

Conclusion

What can we conclude concerning the length of the "days" of creation? The usage of the word "day," with a number, means a 24-hour period. The absence of the article does not alter that meaning. Further, the use of "evening" and "morning" indicates that normal time is meant in Genesis 1. God, Himself, said that the creation took only six days. We also must ask ourselves, did Moses and God deceive us by using the word "day," when it really was a long period of time? If our answer is yes, then we should not use the Bible for any of our beliefs. For, if God can deceive us concerning the events of creation, He might have done that in regards to the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. The bottom line is that we then can have no confidence in God's Word, if the long-day view is held. It is far better to believe God at His Word, and take the creation days as 24-hour days.

References

1. For typical arguments, examine Davis Young, *Creation and the Flood* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pp. 83, 84.
2. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, I:371.
3. *Webster's 20th Century Dictionary, unabridged*.
4. Beekman, John and John Callow. *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), p.69.
5. Kautzsch, E. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1980), p. 404.
6. Archer, Gleason. *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 61.
7. Kautzsch, pp.406, 407.
8. One should consult Jewish commentators Cassuto, Rashi, and Cohen. Some of the Christian commentators are Keil, Leupold, and E.J. Young.
9. Kautzsch, p.408.
10. Kautzsch, p.432.
11. The occurrences are Numbers 11:19; I Samuel 1:1; 1 Chronicles 12:39; II Chronicles 20:25; Ezra 8:15, 32; Nehemiah 2:11; Daniel 1:12, 14,15; 12:12, 13, and Jonah 3:4.
12. Ross, Hugh. *Genesis One: A Scientific Perspective* (Sierra Madre: Wiseman Productions, 1983), p.16.
13. Archer, pp. 116,117, also Henry Alford, *The Book of Genesis and Part of Exodus* (Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, 1979), pp.313, 314.

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You will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.
Based on Proverbs 2:3-5

The Meaning of "Day" in Genesis

by James Stambaugh, M.Div.*

The length of the "days" of creation in Genesis has involved a major controversy in Biblical interpretation among evangelicals for over 150 years. Many have sought to redefine the term in light of the naturalistic presuppositions of modern scientism. Therefore, let us attempt, honestly, to examine the evidence from Scripture.

The communication of language is through words and their use. We must ask ourselves why Moses was using the words he did, and not other words. What is the meaning he was trying to communicate to his original audience and to us, as well? Why did Moses use the word "day" and not the more generic term, "time"? Is there any significance to the repeated use of numbers in the account ("first day," "second day," etc.)? Why are these "days" bounded by the terms, "evening and morning"? As we examine the text of Genesis 1, answers to these questions become clear.

The Meaning of "Day"

Those who argue that the word "day" means "long age," point out that the Hebrew word, *yom*, can have a number of meanings, only one of which is "day of 24 hours."¹ They further seek to strengthen their position with the use of Psalm 90:4 and II Peter 3:8, comparing a day to a thousand years. Both of these verses, however, are simply using figures of speech (similes) to show that God is not constrained by the same time parameters as are humans. These verses are really irrelevant to the discussion of the meaning of "day," in Genesis 1.

It is recognized, of course, that the word "day" can be used with a number of variations. It can have any of five meanings: 1) a period of light; 2) a period of 24 hours; 3) a general, vague time; 4) a point of time; 5) a year.² The context determines which of these is intended by the writer. The English language also can have up to 14 definitions for the word "day."³ The reader should be reminded that the purpose of language is to communicate. Moses wrote in a language that was meant to communicate to his readers. Words must be defined by their relationship to one another.⁴ Word meaning must be determined from within its context. It will be shown how the context defines the word in Genesis 1.

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The use of a number with the word "day" is very illuminating. This combination occurs 357 times outside of Genesis 1. The combination is used in four different ways, but each time it is used, it must mean 24-hour periods of time. If the combinations had been intended to mean long periods of time, both the texts and contexts then become meaningless. A typical verse is Genesis 30:36: "And he (Laban) set three days journey betwixt himself and Jacob." God frequently issued commands that the people were to do or not to do certain things on a given day. This use occurs 162 times. A good example is Exodus 24:16: "And the glory of the Lord abode upon Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days, and on the seventh day He called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud." These are the most typical uses of the word "day" with a number. Four times the terms are used to show a starting point. Ezra 3:6 says, "From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings unto the Lord." A number may also be used with "day" to convey an ending point. An example is Leviticus 19:6: "It shall be eaten the same day ye offer it, and on the morrow: and if ought remain until the third day, it shall be burnt in the fire." It would appear, then, that whenever the Old Testament uses a number with the word "day," it means a 24-hour period of time without any demonstrable exception.

If the meaning of the word "day" with a number always means a 24-hour period of time outside of Genesis 1, then it should also mean a 24-hour period of time inside Genesis 1. The words that Moses used to communicate what God did during creation are very significant. If Moses had meant to signify that the "days" were more than 24 hours in length, he could easily have done so. If we are to understand what Moses wrote, then the language he used must be understood in its normal meaning. The normal meaning is that of 24-hour periods of time.

Absence of The Article

Once we have determined the meaning of the term "day," we need also to examine another problem connected with the days of Genesis 1. Some writers have observed the absence of the article from the mention of each of the first five days. They have concluded that Moses must have meant to convey to his readers that at least those days were long periods of time. They have noted that the normal use of the article is to make the noun definite.⁵ Gleason Archer makes the following statement: "In Hebrew prose of this genre, the definite article was generally used where the noun was intended to be definite."⁶ The genre, or the form of the literature (i.e., history as opposed to poetry) he is referring to here, is history. Let us see if he is correct in this use of the article.

The reader must be aware of two points regarding the use of the article in Hebrew. First, the article is usually present in the historical sections of the Old Testament for the sake of definiteness. But this is not always the case. Second, Hebrew has more peculiarities in its use of the article than most languages.⁷ This should make the reader very sensitive to the nature of the Hebrew language. The Hebrew language is one that must be observed closely. The most common observation among Jewish and Christian commentators is that the use of the article on the last two days is to show the importance of the sixth and seventh days.⁸ This also is in full accord with the Hebrew grammatical rule that the article may be used in this

manner.⁹ On the basis of grammar alone, then, we are still justified in our interpretation of "day" being 24 hours in length.

Also, there is another reason for the absence of the article. It appears that numbers in the Hebrew language have a definitive quality in themselves. Kautzsch refers to them as substantives,¹⁰ yet the meaning is the same. A substantive is a noun that one can touch, such as a chair. He cites many examples where the number and noun occur without the article, yet the meaning is definite. There are 13 other occurrences similar to Genesis 1, where the noun does not have the article but is with a number. In each of these other occurrences, the English translation uses the definite article.¹¹ Therefore, we must conclude that the absence of the article in Genesis 1 does not mean that the days are long periods of time. Moses' point is still very clear: The days are to be thought of as normal 24-hour days.

Evening and Morning

The meaning of the term "day" must be seen in conjunction with the use of "evening" and "morning." Those who would argue that the days are long periods contend that these terms can have figurative meanings.¹² But what is their meaning in the context of Genesis 1? We must ask ourselves, how would the people have understood these terms "evening" and "morning?" Is Moses, and by extension, God, trying to deceive us by not telling us the truth about the length of the "days?" The Old Testament records 38 times when these two words are used in the same verse. Each time they occur, the meaning must be that of a normal day. Here are a couple of examples to illustrate the point: Exodus 16:8 says, "And Moses said, this shall be when the Lord shall give you in the evening flesh to eat, and in the morning bread to the full." Also Exodus 18:13, "and the people stood by Moses from the morning until the evening." All the other occurrences are essentially the same. So then, it would appear that when the words "morning" and "evening" are used in the same verse, they must refer to a normal day.

Statement by God

God did not leave the length of the creation days open to question. He told us the exact length of each day. In Exodus 20:11, He said that in "six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them and rested on the seventh day." The context of the statement is an emphatic command. God tells the people, "remember" and "keep" the Sabbath. God then tells them how to keep the Sabbath in their daily lives. The people can tell whether they are keeping the Sabbath if they are resting on the seventh day. God then anchors the reality of the present days to the reality of the past days of creation. God has set the pattern of Israel's work week. The "days" are the same kind of days that the people would have readily known. As it has been demonstrated previously, "day," used with a number, means a 24-hour day. It seems obvious that all throughout Israel's history, the people have understood this to mean a 24-hour day. Even those who hold to the long ages of Genesis 1 acknowledge the "days" of Exodus 20:8-11 to be 24-hour days.¹³ Therefore, the "days" of creation must also have been 24 hours in length.