The Days of Genesis One

**(Genesis 1:3-5),** *“Then 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.”*

**Question:** Are the days of Genesis 1 literal 24 hour days, or is the term used figuratively, referring to periods of time that would enable to the Genesis account to conform to evolutionary estimates regarding the age of various life forms, and the universe?

* Issue has troubled brethren, leading to a significant exchange that began in July 2000 with the publication of an open letter to “brethren Hill Roberts, Shane Scott, the Bible faculty and administration of Florida College, with particular reference to Colly Caldwell and Ferrell Jenkins.” The Letter, together with an exchange consisting of 35 articles over a two year period, can be reviewed at *watchmanmag.com*
* The letter was written for two major reasons: 1) **Hill Roberts**, who believes the days of Genesis one should be understood as long periods of time, was invited to teach a class on Creation/Evolution during the 1999 Florida College lectures. A CD-ROM was passed out during that class which contained his views on the matter; 2) **Shane Scott**, at that time a professor at the college, contended that the days could not be literal in an article that appeared in *Sentry Magazine* (Vol. 21, No. 1). He also introduced the concept to students in his classes, though he did not overtly advocate the position.

**Substantiating Quotes:**

* Hill Roberts, on the CD-ROM mentioned above, clearly advocates for stellar evolution, and a time frame consistent with the Big Bang Theory. To accommodate this, he denies the days of Genesis are literal. For an example, consider his quote about the third day of God’s creation:

*“How long did this take? For God to pronounce His will for the land and the plants – not long, a day seems to be just right. How long did it take for the land and the plants to accomplish His will? However long His natural laws decreed. The natural history of these first plants indicates that it covered quite a bit of time by our clocks, but for God ’twas a mere blink of an eye. We are on God’s clock in Genesis 1.”*

* Shane Scott’s writing in *Sentry Magazine* contends for a figurative interpretation of the “days” of Genesis

*“Some Bible believers insist that the world, according to Genesis 1, was created in six twenty-four hour days. I will argue that the Bible allows for a much older earth, because the days of Genesis 1 should not be interpreted literally.”*

* In a later section of the article, under the caption **“The Days Cannot Be Literal”** Scott wrote:

*“To prove that the days are ages, consider the seventh day. All the other days of cration ended with the phrase ‘and there was evening, and there was morning, a xth day.’ I understand that to mean that each day had a distinct conclusion. However, there is no such statement for the seventh day, which must mean that it has not ended. In other words on the seventh day God ceased creating new life forms, and that day has continue until now because He still ‘rests’ from creating new life.”*

**Arguments for a literal interpretation of Genesis 1:**

*“Clearly the meaning of Scripture as with any writing, has to do with how it would have been perceived and understood by its original audience. What any subsequent generation might force upon it, based upon its unique presuppositions and world-views, is a different matter altogether. Such things will change with the passing of the generations. But the author’s original intent ought to determine the meaning.” (Daniel H. King, Sr.)*

1. **The *prima facie* reading of the text indicates the creation took six days, ending with a single Sabbath.**
   1. Some may not believe this to be true, based upon information outside of the Genesis account.
   2. But, it is not fair to claim that Moses’ readers would have gotten any other impression.
   3. *“What is said here is intended to hold true entirely and exactly as it stands. There is no trace of the hymnic element in the language, nor is anything said that needs to be understood symbolically or whose deeper meaning has to be deciphered”* (Dr. Gerhard von Rad, commentary on Genesis, pg. 47,48).
   4. Consider, the debate on the “days” occurs only among religious conservatives. Both the skeptic and the modernist looks with mirth upon any idea that the days might be ages. They read it as literal days, they just don’t believe it!
2. **Context makes clear the usage of terms.** For example, “Back in my day, people didn’t have cell phones!” (figurative use of the word *day*). However, “Take 3 pills the first day, 2 the second day, and 1 the third day” (literal use of the word *day*).
   1. Rules of interpretation necessitate that a word be taken literally unless context demands otherwise.
   2. Consider the following quote from Dan King, “all the usages in this chapter being of the same type and utilizing the identical descriptive, ‘there was evening and morning, a first day,’ and so on, it is natural for the reader to imply that the same thing is meant in each and every instance. And it is very unnatural, if not ridiculous, to infer the existence of millions or billions of years either during the days or between the days of Genesis 1. In Genesis 1-2 we have to understand *yom* as literal, 24-hour days…”
3. **The creation days are delimited by the evening and morning**. Such usage in scripture is uniformly a reference to literal days. (A relatively equal period of light and darkness). Could plant life survive over a substantially more extensive period of darkness than 12 hours?
4. **Together with an attribute expressing order** **(2nd, 3rd, etc.) *yom* is uniformly used in a literal manner in the Old Testament.**
5. **Psalm 33:6-9 indicates the instantaneous nature of the creative act.** It is impossible to harmonize this declaration of God’s creative work with any “day/age” interpretation.
6. **Jesus believed the creation to have been a single week.**
   1. Matthew 19:4, *“He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’”*
   2. Mark 10:6, *“But from the beginning of the creation, God ‘made them male and female’”*
   3. The sixth day of a 144 hour week can be viewed as “from the beginning of creation.” However, the creation of man 4.5 billion years or more AFTER the creation of the earth can not!

**The Trouble with Long Days…**

* Plants (third day, 1:11), would exist for millions or billions of years before the creation of the sun, moon, day and night (fourth day, 1:16).
* No pollination possible for plants (third day, 1:11), from birds (fifth day, 1:20) and insects (sixth day, 1:24) for millions or billions of years.
* Birds (fifth day, 1:20) would be without their main food staple, insects (sixth day, 1:24) for millions or billions of years.
* **Note:** The Bible teaches that man was created before it rained (2:5-7), so there would have to have been millions or billions of years before rain fell upon the earth.
* **Note:** The Bible teaches that death entered into the word because of the sin of Adam and Eve (cf. 2:17). Therefore, there would be no death for millions or billions of years before Adam and Eve were created.
* If day six were millions or billions of years, Adam’s age at his death (5:5, 930 years) could not be so.

**Conclusion:** It is simply not possible to substantiate the peculiar “day/age” interpretation of Genesis 1.