

“THE LIGHT HE CALLED ‘DAY’”

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Gen. 1:5 tells us that on the very first day of the creation week God defined the meaning of “day.” This divine definition has implications for understanding the other “days” of Genesis 1. It is to the study of these implications that this article is devoted. While some attention has been given to the statement of Gen. 1:5, “and the light he called ‘day,’” little has been said about the implications of this statement for the *nature* of all of the days recorded here.

This is particularly important to notice since the rise of day-age and framework theories for the meaning of the days of Genesis 1, for this definition has strong negative implications for such theories.

However, before looking specifically at this biblical material, we would like to discuss the relationship of Genesis 1 to man’s thought about origins in general.

A great deal has been written about the teaching of the Bible on creation, and no doubt will continue to be, because there is no way for men to escape the implication of this doctrine that each man is responsible to his Creator. It is significant that the most convinced unbelievers find it necessary to exert themselves to contradict the Bible’s teaching of creation, ignoring other presumably ancient “creation” stories (the Gilgamesh epic, for example).

The reasons for this perennial concern with the biblical account of creation must go beyond the fact that many people happen to believe it; there is more here than that. We believe that science will always have to take account of Genesis 1, very simply because it rings true. Genesis 1 is not a straw man; it will continue to cast its shadow over anyone who wishes to discuss the important questions about the

universe, which questions must include, "Where did it all come from?"

I. The Importance of the Creation Doctrine

While men in general have always had to take account of the Creator and his claim on their lives as Creator, Christians especially must continue to seek to understand clearly and believe just what Genesis 1 is saying, both so that they will truly honor the Creator for his mighty acts and so that they will be able to deal honestly and righteously in the whole world of scientific and philosophical ideas. "Christian" thinkers have sometimes wished to dismiss the teachings of Genesis 1 as having no implications for science whatsoever;¹ however, most of them have seen that they cannot escape the responsibility to take seriously the Bible's statements about what we call "historical" and "scientific" fact.² Especially those who have taken their stand under the banner of Christian orthodoxy have seen the necessity of having the Bible (including Genesis 1), and not science apart from the Bible, decide how they will view the physical universe.

Such persons are concerned first of all not with how they might harmonize the Bible with contemporary scientific opinion, but with what the Bible actually says. The opinions of science may cause us to consider whether we have indeed correctly understood the Bible and so urge us to a careful restudy of it; but they may not be allowed to tell us whether or not our understanding of the Bible is true. That understanding must be based on honest exegesis of the Bible alone.

This should be clear to us for two reasons, one philosophical and the other practical.

First, it is a basic presupposition of Christianity that the Bible is true; whatever it teaches is without error. Therefore to allow anything but Scripture interpreting Scripture to determine for us what we hold to be the true teaching of Scripture is contrary to our own definition of "true faith."³ On the other hand, science is not without error. In fact, the opinions of science change regularly and are often very doubtful.⁴ It is not only philosophically wrong to judge our

understanding of Scripture according to the findings of science, but it is also practically foolish to hold as true some idea that may very well change tomorrow.

All of this is *not* to say that science is useless and never gives us any truth. On the contrary, science is very useful and man does learn a great deal of truth through science. However, science can never stand as an *arbiter* of truth as though it never makes mistakes. That honor belongs only to God speaking in his Word. The scientist, no less than any other man, is subject to sinful blindness and therefore liable to follow blind alleys, believe false theories and come to wrong conclusions.

For example, the account of the origin of the universe and life given by science has changed radically even over the past twenty years. The account given by the Bible has not changed; in the nature of the case it cannot.

II. *Genesis 1:5: A Definition of "Day"*

It is the conviction of this writer that Gen. 1:4-5 deserves a great deal more serious attention than it has usually received from Scripture commentators. Fully as many words are given in the inspired account to describing the creation of light, the division of light from darkness, and the naming of light and darkness, as are given in the first two verses to the original statement concerning the creation and condition of the whole heaven and earth.

Moreover, Gen. 1:4-5 introduces a form of reporting that is repeated several times in the creation account, namely: 1) reporting God's words of command; 2) narrating the springing into existence of what he commanded, along with the statement (not always used) that it was good; and 3) the description of God naming that which he has just created.

What we are contending here is that the Holy Spirit inspired Moses to define the period of light-separated-from-darkness by the word "day" (Hebrew *yom*) on the very first day of creation; that this definition can only be taken in the sense of an ordinary "earth day"; and that it must apply throughout the days of creation.

While much has often been made of a supposed flexibility in the meaning of the word "day" in the rest of the Old Testament (a point upon which we will comment below), that information can only bear indirectly on the meaning of the word here, especially in the face of a definition in Genesis 1 itself. It is, after all, the meaning of the word in this chapter that is at issue.

When we look into the actual language of Gen. 1:4-5 we find no extraordinary grammar or word usage.⁵ This is an essential point in the face of all the rhetoric about poetry and figurative language that is bandied about in the literature on this passage. Spoken phrases are used very matter-of-factly to describe the actions of God in creation, phrases which use very common Hebrew word and idiom. The form of language used here is not unique, with unusual nouns and verbs; the language could be describing any of the hundreds of historical events reported in the Old Testament. The Hebrew in verse 3 reads literally, "And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light." Our translations have no problem giving us the sense perfectly. There is nothing here that does not come across in English. The content of the words, that is, the ideas they convey, are indeed astounding. As the psalmist says in amazement, "For he spoke, and it was, he commanded, and it was standing" (Ps. 33:9). However, the syntax used to convey these ideas is perfectly ordinary.

The revelation of this light which is later named "day" begins in verse 3 where we have the production of a created light that springs forth in answer to the powerful word of God. This light is neither the "Shekinah glory" of God, nor some primeval shimmering,⁶ nor does it come from the sun which is still to be created. However, this light is in no way distinguished in character from the light which later proceeds from the sun. It is not an anomaly, as some claim, that there was light before there were light-bearers. God created light before he created on the fourth day the sources of light for the earth. How this light which was created on the first day operated is mysterious to 20th century man, but that gives us no basis or need for inventing a framework

hypothesis for the first and fourth days.

The textual conclusion is that while light is often associated with light-bearers and is produced by them, it also has an existence apart from the light-bearers.⁷ This is attested to by the findings of physics. Once light has been produced by a star, for example, it continues to pass through space whether the star continues to exist or not.

Now the Scriptures tell us here that God made light, the same kind of light later produced by heavenly light-bearers--but sometime before he made the light-bearers themselves. The statement of Moses contains nothing that conflicts with modern physics. God could very simply have created a shaft of light of sufficient diameter to illuminate the earth and of sufficient length to keep shining on the earth until the fourth day when the light-bearers would be created. (Mathematics tells us that a shaft 3 light-days or about 50 billion miles long would do nicely.) We are not saying that this is how God did it, for we have no way of knowing that. We are pointing out that normal providential law is all that would be necessary to have such light continue to shine on the earth until it was time for the creation of the sun, moon and stars.

That God created light before the light-bearing or reflecting bodies is clear from the text. That certain people have problems believing this demonstrates not that there is something wrong with the text or with its compatibility with the laws of physics.

III. *The Separation of Light and Darkness*

Having created the light and having declared his satisfaction with it, thereby commending its righteousness and usefulness for the universe he had made, God proceeded to divide the light from the darkness which had earlier covered the water which was over the earth. This darkness too is clearly a creation of God which had been created along with the heaven and the earth.⁸

We might speculate as to how this division between light and darkness occurred, whether it affected more than the surface of the earth, whether it was caused by setting the earth spinning on its axis, etc., but of these details we are not informed and we may therefore assume that they are not to the point of the narrative. It is very clear from the subsequent narrative that this separation of light and darkness does affect the surface of the earth and is specifically directed to the future development of it.

This latter point is very important and is actually the occasion for this article. The division of light and darkness and their subsequent naming are neither divine afterthoughts nor incidental information. These events are specifically directed to the subsequent development of the earth under the creating hand of God.

This has been clearly (if not always consciously) denied by many who posit a day-age or framework theory of the days of Genesis 1. They have not seen these events as an essential step in creation, and the implications of these occurrences have seldom been clearly enunciated.

First of all, with respect to the division of light and darkness, the text clearly indicates that it is light and darkness *upon earth* that is divided. This is clear both from the fact that it is the darkness “upon the face of the deep” which is divided from the light, and from the fact that the subsequent days and nights also apply to the earth.

The former fact is demonstrated by the use of the same Hebrew word (*choshek*) for darkness in reference to 1) that which was upon the face of the deep, and 2) that from which light was separated. It is further strengthened by the definition of darkness as night and the subsequent use throughout Scripture of “night” (*laylah*) for the period of darkness (*choshek*).

The latter fact mentioned, namely, that day and night are also “on the face of earth,” is admitted by all commentators and is evident from even the most casual reading of the account. It is also demonstrated by the fact that the primary function of the heavenly bodies (Gen. 1:14) is to provide

time references and light "on the earth," as Gen. 1:15 says in so many words.

Now it should be most illuminating to us that it is *this* light upon the face of the waters covering the earth and *this* darkness upon the face of the waters which were separated from each other and are now named "day" and "night." Light and darkness are not presented here as some vague imagery or mysterious concepts. They are simply the light and darkness which periodically cover the earth. Here are described illuminating light which makes physical objects visible, and physical darkness in which physical objects are not visible. It is almost as if the Holy Spirit is going out of his way to make the obvious painfully so. This is ordinary visible light and ordinary physical darkness that are described.

This is clear both from the meaning and use of the words "light" and "darkness," and from the fact that they are named "day" and "night." The constant use of the Hebrew word *'or* for visible light, brightness or shining, gives us no choice but to identify it as visible light in Genesis 1. The constant use of *choshek* for physical darkness means that it too must refer to that kind of darkness in all of Genesis 1.

There are, of course, metaphorical uses of both *'or* and *choshek* in Scripture⁹. But we shall argue the thesis that to understand the darkness covering the face of the deep in Gen. 1:2 and the light produced by the sun, moon and stars in Gen. 1:15-16 as metaphorical is unacceptable exegesis. The naming of the light as "day" and the darkness as "night" cannot refer to anything but ordinary light and darkness.

While this may appear to be a circular argument, it is an inescapable conclusion that when light is identified with "day," darkness with "night," and the two are put into juxtaposition, it is visible light and physical darkness that are in view. No other interpretation will do.

The basic implication arising from the fact that these refer to ordinary light and darkness should not escape us. Light and darkness are the fundamental physical phenomena

which signal the progression of time on earth. That the inspired text includes so much description of the creation of light, its separation from darkness, and their naming, shows that *progression of time* is fundamental to God's plan for the physical universe. The purpose of heavenly lights for delineating "times and seasons" on the fourth day, and the setting aside of the seventh day at the end of creation, only serve to strengthen this conclusion.

Moreover, this is corroborated by the fact that God created light immediately after creating the heavens and the earth and then immediately began the alternation of light and darkness, thus establishing what would continue as a fundamental measure of time on the face of the earth.

IV. *The Naming of Light and Darkness*

Now it is *this* light and *this* darkness which in Gen. 1:5 are named "day" and "night."

A number of things need to be said about this naming. We would first point out the obvious: if the light and darkness are ordinary physical light and darkness, as we have seen, then it requires a great stretch of imagination to conclude that the day and night they constitute are anything but ordinary day and night. The least that can be said about this is that it would certainly be extremely misleading to introduce day and night in this way, if they are allegories for long ages or if they are figurative elements leading to a "figurative framework interpretation."¹⁰

In Scripture, the practice of naming is very common, very meaningful, and very understandable. Names are given to places, animals, men and God. What we have here in Gen. 1:5 is only the first of a long list of namings: the naming of the firmament as "heaven" (Gen. 1:8); the naming of the dry land as "earth" (Gen. 1:10); the naming of the animals by Adam (Gen. 2:19-20); the naming of Cain by his mother Eve (Gen. 4:1); and especially the revelation of God's names whereby he reveals his person and character to his servants.¹¹ The significance of naming in the Old Testament comes to its apex and application in the third commandment,

which so strictly delimits the proper use of the name of God.

On the basis of the biblical evidence about naming, it is clear that when an object or person is named, the very character of the thing or person named is expressed by the name. A name is not just a convenient label to be added to the vocabulary of the language. A name is descriptive of the nature of the object and is so closely connected with it that to destroy the name is also to wipe out the remembrance of the object itself. This is indicated both positively and negatively.

For example, continuing the names of the families of Israel in the land of promise was so important that these names were to remain in perpetuity. Not only were the old landmarks never to be removed, but the inheritance of each family was never to leave that family. Negatively this is shown by the fact that destroying the images of the gods of the heathen was to be followed by wiping their names out of the places where they had been worshipped.¹² Thus the importance and meaning of the giving of names is that names are inextricably bound up with the nature of the things or persons to which they are applied. The name describes the essential character of the thing named.

At this point it needs to be recognized that the language used in Gen. 1:5 to describe God's naming of the light and darkness is in complete conformity with naming-language elsewhere in the Old Testament. There is no reason in the text or in general Old Testament usage to think that this is anything but a naming of physical light and darkness. In particular, there is no reason to think that we are here dealing with a naming that is allegorical or metaphorical. A literal translation of the wording would be, "And God called to the light, 'day,' and to the darkness he called, 'night'." This is the same wording that is used a few lines later to describe the naming of the firmament, and of the land and water. In verse 8 we read literally, "And God called to the firmament, 'heaven'." Then in verse 10, "And God called to the dry land, 'earth,' and to the waters he called, 'seas'." What is interesting is that while no serious commentator feels free to take these namings of *heaven*, *earth* and *seas* in any

but a literal fashion,¹³ a good many seem quite ready to expand the *days* named here into eons of time or to allegorize them into a merely artificial framework.¹⁴ This is inconsistent and very dangerous, because it opens the door for arbitrarily assigning allegorical value to any historical detail reported in Scripture that does not fit in with our understanding of historical or scientific reality.¹⁵

The significance of the application of names in Old Testament usage is very apparent here in Gen. 1:5. Since the light is named "day" and the darkness is named "night," we would expect the very character of the day to be light and of the night to be darkness. Such is, of course, exactly the situation: day and night become synonyms for light and darkness. Indeed, the naming of light and darkness here in Genesis 1 stands as an excellent introduction to and definition of what naming involves in the Old Testament. Subsequent namings stand in the shadow of this one and when specific reasons are given for namings,¹⁶ those reasons explicitly exhibit the principle that the name points to the character of the thing named, a principle that is implicitly present in Gen. 1:5.

Now some will say, "Yes, but this proves too much. If light is day, then what about 'twenty-four hour days' which include the night as well? And what about all those references to the use of the word 'day' in the literature which indicate that its meaning is quite flexible?"

It is our contention that the naming of light as "day" here gives definition to the word "day" and that it never loses that denotation throughout the Old Testament. We do think that these objections can be answered and that we do well to take seriously what the Scripture is saying here in Gen. 1:5. We will come back to these objections below, but for now we wish to continue to make our case that the days of Genesis 1 are taken honestly only when they are taken as ordinary days of light which together with the period of darkness called "night" provide a basic measure of the chronological sequence of time on earth.

V. *How flexible is yom?*

We have already intimated that we wish to take seriously the fact that it is specifically the light which is named "day." We must now be very pointed both about what we mean by this and about what are the implications of this fact. The word "day" refers specifically to that portion of the time sequence which is made up of light, what we today call the "daylight hours." Thus, while it may certainly be proper to call the whole twenty-four hour period a "day,"¹⁷ it is nevertheless true that the Hebrew word *yom* always carries with it the basic denotation of the period of light. Thus it would be an illegitimate use of the word "day" to refer to a time period that does not include the daylight hours. Notice in this respect that the use of the word "day" is somewhat different from that of the word "night." "Night" is never used to refer to the whole twenty-four hour period. A night is that part of the "day" that is dark. The use of "night" is less flexible than that of "day." But this does not mean that "day" is completely flexible; in every case it carries the denotation of a period of light. Thus the flexibility of the word "day" is quite limited; it can include more than the daylight hours, but it is never free of its reference to the daylight hours. Also, we would not expect the singular to refer to a period containing more than one set of such daylight hours.

This is a good place to explore the widespread contention that the Hebrew word *yom* is very flexible as to the length of time denoted. But a close examination of the biblical evidence claimed to demonstrate this flexibility yields very little in the way of proof for this contention.

We read, for example, that the forty years in the wilderness are called a "day,"¹⁸ that the "day" of the creation of the heaven and earth mentioned in Gen. 2:4 refers to the whole creation week,¹⁹ that the seventh day on which God rested at the end of the creation week is a "day" which continues until the present,²⁰ and that the "day" of vengeance described in Jer. 46:10 is a period of long duration.²¹ However, these and the many passages where *yom* is translated "time" instead of "day" yield no basis for understanding

yom as a flexible length of time.

Take, for example, the idea that *yom* can mean a "long indeterminate period of time." Whenever the KJV employs the word "time" (approximately 65 instances) and the context demands a period longer than one ordinary day, it is not the singular *yom* but the plural *yamim* that is actually being translated "time."

We read, for example, of the "time" (literally "days") of wheat harvest or of Solomon, and of the "process of time," where the plural is used.²² On the other hand, we have references to the "time" of an event where the the singular is translated and the context clearly shows that a particular time is in view. An example of this use of the singular is found in I Kgs. 2:26 where we read of a particular point in time, "I will not at this time [literally "day"] put you to death." What we see here is the normal difference between a singular and plural, not the supposed phenomenon of a great flexibility in the meaning of the word "day."

One horse is not equivalent to a herd, and one day is not equivalent to "many days." It is the word "time" that is flexible in this case. A "time" can be either a stretch of time, as in the phrase "for a time," or it can be a particular point of time, as in the phrase "at that time."

A careful study of this use of the singular and plural of *yom* shows that the difference between them is uniform. The singular always points to a particular point of time; the plural refers to a longer period. Far from showing a flexibility as to the length of a "day," this evidence demonstrates that the singular of *yom* refers only to a specifically limited period. None of these uses of "time" demands that the reference be to anything but an ordinary day of ordinary length. The Hebrew *yom* refers, in the singular, to a period of uniform, ordinary length, not to an indeterminate, flexible amount of time.

We turn now to those passages on the basis of which the word *yom* appears has most frequently and cogently been claimed to refer to more than a single day.

Gen. 2:4 is one of those passages most often cited.²³ It is assumed that here "day" refers to the whole period of creation. There is some difference of opinion as to whether the clause "in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" is a parallel reiteration of the immediately preceding words "when they were created," or whether the two clauses ought to be separated, so that the first belongs to "these are the generations" and the second serves as an introductory clause to what follows.²⁴ In either case, however, this "day" is the day in which God made the earth and the heavens, the most obvious understanding of which would be the first day. What evidence, we must ask, is there for assuming that this refers to the whole period of creation? Why can it not simply refer the first of those days, the actual day on which earth and heaven were created?

Furthermore, as Drs. E. J. Young and G. Ch. Aalders argue, the words "these are the generations" surely tell us that subsequent history occurring in the Garden of Eden is the focus of Genesis 2. This, of course, does not mean that the second chapter is divorced from the first or that it dares not to mention facts from it; but it does mean that the second chapter is not a second creation account which has to be harmonized with the first. The parallel between the *'elleh toledoth* at the beginning of Gen. 2:4 and that in Gen. 5:1, as well as the others in this book of Moses, certify that it is subsequent history that is in view in Genesis 2. Surely no one would argue that the reference in Gen. 5:1 to the "day in which God created man" in his likeness is other than the sixth day of creation. Then why argue that the "day in which the LORD made the earth and the heavens" is other than the day on which he did that, namely, the first day?

Nevertheless, it is often assumed that the *yom* of Gen. 2:4 does refer to the entire creation week. The basis for this assumption is that according to Genesis 1 plants were not created until after the first day of the creation week, on the third day. Therefore the reasons given in Gen. 2:5 for there being no plants are unimportant until later in that week. In fact, one of those reasons, namely, that there was no man, is not addressed until the sixth day when man is finally

created.

From this some conclude that by the "day in which the LORD God made the earth and the heavens," Gen. 2:4 means that this day extended beyond the first day of Genesis 1, to include the day on which the plants were created, as well as the day in which man was created.

But this conclusion is unnecessary. Whether or not the plants were created later in the creation week, the reasons given for their absence (no rain, no man) applied also to the first day of the creation week--*and this is all that the words of the text require*. If one misses a Wednesday meeting because his car broke down on Monday, others should not conclude that Monday lasted through Wednesday, but that the car was still unrepaired on Wednesday. Similarly, when God informs us that no plants existed because there was neither rain nor man on Day 1, we should not conclude that Day 1 lasted until it rained or until man was created (Day 6). The permissible conclusion is that these were necessary to plants *whenever* they were created.

Consequently, even if Gen. 2:5 were additional commentary on Genesis 1, there is no warrant for understanding *yom* in Gen. 2:4 to extend beyond Day 1 of Genesis 1.

Furthermore, Gen. 2:5 is not talking about what conditions existed on the first day of the creation week, but about why there were no plants in the area which later became the Garden of Eden. This is indicated by the introduction of Genesis 2 with *'elleh toledoth*, as argued above, and by the fact that there are plants all over the world which are not tilled by man. Yet in Gen. 2:5 the presence of man is just as essential to the plants mentioned as is the need for rain. In fact, the plants mentioned in Gen. 2:5 are most likely domestic plants, the kind that need man for their cultivation.²⁵ To read these reasons back into Genesis 1 simply proves too much, that is, that there could not be plants where there are no men.

The point we are making is that there is no reason in the text which *demand*s a longer period for the word "day" in Gen. 2:4. Conclusions about the word "day" referring to long

periods of time are necessitated not by the text of Scripture, but by extra-textual assumptions.

Following the parallel in Gen. 5:1 and taking seriously the evidence of Gen. 1:5, listening carefully to the step-by-step description in Gen. 2:6-15 of the preparation of the Garden of Eden for man, it becomes apparent that the "day" in Gen. 2:4 is best understood as the first day of creation. This is especially clear when we notice that there *were* plants on the earth before the end of the creation week--plants which had not been there on the first day, but which did appear before man was created.

The second instance of the word *yom* we wish to discuss with respect to its length is the seventh day, the day of rest. Some have held that since God does not go back to creating on the eighth day or any subsequent day, the seventh day is of eternal duration.²⁶ This argument appears to have a superficial plausibility, but it must be rejected.

First of all, there is not a breath anywhere in Scripture, and least of all here in Genesis 2, that this day is anything more than the ordinary day following the sixth day of creation. In view here is not what God did *after* the seventh day, but what he did *on* the seventh day. Furthermore, the purpose of Gen. 2:3 is to tell us that God sanctified this seventh day and blessed it. It becomes meaningless to plug in some eternal "period" for "day" in this verse, for then the reference to "seventh" becomes preposterous. Again, this setting apart of the seventh day is a reference to the "work six days, rest one day" pattern which God lays out for man's existence. To make the seventh "day" anything but a day of ordinary length is exegetically irresponsible. Even if none of the other days of Genesis 1 are ordinary days, the seventh day must be, if the narrative is to make sense to man.

When we turn to other verses which are claimed in support of the idea that "day" refers to a period of time beyond the ordinary day, we usually find that very loose exegetical work has been done.

For example, the claim that in Heb. 3:8-9 "day" refers to the whole forty years in the wilderness really discredits those who make it. This false impression rests on a mistake in the KJV translation of *hou* as "when" rather than "where." Not only do later translations correct this, but the Hebrew in Psalm 95, from which this is quoted, shows that "day" refers to a particular day at a particular place. "Meribah" and "Massah" were the very descriptive Hebrew names given to the place where Israel tempted God at a particular time. The "day" mentioned in both Ps. 95:8 and its quotation in Heb. 3:8 refers to the specific day of temptation at Massah-Meribah. The text simply says that Massah-Meribah is in the wilderness *where* Israel tempted God for forty years, not that the "day" of Massah-Meribah lasted forty years. Here is no support for the claim that "day" can refer to an indeterminate period of time.

Commentaries and encyclopedia articles on Genesis often provide lists of passages where, it is alleged, "day" means a long or indefinite period. However, one is impressed by the fact that different commentators give different lists of references for this phenomenon. This means that either the phenomenon is very widespread, or that the commentators do not agree. But verifying these interpretations by looking up the passages soon makes one skeptical of the whole business.

For example, Isa. 22:5 and Joel 2:2 are listed by one encyclopedia,²⁷ while another mentions Job 20:28 and Ps. 20:1.²⁸ But each of these references is understandable if "day" is simply taken to mean "day." In light of this, it is not surprising that while some reference works list the "various uses" of the word "day," others simply discuss the length and counting of ordinary days without even mentioning the idea of an indeterminate period.²⁹ The common practice of understanding *yom* to mean a "period of indeterminate length," and then transporting that meaning into Genesis 1, is highly questionable. As we have mentioned above, even if the word were that flexible, substituting a flexible meaning in Genesis 1 without pursuing a consistent interpretation of the remaining data in this chapter itself can hardly be called

honest exegesis.

Now, all of this is not to deny that the word "day" can, like any other word, be used in a figurative sense, for example, as a figure for light or for the idea of immediacy. We find such uses in John 9:4 and II Cor. 6:2 respectively. However, such use does not imply a vague time reference for the word "day." Precisely because "day" denotes light and *limited* time, it is especially fitting in John 9:4; and precisely because it denotes *short time* immediacy, it is so useful to Paul in II Cor. 6:2.

If it were not for the particular ordinary meaning of "day" these figurative uses would lose their force. The figurative use rests *not* on a vague basic denotation of a word, but on its very specific denotation. The figurative use of the word "day" strengthens rather than weakens the traditional idea that it refers to a specific and limited period of time, the ordinary day, rather than to an indefinite period.

If "day" were being employed in Genesis 1 with a figurative sense, it would emphasize either the idea of light or that of immediacy. The conclusion that here in Genesis 1 we are dealing with a framework or series of long periods does not square with this figurative use either. Rather, we are dealing with the order of God's acts of creation; the use of dark nights and light days in such an order requires that we understand Genesis 1 to provide a chronological description. *Nowhere* in Scripture do we find a numbered series of days and nights referring to anything but a chronological sequence of days.

VI. Corroborating Evidence

This view of Gen. 1:5 is corroborated by the use of "evening and morning" to denote the end of each day of creation.

Notice first that "evening" and "morning" are *not* the beginning and end of the day, but that together they form the *end* of the day. Evening and morning are the beginning and end of the *night*, the period in which no creative activity is reported, the period which follows the day.

Unfortunately many commentators have missed this point and have tried to fit in the whole twenty-four hour period between the evening and the morning. As Skinner so aptly points out, "The Jewish day may have begun at sunset, but it did not end at sunrise; and it is impossible to take the words as meaning that the evening and morning *formed* the first (second, etc.) day."³⁰ This leads to the conclusion that the days of Genesis 1 are counted not from evening to evening, but from morning to morning.³¹ Each of them *ended* with an "evening and morning," that is, with a night which in ended at sunrise. We might note that this does not interfere with the later "evening to evening" counting of days by Israel, but it does control what the word "day" can mean here in Genesis 1.

Now this fact that the days of Genesis 1 ended with an evening and morning is just another way of telling us that they were ordinary days. Just as the naming of the light and darkness gives us a definition of "day," so the ending of the day with "evening and morning" tells us that the numbered days were periods of light followed by periods of darkness. (The "night" was from sunset to sunrise.) Not only is the word "day" defined in the first part of Gen. 1:5, but the very next words tell us that the days are numbered by a cycle of "day" followed by evening and morning. There are really two definitions of "day" in Gen. 1:5, and they both make it clear that these are ordinary days of light, followed by ordinary nights of darkness.

It is to be noted in this connection that the Hebrew in Gen. 1:5 does not say literally, "and it was evening and it was morning the first day," as many translate. There is a common Hebrew expression to say "the first day," but that is not what is used here. Instead, we read here: "and there was evening and there was morning one day." While the difference between the two expressions is subtle, the emphasis is upon the nature of the day (ending with night) rather than on the firstness of the day. This was no doubt the first day, but the point of the text is that the day ended in ordinary fashion, with an evening and morning. It *was* an ordinary day.

This appeal to "evening and morning" is strengthened by other Old Testament references.

The Hebrew words *ereb* ("darkness" or "obscurity") and *boqer* ("dawn" or "morning") generally refer to those periods of the day and are never used together in any sense other than literal. Again, the words seem almost specifically chosen to rule out any understanding of the days except days of ordinary length. Here too Hebrew has various ways to describe the end of a period or action, ways which do not require the idea of the end of an ordinary day, if that is the desire of the writer.

For those wishing to taking seriously what Moses is telling us, in the words that Moses used to tell it, the only reasonable conclusion is that God created and brought to a mature state the world in which we live *in six ordinary days*, each of which was followed by an ordinary night bounded by "evening and morning."

Many wish to restrict the miraculous element in this account as much as possible, even while they allegorize the time element. As O. T. Allis comments, this is directly contrary to the Christian understanding of God's hand in reality.³² God's hand does not need immense periods of time to do great things, and when the Scriptures present Jesus healing a child at the instant his words are spoken, we are to treat the "time" involved just as seriously as the healing. So it is with creation: immense acts are described as taking place immediately in response to God's word spoken on successive days following the beginning of time. Taking seriously the *act* of creation requires honest acceptance of the description of the *timespan* of creation as well. If the time element is taken in an allegorical sense, there is no exegetical obstacle to viewing the creative actions in an allegorical sense, too.

Our contention that the definition of light as "day" in Gen. 1:5 controls the meaning of the word "day" in the rest of the account is corroborated by the description of God's approval of the light.

We read in Gen. 1:4 that after God created the light, "And God saw the light that it was good." Since light is not necessary for God to see, darkness and light being alike to him, this means that God looked at the light and pronounced it good. We have already pointed out that this must have been in reference to the earth for which it was created. Now we would observe that this could only be ordinary, visible light because God *saw* it and thus declared it to be good for the earth. For God to inspire the insertion into the account of this little detail about seeing the light is rather misleading if the "day" formed by this light is nothing but a figure of either a long period of time or of a "framework" for creative acts.

A further point undergirding the "ordinary day" understanding of Genesis 1 is that no distinction is made on earth between the days after the creation of the sun, moon and stars on Day 4, and those days which precede this work. Of course, the sun, moon and stars were not present to "rule" those earlier days and nights, but that was a difference in the heavens, not on earth. Now, because the sun is created to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, it is hard to imagine the days and nights following the fourth day as anything but ordinary solar days or ordinary lunar nights. Only ordinary days are ruled by the sun, and only ordinary nights are ruled by the moon.

Two very important points of direct similarity between Days 1-3 and Days 4-6 need to be mentioned. The first is that the days are numbered consecutively from Day 1 to Day 7. No break is made in the count at any point. Thus we would expect them all to be the same kind of "days." We would not expect them to be "oranges and apples," i.e., that Days 1-3 were qualitatively different from Days 4-6.

The second point is that all the days of Genesis 1 have the same kind of terminus; they all end with an evening and morning. Now if each of them is numbered like a day, ends like a day and is called a "day," why even think that they were really something else?

As we look at this fourth day and its creative activity, it should not escape us that the very presence of this day and its activity argues strongly for ordinary days in the whole chapter. Not only is the sun created to rule the day and the moon to rule the night, but the stated purpose for these bodies and the stars is to be "for signs and seasons, for days and years" (Gen. 1:14). The purpose of the heavenly bodies is chronological. Can anyone reasonably hold that the "days," or for that matter, the "years" mentioned in this verse are anything but actual days and years? Why not then also accord the same kind of actual reality to Days 1-7 of the creation week?

To understand these days ruled by the sun and nights ruled by the moon, which are specifically stated to be part of the chronological counting system, as figurative references to large periods of time or to a framework upon which to hang the concept of creation, is irresponsible exegesis.

Other data in Scripture require that the days of Genesis 1 be understood as ordinary earth days. Whitcomb points out that a numbered sequence of days in the Old Testament is always an indication that literal ordinary days are in view.³³ As E. J. Young declared, the argument from the fourth commandment has never been answered.³⁴ Skinner, who himself considers the entire Genesis 1 account to be mythical, shows that it is simply dishonest to think that Moses was writing about something other than creation in six ordinary days.³⁵ Keil concludes, "But if the days of creation are regulated by the recurring interchange of light and darkness, they must be regarded not as periods of time of incalculable duration, of years or thousands of years, but as simple earthly days."³⁶

As Young observes, Genesis 1 is the introduction to a severely historical book.³⁷ It would be wholly out of character with the rest of the book for Moses to use historical language in an allegorical fashion right at its beginning. Chronological days are the stuff of history, and Genesis is a very historical book. Those in the past who have denied the historicity of the events described in the early chapters of Genesis have always ended up denying other essentials of

Christianity. Without an historical Adam, the fall and redemption from that fall by the historical Christ becomes no more than a sentimentally attractive allegory.

It is God who caused the light to shine out of darkness,³⁸ thus beginning the cycle of day and night which continues to this present day. When God called the light "day" on the first day of creation, he himself told us what kind of days all the rest of the days of creation would be. Every indication in the rest of Scripture is that this is exactly the way it was.

* * * * *

APPENDIX

If the above understanding of Gen. 1:4-5 is valid, the implications for theories that the days here are either long periods of time or allegories which form a framework into which God's creative acts fit, are strongly negative.

In recent years Meredith Kline has suggested that the text requires the days of Genesis 1 to be taken as a non-chronological framework on which to hang God's creative acts rather than as a chronological listing of them. In making this suggestion, Kline has held that the traditional view is untenable if the Scriptures are taken as inerrant. While one never enjoys differing widely from his friends and teachers,³⁹ we believe that the evidence given above makes Kline's position the one that is untenable. We would also list the following considerations concerning his views which seem to us to make them even more unacceptable.

1. Kline's argument that Gen. 2:5 provides evidence for ordinary providence in Genesis 1 contains a logical fallacy. Even if Gen. 2:5 applies to the circumstances in Genesis 1 (which is questionable), it does not follow that ordinary providence *alone* was operating during that period of time. The presence of ordinary providence does not disprove the possibility of extraordinary providence. In fact, the text tells us just the opposite. Every creative act of God in Genesis 1 is presented as an extraordinary act of God. Furthermore,

every miracle in the Bible occurs in the midst of ordinary providence and gives lie to the idea that the two cannot coexist.

2. Gen. 2:5 does not refer back to Genesis 1, but forward to the preparation of the Garden of Eden. See the arguments given for this conclusion by Young and Aalders.⁴⁰

3. If Kline's position is truly the only one that can result from a careful reading of the text as inerrant, it is striking that the rest of Scripture, particularly the Fourth Commandment, so readily handles the creation days as ordinary chronological days, contrary to this view. Indeed, the literal way in which the rest of Scripture takes the statements of Genesis 1 contradicts those who claim to hold to inerrancy while taking these statements figuratively. See, for example, in this connection the statements of Deut. 4:32; Ps. 33:6, 9; Isa. 42:5; Isa. 45:7; Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:26; I Cor. 11:9; II Cor. 4:6; II Pet. 3:5.

4. The reasonings of Kline are too arcane to be the basis for overthrowing the far more natural reading of the passage as a chronological account.

5. Kline argues that evaporation would have to proceed at an unnatural rate for the dry land to appear in one day if the *modus operandi* of Gen. 2:5 is inserted in Genesis 1. This should make us doubtful of the idea of inserting Gen. 2:5 back into Genesis 1, but does not disturb the natural reading of the text of Genesis 1.⁴¹ When we find that a method of handling the text leads to unbelievable results, the problem is with the method, not with what the text says.

6. The same thing is to be said about his argument that the insertion of Gen. 2:5 leads to the idea that rain was needed within less than a day after the vegetation was created.⁴² Again, it is not Genesis 1 and its counting of the days of creation that does not make sense; it is the attempted insertion of a *modus operandi* requiring only ordinary providential care and supposedly found in Gen. 2:5 back into Gen. 1 that causes the problem. It is not the narrative of Gen. 1 that is faulty; it is the attempt to insert something that does not belong in it that is faulty. What, for example,

would this kind of method produce if it were applied to the various accounts of the resurrection of Christ? We can decide what Scripture *must* say only on the basis of what it says, not on the basis of what might be if we rearrange its contents.

7. Framework hypotheses in general, and Kline's in particular, seek a correspondence in the structure of creative acts mentioned in the pairs of Days 1 and 4, Days 2 and 5, and Days 3 and 6. However, as Young explains in detail, the framework that is suggested for parallel acts on these pairs of days simply does not match.⁴³

8. Kline's position makes an arbitrary distinction by taking the creative acts of God to be real as they are reported, while taking the time elements of days, mornings and evenings, and their numbering as figurative. There is no basis in the text for such sifting. Even worse, no method has been suggested for distinguishing the real from the allegorical in such historical narratives as Genesis 1 which can be applied without destroying the text's ability to communicate anything authoritatively.

9. If Kline is right, plants followed man on the face of the whole earth. This must follow if Gen. 2:5 speaks about the whole earth for it says that plants could not be present without a man to till the ground. Young argues quite rightly that these plants are domestic plants such as were found in the Garden of Eden.

10. Kline's theory is self-contradictory and also contradicts the facts of nature. The plants mentioned in Genesis 1 are placed all over the world; they did not need the presence of man. Yet Gen. 2:5 requires the presence of man for the support of plants just as much as it requires rain. Of course, the facts of nature also tell us that there are all kinds of plants that thrive without the presence of man. Gen. 2:5 proves too much if it is applied to all of creation, because in that case it proves that there can be no plants where there are no men. This in itself should demonstrate that Kline's approach is faulty.

NOTES

1. "Whatever the significance of the record may be, it is not a revelation of physical fact which can be brought in line with the results of modern science." John Skinner, *Genesis*, in: *The International Critical Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1980) 5.
2. We would emphatically deny the Barthian contention that the facts reported by the Bible are of a different nature from what are normally called "scientific" or "historic" facts. E. J. Young states, "The study of history is simply the study of those things which have actually taken place, whether the historian has come to their knowledge by means of his own investigation or whether information concerning them has been revealed by almighty God." Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964) 25.

We know, for example, the resurrection of Christ in the same way that we know of the existence of the Taj Mahal: by believing the reports of witnesses. Paul's argument in I Corinthians 15 is very much to the factuality of the resurrection. Young also cites Bavinck's comment that when the Bible as a book of religion comes in contact with other sciences and illuminates them, it does not suddenly cease to be God's word but remains such. "Maar als de Schrift dan toch van haar standpunt uit, juist als boek der religie, met andere wetenschappen in aanraking komt en ook daarover haar licht laat schijnen, dan houdt ze niet eensklaps op Gods Woord te zijn maar blijft dat." Herman Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (Kampen: J.H. Bos, 1908) 2:527.

3. True faith is that by which Christians "hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word." Cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Q/A 21.
4. Cf. the devastating scientific disproof of evolutionary orthodoxy by a medical researcher who believes the Bible's account of creation to be a myth. Michael Denton, *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* (Bethesda, MD:

- Adler & Adler Publishing, Inc., 1985).
5. Cf. Young on the weakness of the idea that Genesis 1 is of a special "literary genre." *Studies*, note 80, 82.
 6. As we will argue below, this is created visible light.
 7. R. Laird Harris, et al, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1981) 1:25.
 8. Cf. Isa. 45:7.
 9. Harris, et al, *Wordbook*, 1:25, 331.
 10. Meredith Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XX, No. 2 (May 1958) 155.
 11. Conrad von Orelli, *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950) 8:78.
 12. Deut. 12:3.
 13. Unfortunately the word "literal" has become loaded in recent years, especially in theological writing. We are not ready to give it up; we use it in Webster's sense of "conveying the primary meaning; opposed to figurative."
 14. Cf. Kline's desire to maintain that the creative acts of Genesis 1 are real and that only the time elements, the "days," "evenings and mornings," and the numbering of those days are figurative. "Rained," 156.
 15. As one trained in the physical sciences, with experience in laboratory research, I was impressed already in seminary with the tendency of theologians to confuse scientific theory with scientific fact, according the former as much authority as the latter.
 16. E.g., Gen. 3:20; 4:1; 4:25.
 17. Cf. Ex. 12:14. This "day" included the sacrifice at evening and the eating at night. Likewise, the seven days of unleavened bread (v. 15) include the nights of that week.

18. M'Clintock and Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1879) 2:703.
19. John C. Whitcomb, Jr., "The Science of Historical Geology in the Light of the Biblical Doctrine of a Mature Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal*, Vol. XXXVI, No. 1 (Fall 1973) 67.
20. Kline, "Rained," 154.
21. W.H. Nieuwhuis says, ". . .wordt het woord dag vaak gebezigd voor een tijdruimte van niet bepaalden, soms zeer langen duur; zoo b.v. Jer.30:7, 46:10. . . ." F. W. Grosheide, J. H. Landwehr, C. Lindeboom, J. C. Rullmann, eds., *Christelijke Encyclopaedie* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1925) 1:536.
22. Cf. Judg. 15:1, II Chron. 30:26, Gen. 4:3, respectively.
23. Whitcomb, "Science," 67.
24. Kline takes the former position ("Rained," 149), while Aalders defends the latter in *Genesis*, *Korte Verklaring* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1949), Dutch translation of Gen. 2 on page 104. This verse arrangement is followed also in the English translation of this commentary (*Genesis*, tr. by William Heynen, *The Bible Student's Commentary*, Vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981] 79-81).
25. Young, *Studies*, 61.
26. Kline, "Rained," 154.
27. Patrick Fairbairn, *Fairbairn's Imperial Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957) 2:124.
28. Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975) 2:45.
29. H. B. Hackett. ed., *Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1872) 567-569; Grosheide and Itterzon, *Christelijke Encyclopedie* (Kampen, Netherlands: J.H. Kok, 1957) 1:347-348.

30. Skinner, *Genesis*, 21.
31. Keil and Delitsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951) 1:51.
32. O. T. Allis, "The Time Element in Genesis 1 and 2," *Torch and Trumpet*, Vol. VIII, No. 3 (July-August, 1958) 16.
33. Whitcomb, "Science," 66.
34. Young, *Studies*, 77.
35. Skinner, *Genesis*, 21.
36. Keil, *Commentary*, 1:51.
37. Young, *Studies*, 83.
38. II Cor. 4:6.
39. This writer studied at Westminster Theological Seminary during 1960-1963 when Meredith Kline taught Old Testament there.
40. Young, *Studies*, 58-61; Aalders, *Genesis*, Korte Verk-laring, 108-110. Cf. also the translation of Aalders, *Genesis*, tr. by William Heynen, 79-81.
41. Kline, "Rained," 152.
42. Kline, "Rained," 152.
43. Young, *Studies*, 84ff.