

An Apologia for the 24-Hour Day Creation View, Part 1

Robert V. McCabe, Th.D.
 Professor of Old Testament
 Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary

Because the tradition of Christian orthodoxy has a legacy of interpreting Genesis as a historic narrative, the prevailing interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3 has been that it is a record of God’s creative activity in six, consecutive, literal days followed by a literal seventh day of rest. Because the focus is on the six days of divine creative activity, this view is often called the 24-hour view. With the rise of modern geology and subsequent development of other disciplines, such as astronomy, biology and geophysics, secularists are convinced that the “scientific” evidence, such as radioisotope dating, demands an earth that is 4.5 billions years old and a universe that is 14 billion years old (http://www.talkorigins.org/faqs/dalrymple/scientific_age_earth.html). Since this is an assumed fact in most discussions about the origin of the earth, this sets up an irreconcilable difference with biblical revelation that seemingly supports a literal creation week with its implications that the earth is thousands of years old (see Donald B. DeYoung, *Thousands Not Billions* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2005]). This conflict has had an impact on evangelical views of Genesis 1:1–2:3 with a result that there are two conflicting sources of authority, “science” and the Bible. That “science” is viewed as having an equal level of authority with the Bible, at least in the area of cosmogony, is so stated by evangelical leader Hugh Ross who refers to “science” as the “sixty-seventh book” of our canon (*Creation and Time*, p. 56) and as “dual” revelation to the Bible (*ibid.*, p. 58).

Though most evangelicals would not state the issue so carelessly, their approach assumes two sources of revelation: “science” and the Bible. Because key aspects of each source’s message are antithetical to the other, it is impossible for both to be correct. As a result, many evangelicals have reinterpreted Genesis 1:1–2:3 to resolve the conflict. A consequence of this type of thinking is that Christians are divided into two camps: young-earth creationism and old-earth creationism. Young-earth creationists defend the historic, literal day interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3 and old-earth creationists have reinterpreted Genesis 1:1–2:3 with alternative explanations of the creation account. My objective in this three-part series is to defend a literal interpretation of the creation account. The thesis of this three part series is that, if we consistently affirm the perspicuity of Scripture, the 24-hour view provides the most internally consistent synthesis of Scripture’s comprehensive message about the nature of the creation account and that modern alternative reinterpretations are inconsistent with a biblical theology of creation. My purpose with this first article is to provide a fourfold biblical justification for a literal understanding of the six days of the creation week (for a more detailed explanation of this justification, see my “A Defense of Literal Days in the Creation Week,” *DBSJ* 5 (2000), pp. 100–112, available at <http://www.dbts.edu/journals/2000/mccabe.pdf>). In the subsequent two articles, I will initially summarize leading alternate explanations of Genesis 1:1–2:3 and finally evaluate the various views.

First, the semantic constraints of the singular “day” argue for a normal day. We should note that the noun *yôm* (“day”) always refers to a normal literal day when it is used as a singular noun and is not found in a compound grammatical construction, such as the noun *yôm* being used

with a preposition immediately attached to it, *yôm* being a part of the multi-word construction known as the construct-genitive relationship etc. (see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/EPOCHS’ of Time?” *Origins* 21 [1994]: 23–24). Since *yôm* is used in the Hebrew Old Testament 2,304 times in a variety of contexts (*TLOT*, s.v. “*Yôm*,” by J. E. Jenni, 2:526–272), lexicographers have a clear picture about *yôm*’s use. What should not be missed is that Hebrew lexicons consistently place *yôm*’s use in the creation account with normal days (BDB, p. 398; and *HALOT*, 2:399). In Genesis 1:1–2:3 *yôm* is used 14 times, 13 times in the singular and once in the plural (v. 14) (it is used in Genesis 1:5 [twice], 8, 13, 14 [twice], 16, 18, 19, 23, 31; 2:2 [twice] and 2:3). The lone plural use of “days” does not contradict our understanding of “day” as a normal day. Its use in 1:14 is consistent with our argument. While the use of the plural “days” is clearly not a reference to any of the specific days of the creation week, its use in 1:14 has specific reference to the movement of the heavenly bodies, which do enable people to measure the passage of literal days and literal years and recognize literal signs and seasons, according to their God-declared purpose. These are regular 24-hour days! Returning to our point about the thirteen uses of “day” in Genesis 1, this type of singular use of “day” with a non-extended meaning is used consistently in this manner throughout Genesis, the Pentateuch, and the entire Old Testament to denote literal 24-hour days (Hasel, “‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1,” pp. 23–26).

Second, the use of “evening” and “morning” as qualifiers of “day” also support a literal interpretation of the creation days. Because the word “day” in the creation account is qualified by “evening” and “morning,” each day is to be taken literally. The clauses in which these two nouns are found, “and there was evening and there was morning,” stand in juxtaposition with each enumerated day of the creation week (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31). Whether “evening” and “morning” are used together in a context with “day” (19 times beyond the 6 uses in Genesis 1) or they are used without “day” (38 times), they are used consistently in reference to literal days. “Evening” and “morning” are best understood as references to the beginning and conclusion of the nighttime period that concludes each of the creation days, after God had ceased from that day’s creative activity. The night cycle of evening to morning is reflected in the description of the Passover ritual in Deuteronomy 16:4: “No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the *evening* of the first day remain all night until *morning*.” With this interpretation, each day of the creation week has an “evening-morning” conclusion. The use of *waw* consecutive (a Hebrew verbal form generally used in narrative literature showing a sequence of events) with each clause containing evening (“and there was evening”) and morning (“and there was morning”) indicates that at the conclusion of a creation day, the next sequence was evening and this was followed by the next sequence, morning (For support of this interpretation of “evening” and “morning,” see Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* p. 168; and Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., “The Traditional Interpretation of Genesis 1,” in *Yea, Hath God Said: The Framework Hypothesis/Six-Day Creation Debate*, by Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., and Michael R. Butler [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002], pp. 36–39).

Third, scriptural parallels with “day” further suggest that the days of the creation week are literal days. Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:14–17 support the historic, literal-day interpretation. For example, the context of Exodus 20:8–11 is that of God giving Israel the Decalogue and, in particular, the third commandment about Israel keeping the Sabbath holy. God’s motive for this command (v. 11) was based on the pattern that He had set in the creation week, “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.” If we follow the metaphorical use of day, this verse could be translated: “For in six geological ages of a million years or so the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh geological age of a million years or so: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath geological age of a million years or so and hallowed it.” This is reiterated again in Exodus 31:14–17. What seems readily apparent is that Moses again had six literal days in mind with the seventh day also being a twenty-four hour period.

Finally, numerical qualifiers used with “day” consistently point to literal days in the creation week. Since “day” is often qualified in Genesis 1:1–2:3 by a number, each day must be a literal day. In each case where Moses summarizes God’s creative work for that day, the word “day” is qualified by a number—“one day,” v. 5, “second day,” v. 8, etc. Excluding Genesis 1:1–2:3, when *yôm* is used with a numerical qualifier in the Old Testament, it is not used in an extended, non-literal sense. The use of “day” with a number is clearly demonstrated in Numbers 7. In this context, leaders from each tribe of Israel brought various gifts to the Lord on 12, sequential, literal days. A number qualifies each use of the word “day.” Numbers 7:12 illustrates this point, “He who offered his offering the *first day* was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah” (for the remainder of the days along with their numerical qualifiers, see vv. 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78). The sequential numbering of days is also found in Numbers 29:17–35. Thus, the use of “day” with a number is a clear reference to a literal day. Hasel has made this same point: “When the word *yôm*, ‘day,’ is employed together with a numeral, which happens 150 times in the Old Testament, it refers in the Old Testament invariably to a literal day of 24 hours” (“‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1,” p. 26.). In light of these two contexts with numbers used with “day” in a sequential arrangement, they provide biblical evidence that support this paper’s argument that the use of numbers with days communicates that the first week in the space and time continuum was a week of seven literal, sequentially numbered days.

Therefore, my conclusion is that the creation account unequivocally communicates that God created the heaven, the earth and all things therein in six, consecutive literal days. To put it in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, “In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good” (chapter 4, paragraph 1). With my next installment, I will look at alternate interpretations of Genesis 1:1–2:3.