutive and noninterrupted sequence.

When the Old Testament employs *yom* together with a numeral (150 times) it refers invariably to a literal day of 24 hours. The only exception in numbers of 1-1,000 appears in an eschatological text in Zechariah 14:7. Translators have rendered the Hebrew expression *yom 'echad* in verse 7 into English in a variety of ways: "for it will be a unique day" (*New American Standard Bible*, *New International Version*); "and there shall be continuous day" (*New Revised Standard Version*); "it will be continuous day" (*Revised English Bible*); or "and the day shall be one." The "continuous day," or "one day," of the eschatological future will be one in which the normal rhythm of evening and morning, day and night, will change so that in that eschatological day there shall be "light even at the evening" (verse 7). Scholars generally acknowledge that this is a difficult text in the Hebrew language, and we can hardly use it to change the plain usage in Genesis 1.

## Considerations Based on the "Evening-Morning" Boundary

The Genesis creation account not only links each day to a sequential numeral, but also sets the time boundaries by "evening and morning" (verse 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). The rhythmic boundary phrase "and there was evening and there was morning" provides a definition of the creation "day." The creation "day" consists of "evening" and "morning," and is thus a literal "day."

The term for "evening" (Hebrew *'ereb*) covers the dark part of the day in a *pars pro toto* (meaning that a part [in this case, the "evening"] stands for the whole dark part of the day) usage (cf. "day-night" in Genesis 1:14). The corresponding term "morning" (Hebrew *boqer*) is also *pars pro toto* "for the entire period of daylight." We should note that the "evening-morning" expression must have the same signification in every one of its six usages. Thus "evening and morning" is a temporal expression defining each "day" of creation as a literal day. It cannot be made to mean anything else.

## Conclusion

This chapter investigated the meaning of creation "days" It has considered key arguments in favor of a figurative, nonliteral meaning of the creation "days" and found them to be wanting on the basis of genre investigation, literary considerations, grammatical study, syntactical usages, and semantic connections. The cumulative evidence, based on comparative, literary, linguistic, and other considerations, converges on every level, leading to the inescapable conclusion that the designation *yom*, "day," in Genesis 1 means consistently a literal 24-hour period.

The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal "day" than the ones chosen. The complete lack

of indicators such as prepositions, qualifying expressions, construct phrases, semantic-syntactical connections, and so on indicates that we cannot possibly take the designation "day" in the creation week to be anything other than a regular 24-hour day. The combinations of the factors of articular usage, singular gender, semantic-syntactical constructions, time boundaries, and so on corroborated by the diving promulgations in such Pentateuchal passages as Exodus 20:8-11 and Exodus 31:12-16 suggest uniquely and consistently that the creation "day" is meant to be literal, sequential, and chronological in nature.