

Biblical Interpretation – Genesis 1
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In our discussion of Genesis 1, we shall break it apart into the individual days of Creation, and explain how they fit into an old-earth belief, without compromising any other Scripture, or the key doctrines of the church. All Scripture is from the New King James Bible.

Day One

Genesis 1:1-5

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep, And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

⁽¹⁾ Have you ever seen those young-earth t-shirts that say, “I believe in the big bang...God said it, and “Bang,” there it was.” Unfortunately, the young-earth believer does not understand that this also supports the old-earth belief. In the beginning, about 13.7 billion years ago, the big bang occurred. God said it, and it went “bang.” During the next 9.2 billion years, the universe was expanding from this “bang.” As the earth began to coalesce from interstellar matter, it eventually formed the general size and shape of our present world about 4.5 billion years ago.

²The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep, And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

At this point, it is appropriate to mention the most important item for correctly interpreting the Creation. As in any scientific experiment, you make observations of what is occurring. It is extremely important to consider your “frame of reference” when interpreting any observation. In other words, where are you observing these events from. For the entire creation event, the key to this is in verse 2. To an observer, standing on the surface of the earth, God was hovering over the earth. The rest of the creation events must be interpreted as if the observer were standing on the surface of the earth. Only with this “frame of reference” will you reach the right conclusions.

In verse 2, the earth has just formed into a planet, and is simply one jumbled mass of material with no apparent form. Young earth creationists make a big deal about God not creating junk...what He creates is fully formed. If that's the case, why does verse 2 say the earth was void and without form?

³*Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.*

God creates light in this verse. This is not the point at which light actually was first created, but, from our frame of reference on earth, it is the point at which the earth’s atmosphere first let the light become apparent on the surface of the earth. In other words, to the viewer standing on earth, God would have appeared to create light at this point, even though it was pre-existing before this point.

Many young-earthers would argue that it clearly states that God created light here, and did not merely clear the clouds from the earth and reveal the light. However, one must remember that God is revealing the creation event to us just as it would appear from the surface of the earth. Isn’t it wonderful that God would reveal the creation of the earth to us, with such scientific accuracy? Look up any astronomy book, and look at a model of how a scientist thinks a planet would form. You will find that it would mirror God’s creation story!

⁴*And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.*

God was pleased with the fact that light was now reaching the surface of the earth. Please keep in mind, that although light is reaching the surface, the atmosphere is not anywhere close to being “clear”...there is still much material in a primordial world which would cloud the atmosphere, and it would still take many years for this material to settle and the atmosphere to be clear (this is why it appears, from the surface, that God created the sun and moon on day four).

⁵*God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.*

God made the days and nights. Clearly, the earth was rotating at this point, enough for it to produce the “days and nights” alluded to. The verse concludes with the statement, “evening and the morning were the first day.” Young-earth proponents have long argued that this statement clearly implies that this was only one twenty-four hour period. However, the meaning of the Hebrew word for day, *yom*, can be interpreted as long periods of time (see www.answersincreation.org/word_study_yom.htm).

Young-earth theorists argue that *yom* is never used elsewhere in the Bible to indicate a long period of time...so what? When one looks at the scientific record, one realizes that these “days” must have been long periods of time, therefore *yom* must mean long periods of time when used in Genesis 1.

Another young-earth objection is this...if we are interpreting Genesis 1 from the frame of reference of a viewer on earth, then that viewer would see the setting of the sun, thus he would have viewed the days of creation as being single 24-hour days. However, one must remember that there are no humans on earth at this point. The first human, Adam, only saw the sunset on the sixth day, so this argument has no basis. The viewer, on the surface of earth, for the duration of the creation days, is God Himself.

Other passages of scripture support a day as being a long period of time. Psalm 90:4 states, “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past.” Indeed, it

would seem like that to an eternal God. For God, time has no meaning. “Wow, there goes another million years!” So what...God has millions upon millions more millions. Why then did God not say, “During the first 13 billion years I created the heavens and the earth”? Why did God not tell the plain truth about the true age of the universe?

We can see at least two reasons. First, God was giving us the general pattern of our calendar, the week. We have specific instructions to rest on the seventh day, just as God rested after His work. Second, Adam was introduced into a non-technological world, with no TV, calculators, nor higher mathematics. To Adam’s simple point of view, which is easier to comprehend...seven days, or 13.7 billion years? Adam did not need to know how long it took...he only need to understand that God was the One who created it. Time did not matter.

This does not mean that God lied about the age of the earth. Since time has no meaning to an eternal being, a “day” to God could be billions of years, or even hundreds of billions of years! If you don’t sleep, you can divide time however you want to.

In addition to Psalm 90:4, II Peter 3:8 is even clearer in this “length of day” discussion. It states, “...with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” Again, time has no meaning. Since the first six days of creation are from God’s viewpoint, we cannot limit Him to six 24-hour days.

Day Two

Genesis 1:6-8

Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.”⁷ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so.⁸ And God called the firmament heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.

Day Two describes the formation of the atmosphere. The Hebrew word for firmament, *raqiya*, means firmament, or visible arch in the sky. It has been translated in the NIV version as meaning “sky” (verse 8). God’s building of our atmosphere was key to the development of the earth, and it’s creation after the events of Day One are in line with astronomer’s models of planetary formation.

Some young-earth proponents have said that the “waters above the firmament” were used during the Flood of Noah. Russell Humphreys has gone so far as to state the water is at the edge of the universe. However, there is no evidence for his suggestion. Others point to the so-called “vapor canopy” over the atmosphere, and this supplied the water for the Flood. Ken Ham, a young-earth proponent, adequately answers the problems with this theory in “The Answers Book.”

Day Three

Genesis 1:9-13

Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so.¹⁰ And God called the dry land Earth,

and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. ¹² And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ So the evening and the morning were the third day.

(9-10) Here we see geological processes in action. The lands rose, and the oceans were appointed to their place. This is obviously a time during which plate tectonics are in action, along with all the associated processes that are evident today, i.e. volcanism, subduction zones, faults, plate collisions. God declared that this was good. Indeed, it is one of the necessary steps that needed to be taken to prepare the earth for habitation by man.

¹¹ Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. ¹² And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

God starts the process of life with plants. Many young-earth proponents have argued that this is not what we see in the fossil record. However, that depends on your interpretation. Clearly, the first life forms in the fossil record are single celled algae, a plant. One must also keep two key point in mind. First, plants are fragile, and as such do not preserve well. We believe we have an accurate accounting for them in the fossil record, but we cannot be sure. Second, Day Three is when God created the first plant...but not all plants. We cannot say why God chose to divide his creation account like this, but we can speculate, that he chose to represent the creation of plants, animals, and higher animals (Days Three, Five, Six) separately. Clearly they were intermingled on the timeline, but from the simplified account of Creation in Genesis 1, they are separated and treated independently. In this sense, the days of creation could be said to overlap each other.

This presents no problem theologically. We still have the same creator, creating the same creation, which does not affect any of the doctrines of the Bible.

Day Four

Genesis 1:14-19

Then God said, “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and seasons, and for days and years; ¹⁵ and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”; and it was so. ¹⁶ Then God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. ¹⁷ God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth. ¹⁸ and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

Here the atmosphere is finally clear enough for the observer on the surface of earth to observe the sun and the moon.

¹⁶ Then God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also.

The way this is written, it seems as if the statement “He made the stars also” is a footnote, or addition, to the text. However, it does appear in all the translations. It is obvious that the sun and moon, upon the atmosphere’s clearing, would be the first lights visible in the sky, followed by the other stars.

Here one should note that starlight is visible on earth, despite the great distances it has traveled. Young-earth theorists have long tried to explain this problem, but without success. The current model, proposed by Russell Humphreys, is inadequate, and has not passed the test of being peer-reviewed (it has been reviewed favorably by other young-earth theorists, but since they are biased, these reviews cannot be taken seriously).

Day Five

Genesis 1:20-23

Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens.” ²¹ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ So the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

On this day God created all the sea creatures and the birds. There appears to be a contradiction with this account and the fossil record...if you believe the six days were consecutive, and not overlapping, then the birds are out of place, since they came into being at roughly the same time as the other mammals on Day Six. Also, the marine mammals would seem out of place as well.

Using our overlapping day theory, this presents no problems. Nobody can venture to say why the creation events are divided by God the way they are. He chose to explain it to our limited brains in this manner. We must remember that God is eternal, and time for Him is not the same as time for us. In His division of the creation events, he logically presents an understandable division of events. Since these are clearly not 24-hour days, we can’t assume that these events were limited to a certain time frame. As such, the account of Genesis can still be considered accurate, and the Inerrancy of Scripture is still intact.

Many would claim that I am taking the word of science over that of the Word of God. Not at all. I’m merely trying to reach an explanation that fits all the facts. None of us, old or young-earth, have all the answers. Until we get to heaven, and enroll in Creation 101, will we understand the full truth of how God created the universe. The main difference between me and young-earth theorists is this...at least I make an attempt to

reconcile the scientific data to the Bible. The young-earth theorists start with the presupposition that the earth is 6,000 years old, and thus they must ignore the same scientific data.

If you are a Theistic Evolutionist, one could argue that God designed and made the first birds from the smaller dinosaur species, thus there would be no problem at all with the rock record.

There does remain a question of when the dinosaurs were created. Young earth creationists say they were created with "the creeping things" on Day Six. Hugh Ross, in his book *The Genesis Question*, seems to favor the Day Five option (Page 48), as I do also.

Day Six

Genesis 1:24-31

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind; cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²⁶ Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸ Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." ²⁹ And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. ³⁰ "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so. ³¹ Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

The actual wording of verse 24, "Let the earth bring forth..." actually gives support to those who believe in Theistic Evolution. The theistic evolutionist believes God started the evolutionary process, guiding it along. If "the earth" brought forth the new creatures, it did so on its own (or, with God's guidance).

The rest of this section is straightforward. The old-earth creationist can accept this...the only difference is in the duration of the "day" and the issue of death before sin (see the discussion for verses 29-30 below).

²⁸ *Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

God gives man dominion over every living thing that moves on the earth. This is a good reason why we don't have any more dinosaurs on earth. Man would probably not have dominion over a Tyrannosaurus, or any of the Raptor family...instead, man would be food, and would probably be extinct. I believe God made the dinosaurs extinct, 65 million years ago, because man and dinosaurs would not get along very well.

You may argue that man, with his intellect, would outsmart the dinosaurs, and find a way to kill them. Perhaps, but man, with all his reasoning, learns from experience. After the first Raptor pack came upon man, there would be nobody left to "reason it out." Even if the first attacks did not kill everyone, their sheer reproductive rate would overwhelm man's small numbers.

I already know...young-earth proponents will argue that I have been influenced too greatly by Hollywood. While I admit that Hollywood did a lot for dinosaur lore in their Jurassic Park trilogy, one must realize that these movies are based on science, with many expert paleontologists contributing to the realism of the movies. Therefore, they are probably very close to the truth. Yes, they did embellish parts of the movie, but we know which parts those were, and they present no case against my theory.

You may ask, "Why then did God make dinosaurs in the first place?" Great question. We shall have to ask God once we get to heaven.

²⁹ *And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. ³⁰ "Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so.*

Young-earth theorists point to these verses, and claim them as proof there was no death before the Fall of man. However, there is no basis in this claim. The fossil record is a clear indicator of this pre-sin death.

The proper interpretation of this passage is like this...God gave man and the animals the plants to eat. It DOES NOT say they cannot eat meat. Clearly, God intended cats, with their carnivorous teeth, to eat meat. IF God intended ALL animals to only eat plants, then ALL animals would have molar teeth. Anything created without molars would be an imperfect creation...and since God is perfect, we know that he perfectly created these animals.

Also, if you take a 100 percent literal view as the young-earth theorists do, this verse contradicts with Genesis 2:17, in which God forbade man to eat of the tree of knowledge. If man was given "every tree" as food, this would include this tree. Thus, in a completely literal translation, God contradicts Himself. To read more on this death before sin issue, see [Death Before the Fall of Man¹](#), and [It's All About Teeth.²](#)

³¹ *Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day.*

Another stalwart argument used by the young-earth crowd. They claim that creation could not have been "very good" if it involved millions of years of death. However, I

have no problem calling God's creation "very good," including the millions of years of death.

Was God's creation perfect? Most people would agree with me in saying it was. Would God call His own creation "perfect?" It all depends on what the definition of "perfect" is.

It was not perfect, in the sense that man was given the ability to choose, and he chose to sin. If it was indeed perfect, why did God give man this right? In this sense, when man sinned, Creation failed, because it was not perfect.

Even with this, I would still argue that Creation was perfect. It is exactly what God wanted, and thus it is perfect. God wanted man to have a free will, even if it meant some would reject the Creator.

Given the "fuzzy" meaning of the term perfect, what does "very good" mean? Who are we, lowly man, to claim that God's creation was not good, just because there was death before Adam's sin? It's the way God designed it, so a world which contains millions of years of death is indeed "very good." I'm certainly not going to impose my definition of "very good" upon God. If the Creation itself testifies to millions of years of death, then that also must be considered very good.

Conclusion

By examining science and Scripture, you can come to the conclusion that God created the universe over billions of years, and you can still believe the creation account found in Genesis Chapter One.

¹ www.answersincreation.org/death.htm

² www.answersincreation.org/teeth.htm