

Scientific Challenges to Genesis 1 – A Creation Day

There has been considerable debate about the scientific (and historic) accuracy of The Bible. One major source of contention is the Biblical Creation story. From the first words of Genesis 1:1 through Genesis 2:4a, the Bible describes how God created the entire universe, the Earth, and all life residing here in seven days.

One of the major sources of controversy is the length of the Biblical Creation day. I believe that the word “day” in the Creation story is misunderstood. The Hebrew word translated into “day” is “yom.” The Hebrew word, “yom,” in general, represents an indeterminate period of time – the length of which is ascertained by its use in the sentence. “Yom” is actually similar to the English word “day” in the ways it may be used.

The most common understanding of “day” is twenty-four consecutive hours. It is this understanding that most fundamentalist Christians accept when they read the Creation story. Yet, there is nothing particularly special about a 24-hour Earth day to God. The time it takes the spinning Earth to complete one full rotation determines the length of a day. While such a time is meaningful to humans, and even the animals, its importance to God is dubious. Why would God’s day be constrained by the rotation of a planet that remained lifeless until the Fifth Day?

The first time that the word “yom” appears in the Bible is when God named the light “day” in Genesis 1:5. In this instance, “day” is referring to the daylight part of the day. This varies in length but may average ten to fourteen hours. This definition reveals an interesting point. In the Polar Regions, “daylight” and “night” extend for several consecutive months of the year. This is because it is the position on Earth and the time of the year that determines the length of daylight.

Young-Earth Creationists cite this particular passage in the Bible, where God names the light “day,” as evidence for 24-hour Creation days. However, this first appearance of the word “yom” represents only the daylight hours, not the entire day. So, while it is true that God named the daylight “day,” that reveals nothing about the actual length of a Creation day.

A “day” may also refer to an era. An example of this is found in the expression, “Back in my day...” In this example, “day” encompasses a

period of time that may span years or even decades. However, it almost never represents twenty-four hours.

Finally, a "day" might represent a period of activity. Think of a "work day," which is seldom twenty-four hours, but more likely eight hours.

Without question, a "day" can represent variable periods of time. From my research of the Bible, I know of no scholar who insists that "yom" must represent twenty-four hours. That belief is certainly not true.

In addition to "day," many regard the words "evening" and "morning" in the Creation account as conclusive evidence that the Creation days were twenty-four hours. But even in the English language, the words "evening" and "morning" are not confined to periods in a 24-hour day. Consider such terms as "morning in America," and "the evening of our lives."

"Day," "evening," "morning," and virtually every word in the English language, possesses more than one definition. We can only determine their true meaning when we understand their context in the sentence.

Despite these examples, we cannot completely rule-out a 24-hour Creation day, since that is also an allowable translation. However, it is more likely that none of the seven days of Creation were twenty-four hours, but rather periods of time that the Lord recognized as one of His days.

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