

An Apologia for the 24-Hour Day Creation View, Part 2

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

In the [first part](#) of this three-part series, I noted that the prevailing view of Christian orthodoxy had been the literal day interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3. I also presented four preliminary arguments supporting this 24-hour day interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3. Here we will note four of the most prominent alternative views that have arisen largely as a result of the advent of modern geology and its claims about the (old) age of the earth.

(1) Theistic evolution. This view has also been described by one of its current advocates, Howard J. Van Till of Calvin College, as “the fully gifted creation” (“The Fully Gifted Creation,” in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], p. 172). It argues that God created inorganic matter that contained properties with the potential to evolve into the wide variety of life forms presently observable. The advocates of this view affirm that God “created” all current life forms over extended geological ages and through random mutations and natural selection. Support for this hypothesis is drawn from the (supposedly) incontrovertible evidence of evolutionary naturalism. Moreover, advocates insist that since God has not revealed in Scripture how creation took place, the responsibility for figuring this out is man’s.

(2) Day-age view. This position maintains that the six days of the creation week were six chronologically-arranged geological ages (see Hugh Ross and Gleason L. Archer, “The Day-Age View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian [Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001], pp. 123–63). This position is supported by two primary arguments. The first is that the Hebrew term *yôm* (“day”) can be used figuratively to refer to an extended period of time, as it does, for example, in the expression, “the day of the LORD.” The second argument relies on the results of scientific dating. Thus, as Wayne Grudem notes, “The evident advantage of this view is that, if the current scientific estimate for an earth 4.5 billion years old is correct, it explains how the Bible is consistent with this fact. Among evangelicals who hold to an old earth view, this is a common position. This view is sometimes called a ‘concordist’ view because it seeks agreement or ‘concord’ between the Bible and scientific conclusions about dating” (*Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], p. 298).

(3) Gap theory. This interpretation maintains that that there was a gap of extended time between an original creation in Genesis 1:1 and a recreation, following divine judgment, in Genesis 1:2. This view is also appropriately known as the [ruin-restoration theory](#). Prior to the development of modern geology, Christians generally maintained that fossils preserved in the earth’s sedimentary rocks were the result of the Noahic Flood. However, with the development of uniformitarian geology, some leading Christians began to reinterpret the sedimentary strata, along with the fossils, as being a result of the slow-moving processes of nature, processes that were presumed to be the same in the past as they are in the present (see Terry Mortenson, *The Great Turning Points* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004], pp. 32–33). Recognizing the

challenge that this new interpretation presented to orthodox Christianity, Thomas Chalmers (1780–1847), a leader in the Free Church of Scotland, sought to harmonize Scripture and science. In a lecture given in 1814, Chalmers argued that the history of creation in Genesis 1 begins in the middle of v. 2. He explained that Genesis 1:1–2a (“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was formless and void and darkness was on the face of the deep”) was a reference to a pre-Adamic age that was brought to an end by a great catastrophe, which left the earth “formless and void.” The fossil remains provided evidence for this pre-Adamic age. Precisely stated, the gap theory posits that (1) Genesis 1:1 describes a perfect and complete creation of the heavens and the earth, (2) 1:2 records the ruin of the originally perfect earth, and (3) there was a gap of time (billions of years) between the originally perfect earth and its restoration set forth in 1:3–31 (see Arthur C. Custance, *Hidden Things of God’s Revelation* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977]).

(4) Framework interpretation. This recent interpretation teaches that Genesis 1:1–2:3 contains a historical account that has been shaped (or framed) for literary and theological ends. This means, therefore, that that the six days of creation in the creation account are not meant to represent history as it really happened. The framework view is supported by three arguments. First, it argues that certain features of the creation account suggest it should be read topically rather than chronologically. For instance, the overall structure used in the creation week is a literary scheme of “six work-day frames.” Each day of the creation week is introduced by a divine announcement: “God said” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24). This clause structures each day of the creation week. In addition, “God said” is used twice on two days: the third (Gen 1:9, 11) and sixth (1:24, 26). It is from this that framework supporters suggest that there are eight creative events (Lee Irons with Meredith G. Kline, “The Framework View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian [Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001], pp. 227–28). Within each frame, the author of Genesis either gives one snapshot of God’s creative work, something reflected, for example, by the fiat-fulfillment expressions (Gen 1:3, fiat: “Let there be light”; fulfillment: “and there was light”) on the first, second, fourth and fifth days, or two snapshots, such as on the third and the sixth day. When the six work-day frames are viewed as a whole, the eight creation events are evenly divided into two parallel units of three days, with the first day corresponding to the fourth day, the second to the fifth, and the third to the sixth. Thus, the first three days form a unit of four creative activities that are paralleled by the last three days with the same number of creative events.

Second, it is argued that the unending character of the seventh day (Heb 4:3–4 cites Gen 2:2) indicates that the six days of the creation week are not normal days (see Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” p. 156; and Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, trans. David G. Preston [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984], p. 56). This argument is a fundamental aspect of Kline’s two-register cosmology (“Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 [March 1996]: 2–15). While this argument is a fundamental aspect of Kline’s newer two-register cosmology, not all framework advocates using it also support this cosmology (for additional information, see McCabe, “A Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Week,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008], pp. 212–13, n. 10, pp. 240–46).

Third, those framework advocates who follow Kline also argue that God used ordinary providence (i.e., the non-miraculous sustaining and directing of all creation) to control the creation “week.” This argument is predicated on interpreting “because it had not rained” in

Genesis 2:5 as suggesting that God did not create plants until he first created an environment conducive to sustain plants (see Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (May 1958): 146–48). Based upon what Kline calls “the unargued presupposition of Gen 2:5” (ibid.), he infers that God only used ordinary providence to control the creation “week.” Thus Genesis 1:1–2:3 cannot be a sequential account because, for example, vegetation was created on third day before the sun was created on the fourth day.

Having summarized these four prominent alternative explanations of Genesis 1:1–2:3, I am in a position to evaluate these views with the final installment of this series.