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## The Case for Day-Age Creation

*According to this author's view, belief in an old earth and in days as "ages" is perfectly consistent with belief that God created in six literal days.*

By Hugh Ross

No one approaches the Bible completely free of bias. Mine was a secularist's assumption that this book, like other texts considered "sacred," would be easy to dismiss as a culturally important yet humanly crafted document. I did not *disbelieve* in a Being beyond the universe. I had studied enough to see growing evidence for the universe's transcendent beginning and, thus, the reality of a transcendent Beginner. I felt no compelling need, however, to find the Bible either true or false.

Some may consider my early attraction to astronomy as a bias, but I see no basis for discounting a researcher's truth filters — such as the rules of logic and evidence — as if they are inappropriate study tools. So this is where I started. I could not have imagined where my inquiry would lead.

From where I stand today, with full confidence in the truth of Scripture and high regard for the prolific scientific enterprise that sprang from widespread access to the Bible, I cannot help but wonder if something other than exegetical difficulties is fueling the creation controversy. The push to choose *either* a high view of the Bible *or* a high view of nature's record seems to come from a sense of vulnerability — an apprehension that discoverable facts might somehow, someday clash irreconcilably with biblical theology. And then what? I simply do not see that danger as real. God's constancy and consistency of character, observed in both Scripture and nature, takes it away.



### SEE ALSO:

- For further reading, see Hugh Ross' [A Matter of Days: Resolving a Creation Controversy](#)
- Video:** [How long are the creation "days" in Genesis 1?](#)

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Before summarizing the basis for my day-age position, as set forth in *The Genesis Debate, A Matter of Days, More Than a Theory*, and other books and articles, I focus attention on some concerns that repeatedly interfere with the interpretive process. They arise with such frequency and emotional intensity that we cannot ignore them.

## TWO-BOOKS DOCTRINE

Many Christians seem to have forgotten one of Christendom's historic declarations of faith — the Belgic Confession. This document affirms that God has conveyed His truth in "two books," one of words, the other of works. Both the Bible and features of nature "speak" to us of God — His glory, power, righteousness, wisdom, love, and more. The difference is that verbal communication is uniquely authoritative, propositional, and specific in ways that nonverbal expression cannot be.

The authority of words, however, in no way diminishes, as some suggest, the reliability of God's revelation through what He "spoke" into existence. Both forms of His expression require study and interpretation. Understanding is not always immediate and precise. Even in verbally conveying the story of Jesus' earthly life and teachings, we have four separate accounts to aid our comprehension. Properly understood, God's Word (Scripture) and God's world (nature) — as two revelations (one verbal, one physical) from the same God — cannot contradict each other — any more than Matthew can contradict Mark, Luke, or John. Truth is consistent, internally and externally.

## A QUESTION OF LITERAL LANGUAGE

Typically, some describe the 24-hour "day" view as the literal reading of Genesis 1 and alternate readings as nonliteral. Two considerations come to bear on this issue. First and foremost, "age" or "era" (a long but definite time span) is one of the literal meanings of the Hebrew word translated "day" in Genesis 1 and 2 and elsewhere in the Bible. Sometimes biblical writers used the word for all or part of the daylight hours, sometimes for a calendar day, and sometimes for a long but finite period.

Given that biblical Hebrew contains a mere 3,100 words (apart from names), compared to English with a word count in the millions, it is no wonder that most Hebrew words carry *multiple literal* usages. While English offers many words to denote an extended time period, biblical Hebrew provides only *yôm*. The word *olam* came to mean "epoch" in Modern Hebrew, but in biblical times its usage was restricted to indefinite time, either past or future. Belief in an old earth and in days as "ages" is perfectly consistent with belief that God created in six *literal* days.

## THE EVOLUTION ISSUE

Inappropriate claims about the meaning of "day" have increased their grip from a popular but entirely false connection between earth's measured age and natural-process evolution. Age simply does not equate with evolution. The problem here is that young-earth creationists assign more efficiency to these change processes than any evolutionary biologist would. When they teach that carnivorous activity, which they deem evil, did not exist until after Adam sinned, their view demands that meat-eating creatures rapidly evolved from plant eaters by natural processes alone. Such rapid change also presumably explains how the several million land-dwelling species on earth today evolved from a few thousand animal pairs aboard Noah's ark.

This belief in the super-efficiency of biological change sheds light on the importance of the "day" question. If natural evolutionary processes work as rapidly and effectively as the young-earth view



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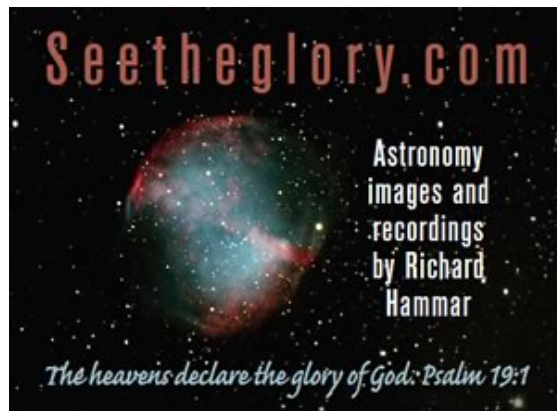


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requires, a million- or billion-year-old earth would seem to rule out the need for God's involvement in creation, a doctrine many of us seek to defend.

Ironically, this confidence in rapid change contradicts three independent sets of data, some findings that seriously disturb neo-Darwinists: 1) evidence that life arose in a geologic instant in the absence of a prebiotic soup, 2) calculations by Francisco Ayala, Brandon Carter, John Barrow, and Frank Tipler demonstrating impossible odds against the human species' (or its equivalent's) emergence from a single-celled organism in less than 5 billion years via natural processes alone (1 in  $10^{24,000,000}$  at best), and 3) long-term evolution experiments showing that natural processes cannot account for the hundreds of repeated complex "evolutionary outcomes" observed in nature.

As I read Genesis 1, God created different kinds of animals to reproduce after their own kind. The Hebrew noun translated "kind" is *min*. Both the calendar-day interpretation and the theistic evolution views require that we use *min* broadly enough to include an entire family or order of species. And yet in Leviticus 11:16–18 and Deuteronomy 14:15–17, Moses referred to the horned owl, screech owl, little owl, great owl, desert owl, and white owl individually as distinct *min*. Deuteronomy 14:12–18 lists the red kite, black kite, vulture, and black vulture as separate *min*. Leviticus 11:22 calls the locust, katydid, cricket, and grasshopper separate *min*. The Bible, thus, appears to limit natural-process evolution to a level no higher than the species/genus level.



## DEATH (AND DECAY) BEFORE ADAM AND EVE

Of all the concerns about how to interpret the biblical creation accounts, the issue of death and decay stirs up the most intense emotion and debate. The idea that we can somehow harmonize millions of generations of plant and animal death with God's perfect love and with His self-declared "very good" creation seems impossible. Death, as the ultimate enemy and consequence of sin, could not have been part of God's creation until the moment when Adam and Eve rebelled, an act that must have altered *everything*.

People most often cite Romans 5:12 to support this conclusion. This verse says that Adam's sin introduced death, but it also includes some significant qualifiers. Twice the passage specifies the kind of death Adam initiated — spiritual death. It says "death through sin" came to all mankind, not to "all life." Certainly human sin impacted all life. God "cursed" the ground because of human sin, and relational brokenness horribly amplified physical pain.

In truth, God provided for humanity's quality of life and civilization through death. Multiple generations of plant and animal death enriched earth with vast biodeposits, e.g., top soil, coal, oil, gas, limestone, marble, and concentrated metal ores. God bequeathed to us in this way the resources we need to fulfill the Great Commission, to spread the good news worldwide.

It is important to note that we can recognize plant and animal death, even carnivorous activity, as the Creator's plan to benefit plants and animals. Studies show carnivores play a vital role in strengthening

herbivore herds. In the absence of carnivores, herbivores suffer a higher rate of starvation and disease. Carnivores also recycle important nutrients that enable larger herbivore herds to thrive.

Given its connection to physical death and decay (or entropy), some have also labeled them as a dire consequence of Adam's sin. From an objective perspective, however, the second law of thermodynamics (law of decay) serves a vital function throughout all creation and for all life. It impacts everything from the way stars provide us with heat and light to the way we humans and other creatures process food.

Genesis 1 tells us that stars shone prior to Adam's fall into sin. In Genesis 2,3, we see that Adam and Eve digested food and worked before they sinned. Such activities depend on the constant operation of the second thermodynamic law. So it must have been in effect already — not for evil, but for good purposes.

Furthermore, any past changes in the physical laws and constants would show up in astronomers' observations over great distances. Such discontinuities simply do not appear. The only way to explain their absence (if past changes did occur) would be to suggest that the observable universe is an illusion. To say that the created realm is illusory, however, would be to contradict biblical affirmations of its revelatory power.

## NEW (OR NEXT) CREATION

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In view of all God has provided for our benefit, we live in a "very good" creation. Yet the "new creation" described in Revelation as our future home exceeds the familiar creation in every respect. God's plan extends beyond restoring an earthly paradise. He has promised to bring us with Him into a vastly more wonderful realm.

The universe we now reside in perfectly suits God's purposes to make a way for our deliverance from sin's effects. In the new creation, which will become our home immediately after the Final Judgment, even the potential for sin and its presence will be gone. The suffering, sorrow, decay, death, and even the space, time, and physical features of our familiar universe will exist no more. Until then, the law of decay and death serves God's eternal purposes.

## ASSESSING INTERPRETATIONS

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The Genesis 1 creation account is so strikingly compact and profound that for some readers it overshadows the abundant creation content found throughout many of the Bible's other books, not to mention the book of nature. These other passages of Scripture (and facts of nature) are also true and, in some cases, even more specific in describing God's creative work.

Two questions can help evaluate a model's viability: 1) How comprehensively and accurately does it account for firmly established facts of nature? 2) How consistently does it fit all the relevant biblical material? For models that perform well in response to these questions, here are two more: 3) How successfully does this interpretation anticipate (or predict) the future trajectory of ongoing discovery? 4) Does it decrease or increase significant gaps in understanding?

These are questions by which my colleagues and I have developed and continue to refine our day-age interpretive model.

## OVERVIEW OF GENESIS 1

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In the words of 19th-century German theologian Franz Delitzsch, "All attempts to harmonize our biblical story of the creation of the world with the results of natural science have been useless *and must always be so*" (emphasis mine). This statement reminds me of experts' initial



negative reaction to the idea of personal computers.

While evolutionists (theistic and nontheistic) and 24-hour-day creationists tend to agree with Delitzsch (and each other) on this point, I disagree. The more we learn about natural history and the more carefully theologians study the biblical text, the clearer the harmony becomes. Most of the apparent contradictions overlook one or more of the basic interpretive principles.

In describing a sequence of physical events, the Bible begins with a statement of the point of view, or reference frame, and an indication of initial conditions. Next comes a chronological account of what occurred. Then we see the final (changed) conditions. In a nutshell, this narrative pattern gave birth to the scientific method.

The context of Genesis 1:1 is the totality of the cosmos. In Genesis 1:2, however, the frame of reference, or point of view, shifts to earth's surface. That same verse describes four initial conditions:

- Water covered the whole surface.
- It was dark on the whole surface.
- Earth was formless or disorganized.
- Earth was empty or void (of life).

With the viewpoint and initial conditions established, one can discern the events of the six creation days, which begin sometime after God's creation of the physical universe:

1. transformation of earth's atmosphere from opaque to translucent (allowing for the creation of simple life by the "brooding" Spirit).
2. formation of a stable, abundant water cycle.
3. formation of continents and oceans.
4. production of plants on the continents.
5. transformation of earth's atmosphere from translucent to transparent, allowing earth's life to see — for the first time — the sun, moon, and stars.
6. production of swarms of small sea animals (the Cambrian explosion).
7. creation of sea mammals and birds ("soulful" animals).
8. creation of three types of advanced land mammals (rodents, difficult-to-tame large mammals, and easy-to-tame large mammals).
9. creation of humans.

We can test this order of events in the light of other Scripture, such as Job 38:8,9 and by nature's record. For example, plate tectonics studies show that most of the continental landmass growth occurred when earth was less than half its current age, a time that seems to fit the context of the third creation day.

A 2009 paper published in *Nature* provided isotope evidence that plants were just as prolific on the continental landmasses for the 200 million years previous to the Cambrian and Avalon explosions as for the following 200 million years. In 2011, another *Nature* paper delivered fossil evidence establishing the abundance of plants on continents as far back as 600 million years before the Avalon and Cambrian explosions. In this case, the biblical narrative anticipated the research findings.

The text skips over creation of the first land mammals to zoom in on God's creation of three subcategories of land mammals; namely, those animals that would prove most critical for launching human civilization, a theme picked up in more detail in Job 38,39.

Genesis 1 provides a great example of how the more we discover and establish from nature's record and from other biblical passages, the more reasons we gain to trust in the complete accuracy of God's Word. No nonbiblical creation story comes close to presenting a realistic and verifiable account.

### CLUES TO MEANING OF "DAY"

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According to the Genesis account, God created both the human male and the human female at the end of the sixth day. Genesis 2 describes a series of events that occurred between the arrival of Adam and of Eve:

1. God placed Adam in the Garden after creating him.
2. Adam watched Eden's trees grow.
3. Adam tended the Garden.
4. Adam named all the *nephesh* (soulish) animals.
5. Adam experienced his aloneness, his lack of a creature like himself.
6. Adam underwent "surgery."
7. God formed Eve, using some tissue from Adam.
8. Adam recovered from surgery.
9. God introduced Adam to Eve.
10. Adam exclaimed, "*Happa'am*" ("at long last")!

The implication concerning a substantial time passage seems unmistakable.

Another clue comes from a break in the pattern whereby Moses marks the beginning and ending of each creation period: "And there was evening, and there was morning — the [Xth] day." These words provide a certain cadence to the text. However, Moses does not attach to or associate such wording with the seventh creation day. In fact, several passages of Scripture tell us that the seventh day — God's "rest" or "cessation" from physical creation — continues into the future. (See Psalm 95:7–11; Hebrews 4:4–11; John 5:16–18, for example.) Romans 8 and Revelation 20,21 imply that the seventh day continues until God pronounces His judgment. At that moment, the Lord will usher redeemed humans into an entirely new creation.

The duration of the sixth and seventh days provides textual validation of the day-age interpretation. Some readers see Exodus 20:10,11 as an argument against this view. However, the emphasis in the Exodus passage lies on the pattern of one out of seven, not on the specific duration of "day." (See also Leviticus 25:3,4 where God says to work the land for 6 years, followed by a Sabbath of 1 year.) God uses the creation story as a model for humanity, a divine mandate to balance work's demands with time to worship not created things but the Creator himself.

If God's seventh day represents a long time, and if it implies that period in which God ceases from His work of preparing the world for humanity, it explains a major scientific enigma. It also provides a straightforward comparative analysis of the theistic evolution model alongside the day-age creation model. The day-age interpretation predicts a dramatic difference between seventh-day biological phenomena and phenomena occurring during the previous 6 days. Theistic evolution predicts little or no difference.

Long-term evolution experiments show a marked difference in the rate and degree of speciation. The extreme difference makes sense if God was directly involved in creating earth's life-forms and if God ceased that involvement when He made human beings.

Examples of other helpful tests could come from measuring (1) how rapidly and fully earth's life recovers from mass extinction events, and (2) how well and how quickly mass extinction and mass speciation events compensate for changes in the sun's luminosity, in earth's rotation rate, and in distribution of earth's continents. Research studies in cognitive neuroscience already are beginning to show that human brain function differs not just in degree but also in kind from that of the higher animals.

## CONCLUSION

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Debate and discussion of creation's timing and processes will no doubt continue for years to come. I welcome the opportunity to participate in the dialogue. What is written here represents only a tiny fraction of the research and reasoning on which my interpretive model rests (and continues to undergo revision). As all participants continue to study and to apply appropriate interpretive tests, we will more fully reveal God's truth and glory, and resolve this controversy. For the sake of our disciple-making endeavors, the sooner, the better.

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