

Getting to Know Your Bible *How does Science fit in with Genesis 1?*

Much ink has been spilled on this topic, and it would be absurd to attempt to summarize all of what has been written. Nevertheless, it is important to have a general understanding of the issues at hand. We will look at one issue in the *text of the passage* as opposed to scientific data involved in the debate. Before doing this, however, it must be noted that the larger issue of "Creation vs. Evolution" is not just a matter of if Genesis 1 fits with scientific data. Rather, it is in large part a matter of what presuppositions and worldviews one adheres to; it is a matter of philosophy. The primary philosophy the scientific community holds to is naturalism (the universe is a closed system, all that exists is that which can be experienced through the five senses, etc). But other philosophies exist such as realism (abstract entities exist that cannot be experienced with the five senses, i.e.- numbers).

The Main Issue at Hand: How should the word "day" be understood?

Statement of the Problem

Science is clear that the earth and universe came to existence over a span of billions and billions of years. However, the text of Genesis describes the process as happening in just six "days." Is there a contradiction? Theologians have sought to resolve the issues as follows:

Understanding "day" as a 24-hour period¹

This perspective seems to understand the word most naturally in the context of what is written. However, those that interpret "day" as a 24-hour period do not need to necessarily say that creation happened literally in the span of 144 hours (six consecutive days), a position that would imply a very young earth (see footnote 1). Rather, the fact that the passage has a unique literary construction points to the possibility that the text is not meant to address how long God spent creating but is used as "an analogy of God's creative activity."² The literary construction referred to is this: in 1:2 darkness, a formless earth and mysterious waters are mentioned as what was there prior to God's activity of creation. Days 1-3 are responses to this dilemma (the creation of light, the separation of water, the creation of dry land), and Days 3-6 fill these spheres (the

¹ Many who hold this view of the word "day" subscribe to *Young Earth Creationism*, a view that understands the earth as being relatively young in age (some thousands of years). While this may seem to contradict modern science, much research and hypothesis have been presented to give this view some meat (see www.answersingenesis.org). However, not all who hold this understanding of the word fall into this category due to the literary framework mentioned in the following.

² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Ch. 1-17 in NICOT* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1990) 55-56.

creation of heavenly bodies, water and air creatures, vegetation and land creatures).

Understanding "day" as an epoch of time³

This perspective understands "day" as an unspecified period of time, a stage. The best evidence for this understanding of "day" is in Genesis 2:4 where it is used to refer to the whole creative process.⁴ Those who hold this view also point to the impossibility of day six being a 24- hour period: God creates Adam, brings all the animals before him to name, puts him to sleep, and creates a woman. People who hold this view understand the tagging of "evening and morning" to "day" as a means of differentiating the understanding of "day" as a metaphorical 24- hour period from "day" as what is in contrast with "night."⁵

For a good general discussion and a bibliography of the views at hand in relation to the broader discussion of science, see *Three Views on Creation and Evolution* edited by JP Moreland and John Mark Reynolds. Many web sites exist as well; one to be trusted is www.str.org.

³ Those who hold this view subscribe to *Old Earth Creationism*, a view that understands the earth as being old in age (some billions of years old).

⁴ Many Christians tend to think of Psalm 90:4- a thousand years are but a day with God- as proof text for this understanding of the word "day." Hermeneutically speaking, however, that is a very bad stretch and should not be used.

⁵ These points are all taken from Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* Updated and Rev. Ed (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 199-201.