

THE IMPORTANCE OF “YÔM” IN CHRISTIAN BELIEF

Robert L. Wright

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Introduction

The use of the term “*yôm*” in Genesis to describe the creative periods is fundamental to understanding God’s role as creator, and the power of the atonement offered by His Son. The reinterpretation of this term, while perhaps well-intentioned, has significant repercussions. This foundational concept has significant impact on any discussion on biblical authority. A thorough understanding of the use of *yôm* as well as a review of the competing views on its interpretation and use, are important concepts for any Christian.

Competing Views

In understanding differing world views which originate from alternate interpretations of the term “*yôm*” in the biblical account of creation, it is important to review the position of those who propose or most vocally defend alternate views. These include Progressive Creation/Day Age and the Gap Theory. All rely on unique linguistic interpretations of the same scripture, Genesis 1, to support their theories.

The Gap Theory

The Gap Theory, a precursor in many ways to Progressive Creation, proposes that between Genesis 1:1 and Genesis 1:2 there is a gap of some period of time.¹ Into this gap, those who support this theory place the existence of dinosaurs, and the deposition of layers of sediment that cover them. It also suggests that a pre-Adam race of men occupied the earth, and that their destruction was the result of Satan’s influence. This theory also suggests that the world was then destroyed by a flood sent by God to destroy this earlier “creation”, and when God moved into the

¹ Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy*, Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 1994, 36.

creation of verse 2, he was “recreating” the earth, using an unlikely interpretation of the term “*bara*” used in Genesis 1:1 as justification. This allows the billions/millions of years of supposed geological evidence to be reconciled with the Biblical account. This theory proposes that all life prior to the flood (and the fossils they left behind) should be considered genetically unrelated to life today.² This theory gained some level of credibility and notoriety when it was included in the reference notes for the book of Genesis in the 1917 *Scofield Reference Bible*.

There is no geological evidence for the events described in the Gap theory, which would require two great flood events. In addition, the entire theory hangs on Hebrew word usage (exegesis), and the meaning of the language recorded by Moses. The ideas proposed by the Gap Theory proponents are not supported by word usage elsewhere in Genesis, or elsewhere in the Bible. There is no gap supported by the use of the term “*bara*,” the word translated as “create,” in Genesis 1. The qal stem of the verb *bara* is used exclusively in the Old Testament to indicate an activity performed by God.³ This verb is never applied to an action performed by man anywhere in the Bible.⁴

Progressive Creation/Day-Age

Hugh Ross and Gleason Archer are two of the primary proponents of the successor to the Gap Theory, the Progressive Creation/Day-Age interpretation of creation.⁵ Ross places nature on a par with the Bible in terms of authoritative sources for revelation, often referring to nature as

² John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis*, Sheffield Publishing, 1975, 44.

³ John Parsons, *Zola's Introduction to Hebrew*, Zola Levitt Ministries, 2002, 10.2.

⁴ Davis, 1975, 44.

⁵ Gleason L Archer, “A Response to the Trustworthiness of Scripture in Areas Relating to Natural Science,” *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible: [papers from ICBI Summit II]*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Prues. Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1986, 331.

the “sixty-seventh book” of the Bible.⁶ This view attempts to reconcile the billions of years required by the geological ages of Charles Lyell. Lyell’s uniformitarian theories provided the framework for Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution. As Darwin put it, he believed that his books “came out of Lyell’s brains.”⁷

While the concepts which form the Progressive Creation/Day-Age theory date back to the 1830’s, it was the American Scientific Affiliation (ASA) and Bernard Ramm who in 1954 formalized the concepts into a form of theistic evolution that today is championed by current Progressive Creation proponents.

Reconciling the Bible with the theories of these scientists is accomplished by utilizing a particular definition for the Hebrew word translated as “day”, *yôm*, in Genesis, Chapter 1.⁸ Ross, and others who support this view, apply a meaning to *yôm* that allows it to represent an abstract “long period of time.”⁹ In addition, the view incorporates death into the initial creation. In this theory, death is not the result of the Fall, but is a part of God’s initial creation.¹⁰

In combination, these assumptions allow the billions of years proposed by secular scientists to be reconciled with the Biblical account. Progressive Creationism supports scientist’s interpretation of the fossil record. This is an evolutionary interpretation.¹¹ In Gleason’s case at least there is some attempt to distance this approach from a belief in evolution in the Darwinian sense. Gleason states, “There is no inherent connection between evolution...and the length of

⁶ Ross, 1994, 57.

⁷ “Charles Lyell,” Darwin Correspondence Project. *University of Cambridge*, Accessed March 3, 2020. <https://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/charles-lyell>.

⁸ Archer, 1986, 327-328.

⁹ Hugh Ross, *A Matter of Days*, Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2004, 81–83.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 83.

¹¹ Ross, 1994, 83.

time indicated by rock formations, extinct fossils, and radioactive materials.” He then continues however with a less supportive statement, “we can demonstrate that there is no conflict between the explanation of nature revealed in Scripture and the geological evidence of an ancient earth”¹².

Ross proposes that the week of creation has actually extended over billions of years as well. He claims that the culmination of this creation week, the seventh day, continues today and will not end until the new heaven and new earth begin.¹³

In another attempt to discard the biblical timeline required by a literal interpretation of days in Genesis, Hugh Ross teaches that the Biblical flood did not cover the earth. Rather, the flood was a local event to the Mesopotamian region and the majority of animals in the world were not affected by it.¹⁴ He believes that the geology observed today and biological diversity present in the world are therefore the result of billions of years of earth history, and not evidence of a global flood. Further evidence, he believes, that the earth was created over billions of years, and not in six literal days as recorded in Genesis.

The heart of these theories is in the interpretation of scripture and the credibility given to extra-Biblical authority. While scientific data can be a compelling testimony to any theory, its evaluation, and the assumptions this evaluation is based upon are critical. In the case of these alternate interpretations, the assumptions begin with science, rather than with the language and truthfulness of the Bible.

¹² Archer, 1986, 332-333.

¹³ Ross, 1994, 59.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 73

The Exegesis of “yôm”

In the absence of a desire to support an old-earth worldview, what motivation is there for the linguistic calisthenics required to reinterpret the term *yôm* to mean something other than what it says? When the word *yôm* is used in association with either numerical values, or other descriptors (such as evening and morning), it never means anything other than a 24-hour period. In no other instance in the Bible is *yôm* used to describe any other period when the cardinal descriptors are present.¹⁵ As observed by Jonathan Sarfati, “The two words “evening” and “morning” are combined with *yôm* 19 times each outside of Genesis 1. Every time, they clearly mean that particular literal part of a 24-hour day, regardless of the literary genre or context.”¹⁶ To assume anything other in this instance, particularly to satisfy an old-earth theory is not supported.

The “singular *yôm* is ordinarily employed purely for temporal references, retaining the basic meaning day”¹⁷, which indicates both the “temporality of the occasion and its localization at a certain time.”¹⁸ As in our current use of the word ‘day’, *yôm* either indicates the space of time marked by the light of the sun, as contrasted with *layla*, night, or the space of time from one evening till the next one. When it is used to imply a quality, or occasion to the day, such as, ‘the day of evil’ (Amos 6:3), or the ‘day of punishment’ (Isaiah 10:3) it does not include the modifiers (temporal, numerical or an association with *layla*, night).

¹⁵ Jonathan Sarfati, *Refuting Compromise*, Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2017, 73-79.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 81.

¹⁷ James Barr, *Language and Meaning: Studies in Hebrew Language and Biblical Exegesis. Papers Read at the Joint British-Dutch Old Testament Conference Held at London*, Brill Academic Publishers, 1974, 129.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, 129

Another important exegetical factor is the association of the word *yôm*, with the Hebrew cardinal term, *echad*. Specifically, this cardinal term, most often translated as “first”, and used in Genesis 1:5 in that context, stands for the ordinal when dealing with a small number of “countable” items, such as the days of creation. Speaking in particular of the sixth day of creation, Andrew Steinmann said, “This would indicate that the sixth day was a regular solar day, but that it was the culminating day of creation.”¹⁹ Francis Humphrey states this argument concisely, the fact that “the word *yôm* is accompanied by sequential numerical denotation and the language of ‘evening and morning’ gives a *prima facie* case that regular 24-hour days are in view.”²⁰ The exegetical case for *yôm* being utilized within the Genesis account as anything other than a 24-hour period is not supported by the text itself. The consistency of its utilization throughout the Bible, requires a single conclusion, Moses was describing a sequence of actual, 24-hour days when he described the creation week.

It is logical to consider the exegetical argument in light of other research on the subject. The fact that Ross chooses to place nature on par with scripture as a source for revelation is not a genuine argument. It can lead to what Paul warned of, “they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator.”²¹ (Romans 1:24) Because nature cannot of itself communicate ideas or meaning, it must be evaluated. Nature has no immutable meaning, all meaning must be inferred, and evaluated through a worldview or set of assumptions that are man-made, and therefore flexible. It is important to ask, “what are the intentions or assumptions being furthered by the specific evaluation?” Ross does not simply give

¹⁹ A. Steinmann, אֶחָד [echad] as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 45(4), 2002, 577–584.

²⁰ Francis Humphrey, “The Meaning of *yôm* in Genesis - creation.Com.

²¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced employ the *English Standard Version*

nature a Biblical authority, he gives authority to anti-God geologists and paleontologists who provide the geological interpretation. The data itself, the presence of rock layers, and the fossils they contain tell a different story when God is considered the Creator, than if they are the result of random events. Considering the fallen nature of man, and his diminished intellectual capacity which resulted from that fall, giving authority to man-interpreted natural observations on par with God-revealed scripture is flawed.²² Rather than considering the creation as equal with the Creator, when we place His word above the creation in authority, and evaluate the evidence in terms of biblical truth, a science that is directed by eternal truth, rather than flawed, temporary belief reveals itself. This true science embraces views such as *yôm* indicating a discrete 24-hour period, the reality of the biblical flood and God’s direct creation of all living things.

The Impact of Alternate Views

Science that refuses to consider the role of God in creation, his omnipotent power, and its miraculous nature, are *de facto*, anti-God, regardless of who supports them. The attempt to reconcile with anti-God science permeates the views of Progressive Creation and Day-Age theorists. Andrew Kulikovsy writes that theistic evolution is “clearly a theological explanation designed to accommodate Darwinism.”²³ Because evolution is a theory powered by death, Ross proposes that death was a part of God’s initial creation. The acceptance of death before the fall has profound implications. The apostle Paul wrote that “sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin.” (Romans 5:12) This is a foundational Christian belief, because it was through Jesus Christ that “we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him...” (Romans 5:9). Evolution requires death. Survival of the fittest requires death

²² Terry Mortenson, *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, New Leaf Publishing Group, 2008, 129.

²³ Andrew Kulikovsky, *Creation, Fall, Restoration: A Biblical Theology of Creation*, Mentor, 2009, 118.

of the weakest. In the absence of death, there can be no theory of evolution, theistic or otherwise. Therefore, an acceptance of the idea of theistic evolution requires an acceptance of pre-Fall death, and a rejection of Christ's foundational work.

Because the Bible provides a particular chronology and sequence to the events of creation, those who support theistic evolution, in any flavor, must also address the inconsistencies between the two in terms of sequence. In evolutionary theory the first animals evolved in the seas, and then became land animals, and ultimately flying animals (both birds and bats). In Genesis, sea and flying creatures are created on the fifth day, with land animals created on the sixth. God also revealed that He created plants on the land before creating living creatures in the seas.²⁴ This is also a contradiction to the evolutionary timeline. Simply denying the exegetical meaning of "yôm" and reinterpreting the Hebrew words used to describe creation days to accommodate it, as a way of accepting billions of years, does not address the inherent incompatibility between the Biblical account, and these implicitly anti-"God as Creator" theories.

Any attempt to integrate theories of men, that have by their very nature excluded God and any of His miracles, will always require compromise. That compromise comes with a cost. It is not simply a matter of which theory sounds better, or who can make the better argument. It is a matter of authority. Accepting the Bible as the Word of God, requires a belief in what it says, even if that may be at odds with the intellectual majority for a time. Through the process of evaluating those who developed and continue to teach against a literal interpretation of the term "yôm" to mean an actual, 24-hour day, it has become clear that the accommodations made to

²⁴ Jonathan Sarfati, "Evolution/long ages contradicts Genesis order of Creation," *Creation Magazine* 37, no. 3 (July, 2015), 52-54.

reconcile with secular science have relegated God to a spiritual role, and not a physical one. Rather than God being front and center in His creation, He is now relegated to filling in the gaps.

Conclusion

Accepting that “*yôm*” does, in fact mean a 24-hour period, and that the Biblical account is therefore actual, historic fact, places God back at the center of His creation. It also allows us to recognize the beauty of His creation, and the redemption offered by His Son. A redemption that necessarily included conquering the death introduced by the actions of man, the fall. When we understand the role God played as Creator, and the reliability of His account, we are able to appreciate the power of His Son to overcome the corrupting influence sin brought into that creation. We are able to embrace the salvation He offers.

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