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THE GENESIS DEBATE

Created in the Recent Past (The Young Earth View)

A Very Old Work of Art (The Day-Age View)

Restoring a Destroyed Creation (The Restoration View)

Literary Theme over Literal Chronology (The Literary Framework View)

Posing the Question

Juston was excited about his new direction in life. Over the summer he had recommitted his life to Christ, and he had a new passion for pursuing his dream of becoming a medical doctor. Now, instead of joining a practice in his hometown, Juston felt certain that he was being called to the mission field to assist in God's work of healing people's souls and bodies in a two-thirds-world context. What he hadn't expected was the challenge to his faith that came with his evolutionary biology course. According to his professor, **evolution** was an undisputed fact, and the age of the earth was over four billion years.

After class, Juston approached the professor. His question was simple and straightforward: How, as a Christian, can I reconcile the claims of modern science with the book of Genesis? His professor's response was abrupt and blunt: these two perspectives cannot be squared, because science is based on fact while the first chapter of Genesis is simply religious myth. As Juston left class that day, he wondered if it were truly possible to be both a Bible-believing Christian and a contemporary-minded scientist.

The Center and Its Contrasts

With all orthodox Christians, evangelicals hold to theism as a worldview. More specifically, they uphold the biblical claim that the Triune God alone is the sovereign Creator of all that is and that he is active in his creation (Gen. 1–2; Col. 1:15–17; Heb. 1:3). Evangelicals, therefore, stand against secular understandings of reality, such as materialism and **naturalism**, which deny that the cosmos was created by a personal Creator. The evangelical view also stands against alternative spiritual worldviews such as **pantheism**, which denies that there is a distinction between God and the world; **panentheism**, which holds that God and the world are both eternal; and polytheism, which denies the existence of one sole Creator. While evangelicals are united in their belief that God created the world—and that God created the world *ex nihilo*, or “out of nothing”—they disagree as to how and when God created the world. More specifically, they disagree over how to interpret Genesis 1 and how it is related to the views of modern science.

Disagreements over the interpretation of Genesis 1 are not new. Early church fathers such as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Augustine wrestled with this issue hundreds of years ago. However, the debate within Christian circles over the age of creation has intensified during the last 150 years, largely in response to the Darwinian theory of evolution. While the debate over the age of creation and the debate over whether God created by means of evolution are related, they are, in fact, two different issues. The four essays in this chapter address the former issue alone.

There are at least a dozen theories concerning the nature of “days” in Genesis 1, but four primary views are currently debated within evangelicalism. First, the **young earth view** holds that the “days” refer to literal successive twenty-four-hour periods. According to this view, the creation is no more than ten thousand years old.

The day-age (or old earth) view argues that the “days” in Genesis 1 are best understood as indefinite periods of time. According to this view, creation is as old as contemporary science claims it is: billions of years.

The third view, the **restoration view** (or **gap theory**) claims that a large gap of time occurred between the first and second verses of Genesis 1. Thus, while the original creation is very old, it is possible to correlate the re-creation phase with an understanding of the “days” of Genesis 1 as six literal twenty-four-hour days.

Finally, the **literary framework view** suggests that adherents of each of the previous views, while well intentioned, are fundamentally off base, because they fail to realize that they are asking the wrong question of the text. According to this view, the author of Genesis never intended to describe how God created

the world, let alone how long it took. Rather, the purpose of this text is to proclaim monotheism in a polytheistic context. It is illegitimate, therefore, to force modern scientific questions on an ancient text.

The four essays in this chapter argue for each of these views.

Created in the Recent Past (The Young Earth View)

The Biblical Argument

The notion that the earth is several billions of years old and that its life-forms have been evolving for millions of years is an integral part of our age’s naturalistic worldview. Though it is a highly speculative and unproven theory, it is customarily accepted as unquestionable fact. It feeds into the general sense of modern people that humans are a minute and momentary aspect of a cosmos that extends almost to infinity in time and space. Not coincidentally, it also flatly contradicts the biblical understanding of creation.

The Bible begins by proclaiming that God created the entire cosmos in a mere six days (Gen. 1:1–31). The ordinary meaning of “day” is a twenty-four-hour period. Young earth creationists find no good reason to interpret this word in an extraordinary way. Five biblical arguments defend this view.

First, in its singular noun form, such as is found in Genesis 1, the Hebrew word *yom* (“day”) always refers to a twenty-four-hour period. Any period of time referred to by *yom*, in other words, is twenty-four hours in length. Advocates of the day-age interpretation of Genesis 1 dispute this, but the passages they offer as counterexamples to this claim do not prove their case. For instance, day-age theorists often cite Genesis 2:4, which says, “In the day [*yom*] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” They argue that here *yom* refers to the entire course of creation, not a twenty-four-hour period. In this case, however, *yom* is part of an adverbial construction that is best translated “when” or “after.” Similarly, some cite Psalm 90:4 to support their position: “For a thousand years in [God’s] sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night.” This passage does not disprove the young earth creation view, however. In this passage, *yom* functions as part of an analogy that emphasizes God’s eternity. God’s experience of a thousand years is *like* a day for us—namely, like one of our regular twenty-four-hour periods. Far from suggesting that a “day” can literally be a thousand years, as day-age theorists suggest, the biblical author is using the ordinary definition of “day” to make his analogy. Finally, some cite Zechariah 14:7, which speaks of a “continuous

day,” to support the day-age position. The point of this passage, however, is not to suggest that a day is longer than twenty-four hours. The author is simply declaring that in heaven there shall be neither “day” nor “night,” for in “the even time there shall be light.” In other words, “day” is used as a synonym for “daylight.” The verse does not support the notion that a “day” can refer to a period of time longer than twenty-four hours.

Second, it is crucial to note that whenever “day” (*yom*) is used with a specific number before it, such as in Genesis 1, it always refers to a normal twenty-four-hour day (e.g., Gen. 8:14; Num. 29:1). Some try to argue that Hosea 6:2 provides a counterexample. This passage reads: “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” Nothing in this text suggests that the author is referring to something other than normal days. His meaning is opaque, to say the least, if he is referring to ages. After two “ages” the Lord will revive Israel, and then on the third “age” raise him up. What could this possibly refer to? What seals the case that the author is referring to normal days, according to most evangelical scholars, is that Paul cites this passage to show that the Old Testament predicted Jesus would rise “on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4). Paul clearly thought Hosea was referring to literal twenty-four-hour periods.

Third, the fact that the author uses “evening” and “morning” when describing each creation “day” is further evidence that he intended his audience to see these as normal days. It would be unnatural for the author to speak of ages having an “evening” and a “morning.” Elsewhere in Scripture this parallel use of “evening” and “morning” clearly refers to normal days (e.g., 1 Sam. 17:16; 1 Chron. 16:40; 2 Chron. 2:4; Ps. 55:17).

Fourth, in Genesis 1:14 we read, “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years.’” No one questions that the “days” and “years” referred to in this passage are literal. It is unnatural to suppose that the author suddenly shifted from speaking about ages to normal days while using the same word for each. The most natural conclusion is that the author is using ordinary language throughout Genesis 1. “Year” refers to what we understand as a 365-day time period, and “day” refers to what we understand as a twenty-four-hour time period.

Finally, one of the strongest arguments in favor of the young earth creation interpretation of Genesis 1 is the fact that God commanded Israel to imitate the pattern he set in Genesis 1 by working six days out of the week and resting on the seventh. In Exodus we read, “Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work. . . . For in six days

the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it” (20:8–11; cf. 31:12–17).

Day-age theorists must suppose that the original hearers of this command would have recognized two different meanings for the word “day” in this passage: God’s “day” refers to “ages” while *our* “day” refers to normal twenty-four-hour time periods. This is an extremely implausible suggestion. If this were indeed what the author wanted to communicate, he could have easily done so by using a different word for God’s “ages” (e.g., *‘olam*) than he used for our “day.” Instead, the author uses the same word (*yom*), apparently with the same meaning throughout. The author is not drawing an *analogy* between God and the Israelites; rather, he is expressing a *precedent* set by God for the Israelites. As God worked six days and rested on the seventh, we must work six days and rest on the seventh. The duration of the periods of work and the period of rest is identical.

These arguments provide good reason to accept the normal understanding of “day” in Genesis 1. And this means that the earth is not billions of years old and that evolution has not taken place on it for millions of years, as most Western intellectuals today believe. It means humans are not latecomers on the scene, a sort of footnote to the evolutionary process. If we follow Scripture, we must conclude that the age of the earth is several thousand years and that its history is centered on human beings. We were placed here as stewards of the earth at the very beginning (Gen. 1:26–31).

Supporting Arguments

1. *Revelation and modern science.* The real question involved in this debate is, Do we accept the plainest meaning of the Bible, or do we insist on a reinterpretation in light of the prevailing opinion of scientists? Christians are called to place God’s Word and the plainest reading of God’s Word above the authority of science. It is puzzling why many evangelical Christians today find this difficult to do. After all, on the authority of God’s Word they believe that God created the world from nothing (*ex nihilo*), yet this flies in the face of one of the most fundamental laws of science (namely, matter is neither created nor destroyed). On the authority of God’s Word they believe in miracles, yet this flies in the face of the scientific view that the world is governed by natural laws. Why then do these Christians balk at the notion that God created the world in six literal days? This requires far *less* a miracle than bringing matter into existence from nothing and *no more* of a miracle than raising Jesus from the dead.

2. *The pattern of supernatural work.* Throughout Scripture God's supernatural work (see **supernaturalism**) is typically sudden and instantaneous, not involving long drawn-out periods of time. For example, this pattern is found throughout Jesus's ministry. The healing of people was sudden; the stilling of the sea was instantaneous; the raising of people from the dead was immediate. Genesis 1 fits this pattern. Each day God spoke and what he commanded was instantaneously so. Conversely, the view that God brought creation about over billions of years fits no pattern in Scripture.

3. *Death came through Adam.* The Bible teaches that death had its origin in the world through Adam's disobedience. Death was not intended for either humans or animals. In their originally created state, humans and animals were to live on vegetation. Hence, the Lord says to Adam, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have *them* for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given *every green plant* for food" (Gen. 1:29–30, emphasis added).

In God's original design, there was to be no pain, no bloodshed, and no death. This is in part why God concluded that his entire creation was "good" (Gen. 1:31). Insentient vegetation was to be the food of humans and animals, and this state shall be restored when God's kingdom is fully established (Isa. 11:6–11; 65:25). How can one reconcile this teaching with the view, espoused by day-age theorists, that animals have been devouring other animals for millions of years? Relatedly, how can we accept that the present state of nature, "red in tooth and claw" as Alfred Tennyson describes it, was the best the all-powerful Creator could come up with? Why would an all-powerful Creator have to use a process of natural selection in which animals prey on other animals to arrive at his goal of human beings? And how could the all-good Creator, whom Scripture depicts as caring about the welfare of animals (Ps. 36:6; Jon. 4:11; cf. Luke 12:6), pronounce this bloody, pain-filled state of affairs to be "good"?

Day-age theorists have no good answer. In our view, nature was designed to be "good." Adam and Eve, along with their descendants, were given authority and responsibility for the earth. When they fell under Satan's power, the entire domain they were responsible for came under Satan's authority and was corrupted (Rom. 8:19–22). Death entered the world because the lord of death had gained power over the world (Heb. 2:14; cf. 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2; 1 John 5:19). This is why the entire creation is now in the travail it is in. This perspective is not available to any who hold that death had been exercising its tyranny for millions of years before humans arrived on the scene.

4. *The precariousness of modern science.* This essay cannot explore all the reasons that can be given for questioning the scientific enterprise. Suffice it to say, a good number of learned scientists believe that the entire old earth/evolutionary paradigm with which modern science works is based on weak evidence and supported by inconclusive arguments.

For example, a number of geologists and paleontologists have rejected on scientific grounds many of the dating techniques routinely employed today (e.g., radiometric dating). These techniques have been shown to be notoriously unreliable, often circular in method, and dependent on certain presuppositions that are themselves unproven. Similarly, a number of scientists have raised serious challenges to big bang cosmology. Some have wondered how a supposedly uniform initial explosion could have produced the type of unevenly distributed matter that we find in our universe. Other scientists have convincingly argued that the supposed geological evidence for an old earth can be better accounted for by postulating the occurrence of a universal flood several thousand years ago.

The secular scientific community is a tightly controlled community. To belong to this community requires that one agree substantially with its authoritative paradigms. People who reject these paradigms are simply not taken seriously, regardless of how cogent their arguments are. Hence, the evidence, arguments, and alternative paradigms of young earth creationists are rarely given serious attention by the scientific community. They are no less compelling for this reason, however. But one must be willing to swim against the present academic current of accepted truth in order to consider them. Evangelical Christians who place Scripture above all other authorities should be willing to go against the flow when necessary.

Responding to Objections

1. *The sun was not created until the fourth day.* Critics of the young earth creation perspective often argue that because the sun was not created until the fourth day, the "days" of Genesis 1 are not normal twenty-four-hour days. We should note, however, that the first thing God did on day one was create "light" (Gen. 1:3). We are not told what the source of this light was, but we are told that it allowed for a pattern of "morning" and "evening" to begin and end each day—the same pattern, we must note, that occurred *after* the sun was created as a special source of light for the earth. In other words, the source of light for the earth was modified on the fourth day, but the fact that light existed that measured each day was not. There is, therefore, nothing significant about the fact that the sun was not created until the fourth day.

2. *The seventh day of rest is still in progress.* Hebrews 4:1–11 suggests that the seventh day is still in progress, for it encourages us to join in the “rest” God has been enjoying since he completed creation (v. 10). Since God’s seventh-day rest has been continuing throughout history, day-age theorists argue, we may assume that the previous six days of creation were also long periods of time. Three things may be said in response to this argument.

First, this text does not say that the seventh *day* is still in progress. It simply implies that the Sabbath rest that God began on the seventh day is, in some sense, continuing.

Second, the author is drawing an analogy in this text, rooted in a theological conclusion drawn from Psalm 95, which speaks of the Israelites’ rebellion in the desert. The author notes that the Israelites in the desert were not able to enter (namely, rest in) the Promised Land because of their disobedience. The author encourages the Hebrew Christians not to repeat this mistake, for they too have a promised land—a “rest”—that God wants them to enter. However, their rest does not concern simply a piece of land. It is the rest that God has in some sense been enjoying since he ceased from his labors on the first Sabbath. We are going beyond the point of the text if we read anything about the length of God’s seventh day into this passage.

Third, this last point is confirmed in that Jesus states that he and his Father are “still working” (John 5:17). Clearly, God is not still literally ceasing from all work, which is what the Sabbath requires (Exod. 31:14–17). The “rest” spoken of in Hebrews should not be pressed too far.

3. *Too much activity took place on the sixth day.* Day-age advocates sometimes argue that too many activities took place on the sixth day for it to be a normal twenty-four-hour day. Among other things, on that one day God had Adam name “every living creature” (Gen. 2:19). This alone would have taken weeks, they argue. This is not a convincing argument for two reasons.

First, Adam at this point had an unfallen mind. It is entirely possible that such a mind would have been capable of performing mental functions at a much faster speed than we are capable of in our fallen condition. Even if his innate capacities were not capable of this, God could have supernaturally assisted him in this task.

Second, it is possible that the animals Adam named were a special class of animals God formed for the express purpose of seeing what Adam would name them (Gen. 2:19). In support of this, Genesis 2 suggests that God formed these animals *after* he made Adam, while Genesis 1 says that God made all the animals *before* he made humans. Perhaps the number of animals Adam named was not that great after all.

4. *Is God deceptive?* Some day-age theorists argue that if God created the world with the “appearance of age,” he is deceptive. Three replies are in order.

First, we do not accept much of what scientists argue is “the appearance” of old age. When the evidence is examined apart from the prevailing assumption that the earth is billions of years old, it does not “appear” billions of years old. It appears thousands of years old.

Second, anything that God created *ex nihilo* would have the appearance of age. People often facetiously ask, What came first, the chicken or the egg? The biblical answer is decidedly “the chicken.” God did not create human embryos: he created a developed man and woman. He did not first create animal seeds or eggs: he created developed animals. He did not first create various seeds for vegetation: he created the vegetation. Hence, plants, animals, and humans are going to look aged, though in fact they are not.

Third, the day-age theorist might respond that creating something with the appearance of *some* age is one thing. Creating it with the appearance of being *billions of years old*, however, is deceptive. As stated above, we do not accept that the earth appears to be billions of years old. The dating techniques that are used are faulty. But what about starlight? If this light originated from a star in its present location and traveled to us, it is argued, it would have taken millions or even billions of years to reach us. True enough. But why should we assume that the light had to originate in this fashion? If we allow Scripture to teach us, we find that the purposes of stars are to give light and to measure seasons *for us on the earth* (Gen. 1:14–19). If that is the case, God would of course have created the stars in such a way that their light already reached us.

A Very Old Work of Art (The Day-Age View)

The Biblical Argument

Genesis 1 says that the cosmos was created in six “days.” Some Christians interpret these days as six twenty-four-hour periods and thus conclude that the earth is roughly only ten thousand years old. As we shall see, this view runs into difficulties with both Scripture and science. According to the *day-age view*, the word “day” (*yom*) in this passage actually refers to an “age” of unspecified duration. Thus, the cosmos is a very old work of art, a view that is consistent with both Scripture and science, as the following four points reveal.

First, while the word “day” in Hebrew can of course refer to a twenty-four-hour period, it also often refers to an age. Perhaps the most important example of this latter usage is in the Genesis account itself. Immediately after depicting the six “days” of creation, the author introduces a more detailed

human-oriented creation account by saying, "In the day [*yom*] that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4). The author is clearly referring to "the period of time" or "the epoch" when God created the cosmos. If "day" can refer to an entire epoch here, there is no good reason to insist on a literal twenty-four-hour interpretation in the preceding verses.

Examples of this epochal use of *yom* abound in Scripture. For example, the author of Proverbs says, "Like the cold of snow in the time [*yom*] of harvest are faithful messengers to those who send them" (Prov. 25:13). Here *yom* refers to an entire season. Similarly, Isaiah says, "On that day [*yom*] the branch of the LORD shall be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land shall be the pride and glory of the survivors of Israel" (Isa. 4:2). Some believe this verse refers to the millennium—a future one-thousand-year period of peace on earth. Others believe it refers to God's final establishment of his kingdom on earth. Either way, "day" clearly denotes a long period of time (cf. Zech. 14:1).

Second, interpreting the days of Genesis 1 as twenty-four-hour periods creates difficulties with the Genesis account. For one thing, in Genesis 1 the sun does not appear until the fourth day. This alone suggests that the "mornings" and "evenings" of the previous days were not marked off by the rising and setting of the sun. Even more importantly, at least two of the days include events that could not have fit into a twenty-four-hour period. On the third day God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation." As a result, "the earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it" (Gen. 1:11–12). This process of bringing forth vegetation is not something that could have occurred in a regular day.

Even more problematic, on the sixth "day" of creation God had Adam individually name all the animals (Gen. 2:18–20). This was not a capricious matter of slapping on titles, for ancient people believed that a name should reflect the character of a thing or person. The text itself suggests this, for it was through this process of naming that Adam discovered that none of the animals was an appropriate companion for him (Gen. 2:20). The process of naming the animals would have taken some consideration and thus some time on Adam's part.

Nonetheless, suppose Adam took a mere five minutes to name each pair of animals. That would mean he could name only 288 animals if he did nothing else for the entire twenty-four hours. Consider that there are roughly 12,000 species of mammals alone. According to a best-case scenario—allowing for no other activities, no sleep, and excluding all now-extinct species—it would have taken Adam more than forty days simply to name the mammals! Some young earth creationists insist that Adam named only the species in the Garden. However, to argue this they must reject the very "literal" hermeneutic on which they base their own case, for the text says, literally, "whatever the man called *every living*

creature, that was its name" (Gen. 2:19, emphasis added). It seems much more natural to conclude that the "day" of human creation referred to in Genesis 1 is not a literal twenty-four-hour period.

Third, several passages of Scripture expressly teach that God's "days" are not measured like our "days." For example, the author of Psalm 90 says, "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night" (v. 4). The theme is picked up by Peter when he writes, "But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (2 Pet. 3:8). Such teachings should caution us against a literal understanding of "day" in Genesis 1.

Along these same lines, Hebrews 4 teaches that we are still in the seventh day of creation on which God rests. "For in one place [Scripture] speaks about the seventh day as follows, 'And God rested on the seventh day from all his works.' And again in this place it says, 'They shall not enter my rest.' So then, a sabbath rest still remains for the people of God; for those who enter God's rest also cease from their labors as God did from his. Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs" (vv. 4–5, 9–11).

This passage suggests that God is still resting from his works on the previous six days. People can enter this rest if they do not resist God's will as the Israelites did in the Old Testament. What concerns us presently is the fact that the seventh day on which God rested apparently covers all of human history. We thus have good reason to conclude that the previous six days of creation were also long periods of time.

Finally, a number of passages teach that the earth is very old. For example, Habakkuk refers to "eternal mountains" and "everlasting hills" (Hab. 3:6). Micah refers to the "enduring foundations" of the earth (Mic. 6:2). The author of Proverbs says that "Wisdom" was created "long ago" and was established "ages ago . . . , before the beginning of the earth" (Prov. 8:22–23). The author is presupposing that the earth is very old in order to exalt God's wisdom for being even older. The celebration of the antiquity of the earth found throughout Scripture is more consistent with the view that the earth is billions of years old than it is with the view that it is a mere ten thousand years old. At the very least, it demonstrates that there is nothing "ungodly" or "secular" about believing in a very old earth.

Supporting Arguments

1. *The truthfulness of God.* Scripture teaches us that God is completely truthful (Num. 23:19; John 14:6). It also teaches us that God's revelation comes to

us through both Scripture and creation (Ps. 19:1–4; Rom. 1:19–20). This is important to remember when we consider that the cosmos appears very old. Consider one simple illustration. We know how fast light travels, and we know approximately how far away certain stars are from the earth. We thus naturally conclude that it has in some cases taken millions if not billions of years for the light from certain stars to reach us. Young earth creationists would have us believe that God created these stars in such a way that their starlight already reached the earth. God could of course do this if he wanted to, but it borders on deception. One could just as easily argue that we were all created five minutes ago with built-in memories.

2. *The credibility of the church.* We must learn from the past. The church lost a good deal of its credibility when it locked horns with science in the sixteenth century. Against Galileo and all who held to the heliocentric view of the solar system, the church insisted on a literal reading of certain passages of Scripture that subsequently were proven scientifically inaccurate. As Galileo himself warned, one must be hesitant to interpret the Bible in ways that openly conflict with the general findings of science, for creation too is “God’s Word.” Of course, if it is absolutely impossible to reconcile science with Scripture’s teaching, we must side with Scripture. If there are ways of interpreting Scripture that do not conflict with science, however, these should be preferred. The day-age theory of Genesis 1 offers a way of reconciliation. Not only is there scriptural support for this view, but it does not harm the credibility of the church for the scientifically minded people we are called to reach with the gospel.

3. *The scientific evidence.* While it is true that science should not determine our exegesis, it is also true that we should not ignore science in our exegesis. Among other things, the credibility of our proclamation is at stake, as argued above. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of scientists, from a wide variety of fields, agree that the earth is billions of years old. For example, almost all contemporary astronomers hold to the **big bang theory** of how the cosmos began. This view postulates that the universe began roughly fifteen billion years ago. Similarly, though young earth creationists try to explain this away with their **flood geology**, almost all contemporary geologists find the evidence for a four- to five-billion-year-old earth to be compelling. Among other things, the stratification of the earth’s layers cannot be accounted for adequately by the flood theory. Finally, the vast majority of biologists accept the view that life has been evolving on our planet for millions of years. Even most of the minority who reject macroevolution but accept microevolution argue that the changes we can discern from the fossil record require a time period far longer than ten thousand years. The day-age interpretation of Genesis 1 can accept this information without compromising fidelity to God’s Word.

Responding to Objections

1. *Enumerated “days” were used in Genesis 1.* Some argue that the word *yom* can refer to an indefinite period of time only if it is not preceded by an ordinal (e.g., first, second). Since Genesis 1 numbers the days, this means the author intended for us to understand distinct twenty-four-hour periods. Three things may be said in response.

First, while it may be true that elsewhere in the Bible *yom* refers to a twenty-four-hour period when preceded by an ordinal, this is not a grammatical rule of the Hebrew language. In our view, Genesis 1 demonstrates that *yom* can refer to a period of time when preceded by an ordinal. Young earth creationists must presuppose their interpretation of Genesis 1 in order to make this argument, which, of course, constitutes circular reasoning.

Second, even if we grant that ordinarily *yom* refers to a twenty-four-hour period when preceded by an ordinal, we should not be surprised that Genesis 1 offers an exception to this. Most of the time when the Bible speaks of “days,” it is referring to ordinary *human* days. The Bible simply does not have occasion to enumerate successive epochs—except in Genesis 1. This chapter deals with God’s unique creation of the world, and humans are not even around until the end of the act. Therefore, if the epochal use of *yom* can be preceded by an ordinal, as we argue, this would be the only place where it would be appropriate to do so.

Third, having said all this, we should note that the claim that the epochal use of *yom* is never preceded by an ordinal may simply be mistaken. Hosea 6:2 proclaims that “after two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.” While Paul may allude to this as a type of Christ’s resurrection (see **typology**) “on the third day” (1 Cor. 15:4), most commentators agree that Hosea was referring to epochs, not twenty-four-hour periods. If so, this is a clear instance of a Hebrew author enumerating epochs.

2. *The use of “evening” and “morning” suggests a twenty-four-hour period.* Young earth creationists often argue that the mention of “evening” and “morning” after each creation day (e.g., Gen. 1:5, 8) signifies that each day was a twenty-four-hour period. The fact that the sun does not appear until the fourth day, however, proves that the terms “evening” and “morning” cannot be taken literally. Instead, they refer to the beginning and ending of epochs, much as we might refer to “the dawn of humankind” or “the twilight of the modern age.”

3. *The word ‘olam refers to an epoch.* Some argue that the author of Genesis 1 would have used the word *‘olam* instead of *yom* if he had wanted to refer to epochs. Two things may be said in response.

First, as we have already seen, there is a precedent in the Old Testament for interpreting *yom* as “age” or “epoch.” This alone demonstrates that authors did not have to use *‘olam* when they wanted to refer to epochs.

Second, and even more to the point, it is not clear that *‘olam* could refer to “epoch” in biblical times. Postbiblical Hebrew used *‘olam* in this sense, but the term in the Old Testament has the connotation of something “everlasting” or “perpetual” (e.g., Gen. 9:16; Ps. 41:13). Since the author of Genesis is clearly referring to temporary periods of time, it seems natural for him to use *yom* instead of *‘olam*.

4. *Death entered the world with Adam.* It is sometimes argued that the old earth view of creation, which assumes that death was present millions of years before humans arrived on the scene, violates New Testament teaching that death entered the world through Adam’s sin (Rom. 5:12).

First, as mentioned earlier, all the geological evidence suggests that animal death occurred before human death. Given this consensus, we should resist this conclusion only if Scripture absolutely demands that we do so. As we shall see, Scripture does not demand this.

Second, Paul is speaking specifically about humans in Romans 5. We are reading too much into the text if we apply this text to the entire animal kingdom. Indeed, if we are going to press the text this far, we could easily include all vegetation—forcing the awkward conclusion that God originally designed all animals and people to eat nothing.

Third, the “death” Paul refers to need not be physical death. It may refer to spiritual death. In fact, Genesis 2 may imply this, for God told Adam he would die on the day he ate from the tree (Gen. 2:17), yet Adam physically lived for a long while after his disobedience.

Finally, the problems that old earth advocates have with this text are less problematic than those young earth creationists must face. Young earth creationists must postulate not only that, for instance, the *Tyrannosaurus rex* was contemporary with Adam (in contradiction to modern science) but also that the *Tyrannosaurus rex* was originally a vegetarian. Most people consider this extremely implausible.

5. *The length of the Sabbath matches God’s original Sabbath.* Finally, some argue that since the Sabbath day of rest commanded in Exodus (Exod. 20:8; 31:12–17) is twenty-four hours, the original Sabbath of God’s rest (and thus the other “days” in Genesis 1) must have been twenty-four hours as well. However, what is important in Exodus is not the *length* of the Sabbath but the *idea* of a Sabbath rest. For instance, there is a twenty-four-hour period of Sabbath rest every week but a yearlong period of Sabbath rest every seven years (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:1–7) and a Jubilee year of rest every fifty years (Lev. 25:8–17). What is consistent is a period of rest, not the length of the rest.

Restoring a Destroyed Creation (The Restoration View)

According to this view, the debate between young earth creationists and day-age theorists is unnecessary. While both sides make valid points, both sides start from a mistaken premise. They both assume that the first two chapters of Genesis are about the *original* creation of the earth. Advocates for the restoration interpretation of Genesis 1 argue that this is incorrect. After the first verse (Gen. 1:1), the first two chapters of the Bible are about the *restoration* of God’s original creation, not the original creation itself.

The original creation expressed in Genesis 1:1 became corrupted through demonic forces and was judged. It became “a formless void” (Gen. 1:2). The author of Genesis 1 and 2 then describes how God restored the world and replenished it with beings (humankind) who would love God and administrate his lordship over the earth. Because adherents of this view suggest there is a “gap” between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, this view has often been called the gap theory of creation. While this view may initially sound fanciful, it is supported by a careful reading of Scripture. It also offers a number of advantages over the young earth creation and day-age views.

The Biblical Argument

First, the description of the world in Genesis 1:2 as a “formless void” in which “darkness covered the face of the deep” is a pejorative description. In Scripture, “formless” (*tohu*) and “void” (*bohu*) almost always refer to something that has been corrupted, wasted, and/or judged (e.g., Deut. 32:10; Isa. 24:10; 49:4). Indeed, the only other verses in which the terms are used together refer explicitly to a desperate state of affairs *resulting from God’s judgment* (Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:23). It thus seems reasonable to assume that the state of affairs described in Genesis 1:2 refers to a state that was brought about by God’s judgment. In contrast to the first verse, the second verse of the chapter does not describe God’s original design.

This view is supported by the fact that Isaiah 45:18 says explicitly that the Lord “did not create [the world] a chaos [*tohu*].” Yet this is precisely how Genesis 1:2 describes the world. Some Old Testament scholars also argue that the verb “was” in Genesis 1:2 can be and perhaps should be translated “became.” If so, Genesis 1:2 suggests that God did not originally create the world a chaos but that it eventually became one. The chaos is the result of God’s judgment.

Second, a number of Old Testament scholars argue that “the deep” also has a negative connotation. In the ancient Mesopotamian world, “the deep” often

signified something that opposed God, or in pagan literature, the gods. Perhaps this is why the author describes the Spirit of God as hovering over or guarding the deep (Gen. 1:2). Using imagery that ancient Hebrews could understand, the author reveals that God's Spirit was keeping demonic forces at bay. The sinister nature of the deep further suggests that the state of affairs referred to in Genesis 1:2 was not something God originally created.

Third, Genesis 1 and 2 are not the only passages of Scripture that refer to creation. Though evangelicals often overlook them, there are in fact a number of other creation passages in the Bible. Interestingly enough, many of these depict God doing battle with hostile forces (e.g., "waters," "the deep," "Leviathan") in order to bring the world into being (Pss. 74:12–17; 89:8–18; 104:1–9). Ancient Near Eastern people generally believed that a war of some sort preceded the creation of the world. These biblical passages appear to express this perspective but attribute the victory over hostile forces to Yahweh rather than to the pagan gods in whom other Near Eastern people believed.

The question that must be answered is this: How do these passages, which include conflict, fit into the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2? Along the same lines, one must also ask, Where does the rebellion and fall of Satan and his angels fit into the Genesis creation story (Jude 6; Rev. 12)? It is clear from Genesis 3 that Satan had already fallen by the time Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden. Yet we read nothing about him in the preceding chapters.

The restoration interpretation of Genesis 1:2 answers these questions. The conflict between God and hostile forces, expressed in the Old Testament, and the rebellion of Satan and the battle between him and God, expressed in the New Testament, are one and the same event. This rebellion and battle occurred sometime *after* the original creation (when all angels were created) but *before* the judgment and restoration of the creation. In other words, the battle occurred sometime between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

As a result of the rebellion, ensuing battle, and ultimately God's judgment, God's original creation became a "formless void" characterized by "darkness" and covered by "the deep." Since this concept of a pre-creation battle was widely known among ancient Near Eastern people and among the Jews, as evidenced by the other creation passages that involve conflict, the Genesis author picked up his account where these other accounts left off. He began his narrative with the earth in its destroyed state. He then emphasized the ease with which God re-created his world, thus expressing the victory and sovereignty of the Creator over all forces that oppose him. No other reading of Genesis 1 and 2 can as easily harmonize itself with the biblical data about God's conflict with forces of evil prior to the creation of our world.

Fourth, it is significant that with the exception of animals and humans (Gen. 1:21, 26–27), Genesis 1 does not use the word "create" (*bara*) but "make" (*asah*). God fashions things out of preexisting material. This observation fits well with the view that Genesis 1 and 2 are talking about the restoration of the world, not its original creation from nothing.

Finally, certain otherwise puzzling features of the Genesis narrative become clear in light of the restoration interpretation. For example, God's command to humankind to "have **dominion**" seems to suggest that humankind would be met with resistance. The Hebrew term *kabash* ("dominion") usually suggests suppression, conquering, or enslaving hostile forces (e.g., Num. 32:22, 29; Josh. 18:1; Neh. 5:5; Jer. 34:16; Mic. 7:19; Zech. 9:15). Along the same lines, God's command to Adam to "keep" (*shamar*) the Garden (Gen. 2:15) conveys a sense of "guarding" it from something hostile. It is the same term used to describe the role of the cherubim in keeping Adam and Eve from reentering the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:24).

But what were our primordial parents to subdue and guard against if in fact this was God's original creation and everything existed just as God intended it? There is no good answer. If the first two chapters of Genesis describe the restoration of a world from the ruins of an old one, however, these commands begin to make sense. One of the tasks God gave humanity, it seems, was the task of keeping the earth from falling back into the satanic bondage that led to its initial destruction.

Unfortunately, Adam and Eve failed to subdue the world and guard the Garden, for they succumbed to the temptations of the enemy (Gen. 3:1–7). In time sin ran its full course, and God once again had to cover the earth with the deep and start over (Gen. 6–9). As he did with the first destruction, he fashioned a new world from what could be salvaged from the old one. It is a process that Scripture tells us the world will undergo one final time when the Lord purges the world with fire in order to create "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1).

Supporting Arguments

1. *The flexibility of the restoration theory.* Most restoration theorists accept the young earth creation argument that the "days" of Genesis 1 are normal twenty-four-hour periods while also accepting the day-age argument that the earth is very old. According to the restoration view, the scientific evidence of an old earth applies to the first creation that was destroyed. The six twenty-four-hour periods of Genesis 1 apply to God's supernatural restoration of the

creation after it had been destroyed. This interpretation can accept the strengths of both views while avoiding their weaknesses.

A restoration theorist need not hold to an old earth or a literal six-day creation, however. This too is one of the advantages of this perspective. It is theoretically consistent with either a young or old earth perspective, with either a literal or nonliteral understanding of the “days” of Genesis 1, and with either an evolutionary or non-evolutionary view of creation. Embracing this view allows one to follow both the scriptural and scientific evidence wherever it leads. As mentioned earlier, therefore, the debate between the young earth creationists and the day-age advocates is unnecessary, as is the debate between evolutionists and non-evolutionists.

2. *The problem of prehumanoid suffering.* One of the most difficult problems for both the young earth creationist and the day-age theorist is how to account for the presence of animal suffering prior to the arrival of human beings. All the fossil evidence suggests that nature was “red in tooth and claw” (Tennyson) millions of years before humans arrived on the scene. Most creationists argue against this on the grounds that Scripture teaches that creation was not corrupted and death did not enter the world until Adam sinned (Rom. 5:12). Only then did animals become carnivorous (cf. Gen. 1:30). As a result, they must reject the view held by almost all experts in the field that carnivorous animals roamed the earth millions of years before the advent of human beings. Day-age theorists accept this evidence but are faced with the difficulty of squaring their view with Scripture’s teaching about the original vegetarian creation. They must also explain why an all-good and all-powerful God would use natural selection, a pain-filled, bloody, and barbaric means of bringing human beings on the scene, while pronouncing this state of affairs “very good” (Gen. 1:31).

The restoration view avoids both problems by affirming that both views contain an element of truth and an element of error. Young earth creationists are correct in affirming Scripture’s teaching that animals *in this creation* were originally vegetarian, but they are wrong in thinking that this contradicts the evidence that animals have been carnivorous for millions of years. Day-age theorists are correct in affirming the evidence that animals have been carnivorous for millions of years, but they are mistaken in thinking that this characterized *this creation* from the start.

The most plausible view is that God’s original creation became subject to demonic forces that corrupted it. The presence of vicious creatures such as meat-eating dinosaurs was the result of this alien corruption. God eventually destroyed this world and then restored it, placing humans over the earth as its authorities with the task of keeping it free from demonic influence. This they failed to do, and as a result, creation quickly lapsed back to the state it was in prior to God’s judgment.

Responding to Objections

1. *This view is not traditional.* Opponents of the restoration view of creation often object that this view has few representatives in the church tradition. This is true, but two observations qualify its force as an objection.

First, evangelicals, and Protestants in general, look to Scripture as their sole authority in matters of doctrine. Therefore, while the absence of precedent for a view should make us cautious, it cannot itself constitute a decisive objection.

Second, no particular interpretation of the Bible’s opening creation narrative can claim significant dominance in the church tradition. Indeed, one of the most popular interpretations of the creation story throughout church history, the allegorical interpretation, is now rejected by all evangelicals. The fact is that beyond the affirmation that God created all things from nothing, there has been no standard, let alone officially “orthodox,” interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2.

2. *This view is based on circumstantial evidence.* One of the most frequently voiced criticisms of the restoration view is that it is based on inferences from circumstantial evidence. There is no single passage of Scripture that explicitly teaches this view. Indeed, many reject this view as fanciful speculation.

In response, all interpretations of Scripture are based on inferences from other Scripture passages. All evangelicals try to allow Scripture to interpret Scripture and to see each passage as a part of the whole. The restoration view is hardly unique in this regard and in fact is the best way of making sense of the whole of Scripture. It is the best way of harmonizing *everything* Scripture says about creation.

3. *This view is based on a distinction between “create” and “make.”* Some have pointed out that Scripture uses “create” and “make” interchangeably. The restoration interpretation of Genesis 1 is thus mistaken in drawing conclusions based on this distinction.

It is true that “create” and “make” *can* be used interchangeably in Scripture. But when one author alters the terms throughout a single passage, it suggests that he is making a real distinction. In the case of Genesis 1, after the first verse in which God is said to have created everything, the author intentionally uses “create” only when referring to living beings—animals and humans. He is thereby contrasting what God “creates” with what God “makes,” or “forms.” This fact is important, for it demonstrates that Genesis 1 is mostly about God forming—or re-forming—the world rather than creating it *ex nihilo*.

4. *This view is inconsistent with the goodness of creation.* The restoration interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2 supposes that evil spirits existed before and after the creation (or re-formation) of this world. This belief is inconsistent with the fact that God pronounced his creation “good.” How could he declare

this if, in fact, there were myriad evil spirits menacing creation? In reply, we need only point out that God's declarations in Genesis have a specific focus. Each declaration refers to a new stage of God's restoration of the earth (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The declarations do not rule out the possibility that beings existed who were not part of his restoration process, and thus were not included in his pronouncements, and who were not good.

5. *This view is inconsistent with the fossil evidence.* If the original creation had been judged so severely that it could be described as a "formless void," contemporary scientists should not be able to find fossils of creatures (e.g., dinosaurs) that supposedly lived in this original creation. One would expect all evidence of the previous world to have been lost.

The argument does not work. Almost all geologists and paleontologists—including young earth creationists—agree that the earth has been through one or more global catastrophes in the past. Some believe the earth has undergone a global flood. Others believe it has experienced ice ages and revolutionary climate changes due to meteor showers. Yet all agree we can still find fossils of animals that existed prior to these alleged catastrophes. Why then should restoration theorists be accused of inconsistency on this account?

The fact of the matter is that we have no clear idea what the world looked like when the author described it as a "formless void" with "darkness" on the face of "the deep." There is no reason to assume that all evidence of previous life would have been destroyed.

Literary Theme over Literal Chronology (The Literary Framework View)

Young earth creationists try to force modern science into a literal reading of Genesis 1. Day-age theorists try to fit Genesis 1 into modern science. Proponents of the restoration view try to have their cake and eat it too by inserting a speculative gap between verses 1 and 2 of this chapter. All three views are fundamentally misguided and are rooted in contradictory opinions about the meaning and significance of various words and phrases in Genesis 1 (e.g., "day," "formless void"). None of them have seriously considered the more fundamental question concerning the kind of literature we are dealing with in Genesis 1.

More specifically, young earth creationists, day-age theorists, and restorationists all assume that the author of this passage was centrally concerned with providing his audience with a literal chronology of how creation came about—though they disagree over the length and nature of this chronology. The literary framework view is that the biblical author was interested in nothing of

the sort. The discussion surrounding the seven days of creation was not meant to satisfy a quasi-scientific curiosity about the order of creation. Rather, it provided a literary framework within which the author could effectively express the Hebraic conviction that one God created the world by bringing order out of chaos. He was interested in thematic rather than chronological organization.

The Biblical Argument

We can appreciate the thematic organization of this chapter best if we step back from the various issues related to particular terms and look at the structure of the chapter as a whole.

The first verse (Gen. 1:1) functions as a general introductory statement. The second verse (v. 2) sets forth a problem that the rest of the chapter is going to solve. The problem is one with which ancient Near Eastern people would have been familiar: the world is engulfed in a primordial chaos. More specifically, the earth is enveloped in "darkness," covered by "the deep," and in a state that is "formless" and "void" (*tohu wabohu*). The author's goal was to show how Yahweh solved each of these problems and thus succeeded in bringing order out of chaos.

The creation week is divided into two groups of three days (days 1–3 and 4–6) with the seventh day acting as a capstone. Within each three-day grouping, four creative acts of God are identified by the phrase "Let there be . . ." Most significantly, the creative acts in the second group mirror the creative acts in the first group. That is, day four mirrors day one; day five mirrors day two; and day six mirrors day three.

The first set of three days addresses the problems of the darkness, the deep, and the formlessness of the earth as spelled out in verse 2. God addresses these problems by creating spaces within which things may exist. The second set of three days addresses the voidness problem of verse 2. God solves this problem by creating things to fill the spaces he created in the first three days.

More specifically, on day one God created light (which addressed the darkness problem) and separated it from the darkness (vv. 3–5). On day two God created the heavens (which addressed the watery abyss problem) and used it to separate the waters above from the waters below (vv. 6–8). On day three God created dry land and vegetation (addressing the formless earth problem) and separated the earth from the waters below (vv. 9–13). Thus, by the end of day three the first three problems had been addressed: darkness, water, formlessness.

The second set of three days addresses the final problem of voidness—the lack of things to fill the spaces God has created. This is how the second set

mirrors the first set of days. More specifically, on day four God creates the lights to fill the skies that he created on day one (vv. 14–19). On day five God creates fish and birds to fill the water and air that he created on day two (vv. 20–23). And on day six God creates animals and humans to fill the dry land that he created on day three (vv. 24–31). On day seven God rested from his labor, celebrating the goodness of creation (2:1–4).

The following chart summarizes the findings.

Problem	Solution: Stage 1	Solution: Stage 2
Formless void	Forming place (days 1–3)	Filling void (days 4–6)
Darkness	Day 1: light/separate darkness	Day 4: lights
The deep	Day 2: heavens/separate waters	Day 5: birds/fish
Formless earth	Day 3: earth/vegetation	Day 6: animals/humans

Genesis 1 is thematically and logically organized and expresses how the Creator solves the problems he needs to solve in order to bring creation out of chaos. Therefore, we have every reason to suppose that the succession of days was not meant to refer to a chronological succession but to a logical, thematic, and literary succession.

In this respect, Genesis 1 is not exceptional. Though it may strike modern historically minded people as odd, biblical authors frequently emphasized thematic unity over historical exactitude. For example, it is a well-known fact that some Gospel authors grouped Jesus's sayings and deeds by theme rather than by the order in which they occurred historically. As a result, the order of events in the Gospels differs considerably, just as the order of events in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 differs significantly. This would be of concern only if the authors intended to provide an exact account of how things happened historically. If their concern was more thematic, as we suggest, then the contradictions are inconsequential.

Supporting Arguments

1. *The ancient Near Eastern background.* A number of considerations support the literary framework interpretation of Genesis 1. To begin with, an examination of ancient Near Eastern creation literature seems to confirm this view. Over the last century a number of ancient Near Eastern texts have been found that deal with creation and that to some degree parallel Genesis 1. There is often a "six plus one" literary structure to these texts, expressed as the seven "days" of creation. (This is found, for example, in the *Enuma Elish* as well as

in several Ugaritic texts such as Keret, Aqhat, and Baal.) The general pattern of presenting creation in the form of a weeklong period has cultural precedent. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the Genesis author was following this cultural pattern to communicate his own view of creation.

2. *The theology of Genesis 1.* The theology of Genesis 1 takes on a more profound significance when read against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern literature rather than against the backdrop of contemporary scientific concerns. Genesis 1 is a theological statement, not a scientific report, expressed in a rather typical ancient Near Eastern way. Its intended purpose is to tell us *who* the Creator is, not exactly *how* he created.

More specifically, when Genesis 1 is read against the ancient Near Eastern background, it becomes clear that the Genesis author is engaging in a polemic against his pagan neighbors. He utilizes their six-day structure but to a very different end. Unlike the pagan ancient Near Eastern view that many gods were involved in creation, the Genesis author affirms that the world was created by one God alone. Unlike their view that the cosmos was created as a result of a cosmic battle, the Genesis author affirms that God created the cosmos without opposition. Like a mighty king, the Lord simply said, "Let there be . . ."

What is more, unlike the pagan ancient Near Eastern view that the cosmos was formed out of preexistent material (often the body parts of defeated gods), the Genesis author affirms that God created the world simply by speaking it into existence (he created it *ex nihilo*). And unlike the common pagan view that the sun, moon, and stars were divine beings, the Genesis author emphasizes God's sole sovereignty over creation by depersonalizing them and depicting them as inanimate objects.

While modern people may be concerned with a scientific account of the origin of the cosmos, it seems the author of Genesis was not. His concern was simply to battle false theology with true theology. When we read his work against the backdrop of the theological concerns with which he was wrestling, it takes on a significance we miss if we are locked into modern issues. The "days" of Genesis 1 are part of a literary structure that serves to support the theological claim that Yahweh-God alone is Creator-King! They are not meant to satisfy modern curiosity as to how long it took God to create the world.

3. *The weaknesses of alternative views.* Adherents of the literary framework view of Genesis 1 agree with young earth creationists that the word "day" (*yom*) as well as the "morning"/"evening" references probably indicate that the author was thinking of normal twenty-four-hour periods. The arguments against the epochal reading of *yom* in Genesis 1 are strong. At the same time, the arguments against the young earth creationists' position that the earth was created in six literal days and is only ten thousand years old are strong as well. Both views

also have a difficult time explaining how plant life could survive for a day—or an entire age!—without a sun. The literary framework view not only avoids this problem but actually explains it. The order of the days is not meant to reflect the chronology of creation. It is rather meant to express thematically the problems of darkness, watery abyss, formlessness, and void expressed in Genesis 1:2.

4. *Genesis 1 and the scientific evidence.* The literary framework interpretation can easily be reconciled with any contemporary scientific theory of origin one chooses to embrace. Yet at the same time, reconciliation is not necessary. Genesis 1 has no bearing on science, for it is strictly interested in theology, not science.

Responding to Objections

1. *This view acquiesces to liberal theology.* Some conservative evangelicals object to the literary framework approach to Genesis 1 on the grounds that it acquiesces to liberal theology. A good deal of liberal theology is premised on the mistaken notion that people can embrace the symbolic meaning of an event while denying the event ever literally took place. So, for example, some liberal theologians have denied that the incarnation or resurrection literally took place, though they continue to insist that we can appreciate and benefit from their symbolic value. Evangelicals have always regarded this line of thinking implausible, if not incoherent. Unfortunately, some believe that the literary framework interpretation of Genesis 1 comes close to this sort of thinking. They argue that this view denies that creation literally took place as the passage says (namely, in six days) while it nevertheless insists that this does not affect the symbolic meaning of the passage.

The truth of the matter is that the literary framework interpretation of Genesis 1 has nothing in common with the agenda of liberal theology. The reason liberal theologians sometimes deny events such as the incarnation or resurrection is that they find Scripture impossible to believe. By contrast, literary framework theorists deny that Genesis 1 provides a literal chronology of how creation came about because they are convinced that the biblical author did not intend to provide a literal chronology. They are simply trying to remain true to the text. The literal reading of the passage is contrary to the authorial intent behind the text.

2. *This view overstates the parallels with other ancient Near Eastern texts.* Some Old Testament scholars have argued that literary framework theorists overstate the parallels between Genesis 1 and other ancient Near Eastern creation texts. More specifically, these scholars point out that the typical arrangement in

other Near Eastern texts is three groups of two days, not two groups of three days, such as we find in Genesis 1.

In reply, this view does not deny that there are literary differences between Genesis and other ancient Near Eastern texts. This should not be surprising, for all the creation accounts differ in one way or another from all the others. Each author creatively arranged his material as he saw fit. The point is merely that the Genesis account parallels the other accounts by using “days” as thematic and literary benchmarks rather than literal quasi-scientific reports of how long it took for the world to come into being.

3. *“Day” is always used in a literal way in Hebraic literature.* Some object to the literary framework reading of Genesis 1 on the grounds that there are no other examples in Hebraic literature of “day” (*yom*) being used as a structural literary theme. This is true, but three considerations weaken it as an objection against this view.

First, most scholars agree that the concept of “day” *does* function as a structural literary device in other ancient Near Eastern texts, providing sufficient precedent for such an interpretation.

Second, the literary use of “day” in other ancient Near Eastern texts is always in creation passages. Too much should not be made, therefore, of the fact that this usage is found only in the Bible’s fullest creation passage (Gen. 1).

Third, interpreting “day” in a literal fashion creates difficulties that the literary framework avoids. The literal interpretation forces us to accept that plant life arose before a sun existed. It also conflicts with modern science. Most importantly, if we approach the passage with the assumption that the author was concerned with chronology, we miss the profound thematic point the author is making throughout this passage—namely, that God brings order out of chaos.

4. *This view creates a false antithesis.* One could argue that the thematic structure that the literary framework highlights does not rule out the possibility that Genesis 1 *also* teaches the actual chronology of creation. That is, one could argue that God created the world in six twenty-four-hour periods or in six ages, and the reason the days occurred in the order they did is revealed by the literary framework theory. It is just as easy to credit God with being ingenious in the way he *actually brought about* creation as it is to credit an ancient author with being ingenious in the way he chose to *structure a story* about creation.

One must admit that the scenario proposed by this objection is logically possible. But once we understand the literary purpose of the “days” in this passage, there is no need to interpret them as actual events, even if it remains logically possible to do so. In other words, the explanation of the text is not helped by this addition. What is more, if we accept this objection, we must once again wrestle with the biblical, logical, and scientific difficulties with

which the other three theories of creation must deal. Why enter this arena if we do not have to?

5. *This view undermines the command to keep the seventh day holy.* Finally, some have argued that this theory undermines the motivation of the Sabbath commandment in Scripture. The command to rest on “the seventh day” presupposes the importance of the chronological, not simply logical, order of days in Genesis 1. Indeed, Exodus 20:8–11 sees the entire week of creation as a precedent for our workweek. As God worked six days and rested on the seventh, so we should work six days and rest on the seventh. This precedent makes no sense, it is argued, if chronology is not the point in Genesis 1.

This precedent makes perfect sense, however, even though chronology is not the point in Genesis 1. God rested when his work of bringing order out of chaos was complete. His work culminated in a rest that celebrated the goodness of creation (Gen. 2:2–3). *This* is the point of both the Genesis and the Exodus passages. It is not intrinsically connected to whether the “days” are twenty-four-hour periods or not, or whether the second day had to literally follow the first day. Indeed, Hebrews teaches us that God’s seventh day is still in progress (Heb. 4:1–11), a point that decisively undermines the young earth creation objection.

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