



Richard Davidson

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*An occasional column for those who seek biblical knowledge*

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**O**n the first day of Creation week, according to the account in Genesis 1, God said: “Let there be light, and there was light” (vs. 3, NIV). But a few verses later, I read that on the fourth day of Creation week, God ordered into existence “lights in the expanse of the sky to separate light from darkness and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth” (1:14-18). What was the source of the light that illuminated our planet before the fourth day, if it did not come from the Sun?—Havannah Beetson, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Theologians have given a number of answers. Richard Davidson, chairman of the Old Testament Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, discusses five:

1. God’s presence was the source of light on the first day of Creation.

**Where did the light on the first day of Creation week come from?**

Psalm 104, a stylized account of the Creation story, mentions God covering himself with “light as with a garment” in the section paralleling the first day of Creation (vs. 2). During the first three days, God could have separated the light from darkness as he later did at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:19, 20). By being the light source for the first part of the week, God would be emphasizing the God-centered rather than the Sun-centered nature of Creation, and thus forestalling any temptation to worship the Sun if it were the first object created.

2. The Sun was created before the fourth day, but became visible on that day as the cloud cover was removed. This explanation would explain the evening/morning cycle before Day 4. The Hebrew for Genesis 1:14 differs from the pattern of the other days. Verse 14 literally reads: “Let lights in the firmament of the heavens divide the day from the

night”—not “let there be lights. . . to divide. . .” as in most translations—perhaps implying that the lights were already in existence before the fourth day.

The “greater” and “lesser” lights as well as the stars could have been created “in the beginning” [before Creation week (vs. 1; cf. John 1:1-3)]. On the fourth day, they were given a purpose—to separate the day from the night and to mark seasons and days and years. A variant of this view is that the Sun and Moon were created before Creation week, but in their *tohu-bohu* (“unformed-unfilled”) state like the Earth (see verse 2) and on the fourth day were further formed into their fully functional state (vs. 16).

**3. God created the physical properties of visible light and the rest of the electromagnetic spectrum on the first day.** This idea, however, is not satisfactory if the universe and light from other galaxies are older than life on Earth. Several passages of Scripture suggest that celestial bodies and intelligent beings were created before life was brought into existence on this planet (Job 38:7; Eze. 28:15). In addition, the Hebrew syntax of Genesis 1:16 doesn’t require the creation of the stars on Day 4, and in fact suggests that they were already in existence.

**4. The literary structure of Genesis 1 dictated the order of the days of Creation: the Sun on the fourth day**

to provide the light on the first; birds and fish on the fifth to inhabit the air, dividing the water on the second; animals on the sixth to live on the dry land and eat of the vegetation of the third. However, the symmetry seems reversed on the first and fourth days, since the light appears before its physical source.

**5. The Genesis 1 Creation story is intended to undergird the monotheistic religion of Israel in contrast to the polytheism of the surrounding nations.** The story deliberately altered the relationship of the Sun, light, and daily cycle to convey the powers of the Creator God. For example, the term translated “greater light” was used rather than the Hebrew word for sun, to avoid any confusion with the pagan sun-god. However, both this answer and the previous rely on a figurative rather than a literal understanding of the Creation narrative.

Of the options above, the first two seem to be most in harmony with the biblical data. Perhaps a combination of these two views is possible: The Sun and the Moon may have been created (at least in their “unformed-unfilled” state) before Creation week, but God himself was the light source until Day 4. The author clearly intends his account to be literal. For example, the heading “the generations/accounts/history” is used in Genesis 2:4 (KJV, NRSV), as well as the nine other sections of Genesis.

Part of Suggestion 4 may also be true: God seems to have created in such a way that the first three days formed the *tohu* ("unformed") mentioned in verse 2, and the last three days filled the *bohu* ("unfilled") of verse 2. Part of Suggestion 5 is also true in that God created in such a way as to serve as a polemic against the polytheism of the surrounding nations.

Regardless of the answer(s) preferred, the Genesis story refutes the worship of nature, including the

popular sun-god. God created light and the daily cycle, which are dependent on him. Later in Creation week, God gave these responsibilities in the heavens to the Sun and the Moon, just as he passed on to human beings the responsibility for stewardship of the Earth, its natural cover, and its creatures. Ultimately, the heavens, the natural world, and any human ability to control or thoroughly understand them are totally dependent on God, who alone deserves our worship.