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**ARE THE DAYS OF GENESIS LONGER THAN 24 HOURS?
THE BIBLE SAYS, "YES!"**

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*I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.*

So reads the first statement of the Apostles's Creed. This declaration basically restates the first verse of the Bible, and it is universally accepted by Christians. Nevertheless, whereas Christians uniformly agree to the *fact* of God as creator, they disagree on the *length of time* God took to create and mold the universe into its present form. Some Christians hold that God took six literal days to accomplish this task, while others are convinced that God used processes that spanned millions and billions of years.

Why the difference of opinion? The answer is that ample evidence exists, both scientific and biblical, that raises questions about a literal six day creation period. I will not discuss the scientific evidence. After all, regardless of scientific opinion, if the Bible is clear that creation occurred in six literal days, then we would be required as Bible believers to accept this verdict. There are, however, abundant biblical data indicating that the Bible does not require belief in a literal creation week. This evidence comes from the usage of the terms "day," "morning," and "evening," and from the events that occurred during day six.

Usage of the Terms "Day," "Morning," and "Evening"

In Hebrew (the language of most of the Old Testament), as in English, a single word can have several meanings. The Hebrew word "day" can mean a period of daylight as opposed to night (Genesis 1.5,14), a twenty-four hour period (many examples), and a

period of time of unspecified length. The last usage, which is figurative, occurs many times in the Old Testament. An example appears in the creation account itself: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the *day* that the Lord made the earth and the heavens" (Genesis 2.4). As we can see from this verse, regardless of the meaning of "day" in Genesis chapter one, scripture uses "day" for the entire week of creation, thereby illustrating the figurative meaning of the word.

At first, this may seem strange, for English speakers do not often use "day" figuratively. It does, nevertheless, appear at times in expressions like "back in my day," "in this day and age," and "in the days of FDR." It should be noted that the plural form "days" occurs figuratively numerous times in Hebrew. In fact, consulting a concordance will show that about a quarter of all the uses of "day" and "days" are figurative. Hence there is no doubt that "day/days" can denote a period of time longer than twenty-four hours.

On the other hand, what about the terms "morning" and "evening"? Does not their use in conjunction with "day" strengthen the literal interpretation of "day?" The answer is "no," because Hebrew also uses "morning" and "evening" figuratively. For example, we read in Psalm 90, attributed to Moses, that human beings are like the grass that "though in the *morning* it springs up new, by *evening* it is dry and withered" (verse 6). I know of no grass that literally springs up in the morning and then is dead by the same evening. Rather, the psalmist has in mind the life cycle of grass in the Levant, which begins its growth with the November rains and dies with the hot, dry, March, desert winds. In this psalm, therefore, "morning" stands for the period of growth and "evening" stands for the period of death. This interpretation fits in with the tenor of the entire psalm which encourages humans to be mindful of their time on earth; for just as the life cycle of grass is short with respect to human life, human life itself is short with respect to the ongoing activities of God. The same comparison is made between humans and grass in Isaiah 40.6-8 and 1 Peter 1.24,25.

"Morning" and "evening" are also used figuratively in Psalm 30.5. In this verse we read that God's anger "lasts only a moment, but his favor lasts a lifetime; weeping may remain for a *night* [literally: evening], but rejoicing comes in the *morning* ." In context, "evening" corresponds to the time of weeping over God's anger, and "morning" corresponds to the time of rejoicing over God's favor. The writer envisions a time longer than a literal morning or evening.

Finally, we read in Psalm 49.14,15 that the wicked are

like sheep ... destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them
in the *morning*; their forms will decay in the grave far from their princely mansions. But God will
redeem my soul from the grave; he will surely take me to himself.

Again, "morning" must be interpreted figuratively, for in what way can the upright literally rule over the dead the morning after they die? After all, one rules over those who

are alive, not over those who are dead. I would suggest that the psalmist is looking ahead to the time of his ultimate redemption -- his resurrection -- spoken of in verse 15. In short, he is looking forward to a new age that he calls "morning."

As with the word "day," English speakers do not regularly use "morning" and "evening" figuratively, but perhaps the expressions "the dawning of a new age" and "in the twilight of his/her years" parallel the Hebrew idiom that uses portions of a day figuratively for periods of time.

In summary, we find evidence from the biblical usage of the terms "day," "morning," and "evening" that the "days" of the first chapter of Genesis may not be literal. If not, then what do the terms mean? I would suggest the following: "Evening" represents the waning of one "day's" creative activity and "morning" represents the beginning of the next "day's" creative activity. This activity has taken place in a period of time called a "day."

The argument for figurative days will be reinforced when we consider the events that occurred on the sixth day.

The Events of the Sixth Day

In Genesis 1.27 it appears that man and woman were created at the same time, but in Genesis chapter two we learn that a period of time elapsed between the creation of the man and that of the woman. This is not a contradiction. Chapter one only gives an overview of the creation of human beings, whereas chapter two fills in the details. Let us examine each detail while asking ourselves if all the events presented in chapter two could reasonably fit into twenty-four hours.

First, after Adam was created, God planted the garden of Eden in the east. He then made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground. At this point we have to pay very careful attention to the terminology describing God's activities. Notice that we are not told that God "created" the garden or the trees. Rather, God "planted" and "caused the trees to grow." The terms "planted" and "grow" imply activity that took time. Of course, God has the power to create Eden in an instant, but the language of the narrative suggests a process, not an immediate creative act.

Second, in spite of the garden's perfection, it could not take care of itself; man still needed "to work it and to take care of it." (verse 15) The nature of the work is not stated, but one wonders why the garden needed any work at all if the sixth day was only twenty-four hours. Could not the garden take care of itself for such a short period? Again, the narrative implies a time longer than a literal day, unless the command was given at this time but was meant to be fulfilled at a later date. The perception is, however, that Adam was to begin his work forthwith.

Third, in verse 18 the Lord declares that "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." The Lord, however, did not create Eve immediately. Instead, he brought the beasts of the field and the birds of the air to Adam to name them,

which he did. This naming process would have taken time, both because there were many kinds of animals, and because names in the Bible describe a characteristic of the object being named. Note, for example, that the name "woman" is not arbitrary; it brings out a characteristic of woman -- "she was taken out of man." (verse 23) Note also the meanings of "Cain" and "Seth" in Genesis 4.1,25. From these and other scriptural examples, it is not unreasonable that Adam's name for each animal would have expressed a characteristic of the animal, and this implies that Adam would have had to observe each animal for a while in order to select a name that summarized one of its characteristics. Thus it is hard to believe that Adam could have named all the beasts of the field and the birds of the air in twenty-four hours.

Of course, one wonders why the Lord had Adam name the animals before He created the woman. I would suggest that God's purpose was to show Adam that he was incomplete without a mate (after all, the other animals had mates); in this way he would love and appreciate Eve all the more.

The final evidence that the sixth day was longer than twenty-four hours comes from Adam's expression after he sees Eve: "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." The English translation "this is now" misses the emphasis which belongs to the word used in the original Hebrew. A better rendering would be "now at length" or "now at last," as we can see by tracing the use of this word in other portions of the Old Testament.

Uses of "This is now":

1. *Genesis 18.32*: As Abraham argues with the Lord about the impending destruction of Sodom, he ends the long bargaining session by asking the Lord not to be angry "this time," or "now at last," when he requests that Sodom not be destroyed if only ten righteous individuals are found within the city.
2. *Genesis 29.34,35*: Leah uses this expression after the birth of her sons Levi and Judah. Recall that Leah was not loved by Jacob, but she felt that *now* she would be loved after giving birth to these two sons.
3. *Genesis 30.20*: Again, the expression is used by Leah after the birth of Zebulun.
4. *Genesis 46.30*: For many years Israel (Jacob) thought that his beloved son Joseph was dead, but finally he learns that Joseph was alive in Egypt. Upon seeing his son, Israel states, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive." The word "now" is the same word used by Adam in Genesis 2.23.
5. *Exodus 9.27*: After the seventh plague, Pharaoh urges Moses to end the plague by declaring, "*This time* I have sinned." The expression "this time" is the same word used in Genesis 2.23.

6. *Exodus 10.17*: Again, after the eighth plague, Pharaoh tries the same tactic as before.

7. *Judges 6.39*: Our expression is used twice by Gideon when requesting that "now at last" the Lord not be angry with him for asking that the dew avoid the fleece and condense on the ground.

8. *Judges 15.3*: Samson had experienced a time of contention with the Philistines which ended in his leaving his wife with her father and returning to the land of Israel. Some time later, Samson returned to his wife's house only to find that she was given to another man. Samson responds by declaring that "this time," or "now at last" he has a right to get even with the Philistines.

9. *Judges 16.18*: Samson finally succumbs to Delilah's enticements and he confesses to her the source of his strength. Delilah calls the Philistine leaders to come "this time," for he told her everything.

10. *Judges 16.28*: After Samson was taken to the temple to be mocked by the Philistines, he asks God "now at last" to give him the strength to bring down the temple.

In each instance above, except for Abraham and Gideon, the narrative relates a series of events that lasted longer than twenty-four hours. In some cases, a considerable period of time elapsed. That is why the term is better translated "now at last." It is difficult, therefore, to believe that Adam would use this expression if only a fraction of a day passed between his creation and that of Eve's. Unlike Abraham or Gideon, Adam was neither arguing with God nor seeking a sign; his use of "now at last" parallels those which involve a longer period of time. In Adam's case, this period included the naming of the animals and the recognition that he was incomplete without a mate. Surely these events took longer than a day. And if the sixth day was not a twenty-four hour period, what right do we have to insist that any other day of creation was twenty-four hours?

We have seen two powerful evidences that the "days" of Genesis are figurative. First, we have investigated the usage of the terms "day," "morning," and "evening," and we have seen that these terms can be used figuratively. Second, we have examined the terminology used to describe the activities of the sixth day, and we find substantial testimony that the events of the sixth day do not fit into twenty-four hours.

We conclude that scripture itself attests that the "days" of Genesis need not be taken literally.

Appendix: Two Common Arguments against the Non-literal View

One argument often encountered is as follows: In all instances outside of Genesis one, when a number appears with the term "day," a literal day is meant. Because a number appears with the days of Genesis one, they must be literal.

This argument fails on two counts. First, the premise is false. There are at least two instances where a number appears with a figurative use of "day," Isaiah 9.14 (9.13 in Hebrew) and Hosea 6.2. In the Isaiah passage, the expression "one day" is exactly the same in Hebrew as the one often translated as "the first day" in Genesis 1.5. "One day" in this passage, as well as the numbered "days" in Hosea, are clearly figurative.

Second, in all cases purportedly illustrating the number/literal day correlation, it is already apparent from the context that a literal day is intended. The number is simply descriptive; it does not define "day." Hence the proposed connection between the presence of a number and the meaning of "day" does not exist.

A second argument against non-literal days arises from the fourth commandment (Exodus 20.9-11):

Six days you will labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. You will not do any work For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth ... and rested on the seventh.

A parallel is observed between the literal days of human work and rest and the days of creation. But can we conclude from this that the days of the first chapter of Genesis are literal? The theologian J. Oliver Buswell provides an excellent answer:

If we had no other example of Moses' language, this passage might be taken as evidence for a twenty-four hour creative day, but we have Scriptural evidence that Moses made a radical distinction between God's attitude toward time and the attitude of man. What Moses is saying, in the total Scriptural context, must be understood as teaching that man should observe a periodicity in the ratio of work to rest, of six days to one day, because God in the creation set an example of an analogous periodicity of six and one of his kind of days. Surely the fourth commandment gives no right to say that God's days always must be understood to be of the same length as man's days, when we have so much evidence to the contrary.

The ninetieth Psalm is ascribed to Moses and it is probable that the ascription is correct. In verse four of the Psalm we read, "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night." It would appear then that Moses himself was accustomed to a figurative use of the word; for a thousand years could equal "yesterday," or "a watch in the night" of three or four hours. Peter brings out the same thought. "This one thing must not be forgotten, beloved, that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 2:8).

To the above one might add that it appears as though God's rest on the seventh day is used as a basis for *three* sabbath principles: rest on the seventh day (Exodus 20.8-11), the seventh year (Leviticus 25.8-17), and the jubilee year, after $7 \times 7 = 49$ years (Leviticus 25.8-17). It is invalid to pick out just one of these applications of the sabbath principle and apply it to the days of Genesis.

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