

What Kind of Days are These?

Introducing the Divine-Pattern View of Genesis 1

Ray Williams

Background

Understanding the exact nature of the Genesis 1 creation days has plagued exegetes of Scripture for centuries. And, unfortunately the creation-day question is still being debated.

St. Augustine, wrote in his book the *City of God*;

“What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible to determine.”

But, in the 21st century, many heretofore-deep mysteries of the universe and how it came into existence have been resolved.

Armed with this evidence, it's now possible to re-examine the creation account and settle on its proper interpretation.

The analysis of the creation account presented herein is a new interpretation of Genesis 1 that answers the creation-day question.

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The authors of note are listed in alphabetical order:

**Gleason L. Archer
J. Oliver Buswell
Dallas E. Cain
C. John Collins
R. Laird Harris
Robert C. Newman
Ronald L. Numbers**

**Perry G. Phillips
Hugh Ross
John H. Sailhamer
David Snoke
Rodney Whitefield
Mark S. Whorton
Davis A. Young**

Presentation Outline

Six Historic Views of Genesis 1

Analysis of the Biblical Text

Commentary on the Creation Episodes

What can we Conclude ?

Six Historic Views of Genesis 1

Six Historic Views of Genesis 1

Ordinary-Day	<i>Yom</i> should be interpreted as an ordinary 24-hour day.
Gap Theory	Long period of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2
Intermittent-Day	24-hour days separated by long periods of time.
Day-Age	Creation days = geological ages or long periods of time.
Analogical-Day	Days are analogous to but not equal to man's workdays.
Framework View	Figurative rather than a sequential interpretation.

**Analysis
of the
Biblical Text**

Analysis of the Biblical Text

Literary Structure of Genesis 1

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

Analysis of the “evening and morning” Refrain

Literary Structure of Genesis 1

Structure of Genesis 1

The Genesis 1 Account Portrays Three Major Epochs

In the beginning - Creation of the Universe - Gen. 1:1-2

Eight Episodes - The Earth's Transformation - Gen. 1:3-31

Period of Rest - God's Rest from Creation - Gen. 2:2-3

Structure of Genesis 1

The Transformation and Filling of the Earth is described in Eight Episodes:

- 1. Separation of Day from Night**
- 2. Separation of the Waters**
- 3. Appearance of Dry Land**
- 4. Sprouting of Vegetation**
- 5. Sun and Moon as Signs**
- 6. Creation of Fish and Birds**
- 7. Creation of Land Creatures**
- 8. Creation of Adam and Eve**

Structure of Genesis 1

The Eight Essential Questions Divided into a Sequence of Six Days of Days are These?

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| 1. Separation of Day from Night | Day 1 |
| 2. Separation of the Waters | Day 2 |
| 3. Appearance of Dry Land | } Day 3 |
| 4. Sprouting of Vegetation | |
| 5. Sun and Moon as Signs | Day 4 |
| 6. Creation of Fish and Birds | Day 5 |
| 7. Creation of Land Creatures | } Day 6 |
| 8. Creation of Adam and Eve | |

Structure of Genesis 1

Each of the Eight Episodes is described via a Four-Part Structure:

- 1. Command or Edict** (And God said)
- 2. Confirmation it happened** (And it came to be so)
- 3. More detail given in** (Parenthetical verses)
- 4. God's Assessment** (And God saw that it was good)

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

It's universally agreed that *yom* has more than one meaning.

Included are:

- a 12-hour daylight period,
- a 24-hour day,
- a number of days collectively,
- an unspecified period of time,
- or time in general.

Therefore, when *yom* appears in a verse, it's the *context of the verse* that establishes its intended meaning.

And, its meaning in one verse does not, necessarily, mean that it has the same meaning in another verse.

When *yom* is used with an ordinal number, it's not a legitimate rule of Hebrew grammar to claim that it means a 24-hour day.

With these points in mind, let's examine the *context* of the Genesis 1 verses in which *yom* is used.

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

Separation of Day from Night (Four verses)

Gen. 1:5a - *God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night.*

Gen. 1:14a - *And God said, Let there be lights in the expanse of heavens to separate the day from the night.*

Gen. 1:16 - *And God made the two great lights - the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night.*

Gen. 1:18a - *[God set them] to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness.*

In all four of these verses, *yom* refers to the 12-hour (on-average) daylight period that *man will experience* as he lives on earth.

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

Influence of the Sun and Moon on Earthly Existence

Gen. 1:14b - *And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years.*

This verse states that the sun and moon are the means by which set-times such as “planting time, harvest time, etc.” are established that regulate man’s earthly existence.

Yom, in this instance, refers to ordinary solar days that *man will experience* as he lives earth.

The moon, in conjunction with the sun, enables life to exist as we know it, because it stabilizes the earth’s rotational axis at an appropriate angle so that seasonal variations occur as the earth travels on its yearly orbit around the sun.

Use of the Hebrew Word *Yom*

The creation account is divided into six parts by a Refrain:

Gen. 1:5b, 8b, 13, 19, 23, 31b - *And there was evening and there was morning, one day.* (ASV, RSV)

“a second day”

“a third day”

“and so forth”

Translations that use “the first day” introduce the false notion that this verse is referring to the first time period of creation.

This is not an accurate translation of the Hebrew text and it has led many to discount the beginning time period of Genesis 1:1.

Because of this confusion, it's vital to analyze the refrain in order to determine its exact context.

Analysis of the Refrain

Analysis of the Refrain

“And there was evening and there was morning, one day”

Concerning the syntax of the refrain, it should be noted that two verbs are used.

This indicates that the “evening” and “morning” terms are successive events that mark the beginning and ending of a normal earth day nighttime period.

Thus, the context of the refrain is consistent with the other uses of *yom*, all of which have reference to an earth day (or days) and not a time period of creation.


Therefore, there is no justification whatsoever in claiming that *yom* should be interpreted as a 24-hour “creation” day - and to do so, is simply a suppositional assertion.

Analysis of the Refrain

“And there was evening and there was morning, one day”

The next critical question is - Why is the creation account divided into six segments?

The key idea to be grasped is the intent of the author in relating a nighttime rest period after describing a transformational episode.

Since God has infinite power, it's obvious that this nighttime period is not meant to suggest that the Creator needed a rest. 

Therefore, this is the defining clue that the author is not describing, in detail, *how* God transformed the earth, or that the process consisted of six separate segments.

Instead, the author is documenting the earth's transformation in a way that projects a living pattern for mankind, which is to consist of a six-day routine of daily work and nightly rest.

Commentary
on the
Creation Episodes
(and Key Passages)

Commentary

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Verse 1 is not a title or a summary; rather, it's an independent statement that God created the entire universe out-of-nothing.

Unlike English, Biblical Hebrew did not have a single word for the universe; it did so by means of a merism or figure of speech.

Thus “the heavens and the earth” means the totality of the universe including the stars, galaxies, sun, moon, earth, and planets and every seen and unseen part of the created world.

Hebrew “bereshith” (In the beginning) teaches that the creation of the universe involved some unspecified period of time.

Commentary



Genesis 1:2

And the earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

Verse 2 changes the frame of reference to that of the earth and describes its primordial condition prior to its transformation.

Earth's darkness was a result of its opaque atmosphere, which prevented the sun's radiation from reaching the earth's surface. (See Job 38:9)

But, the Spirit of God was present to superintend all activities.

Commentary

Genesis 1:3 (First Episode)

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.

Since all forms of energy, including visible light, were created “in the beginning” - the phrase “Let there be light” does not mean its creation.

The Hebrew word “*hayah*” translated, “Let there be” is not the equivalent of create (*bara*) or make (*‘asah*).

Instead, *hayah* means the *coming-to-pass* of sunlight reaching the earth’s surface because of its decreasing atmospheric density.

On earth, *daylight* could now be distinguished from *darkness* as the earth rotated on its axis.

Since the Sun’s radiant energy is the power source for all life on earth, it’s appropriate that the first episode of the earth’s transformation addresses the appearance-of-light.

Commentary

Genesis 1:6 (Second Episode)

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.”

The establishment of a water cycle between the water vapor in the sky above and the water in the sea below characterizes the second episode of the earth’s transformation.

The energy necessary to establish this evaporation-type water cycle was radiation from the sun.

This process cycle also confirms the existence of the sun to keep the earth from being like a frozen ice-ball.

Commentary

Genesis 1:9 (Third Episode)

And God said, “Let the water under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.”

The edict that initiated the third episode commanded the gathering of the waters and the appearance of dry land.

This was the beginning of what is now known as Plate Tectonics or the emergence of dry land and its movement over time.

This land movement resulted in the drift of continents, volcanic activity, the buildup of mountain ranges, and the formation of other geological features of the earth's crust.

Commentary

Genesis 1:11 (Fourth Episode)

And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.”

The fourth transformation episode resulted in the bringing forth of vegetation.

It testifies to an extended period of time during which plants sprouted, matured, bore fruit, and reproduced after their kind.

This organic life cycle was effectively sustained by the sun’s radiated energy.

By the process of photosynthesis, the earth’s vegetation absorbed carbon dioxide and released oxygen to help produce an oxygen-rich atmosphere.

Commentary

Genesis 1:14,15 (Fifth Episode)

And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.”

English translations of the Hebrew text can be misleading as to what Verse 14 actually declares.

Properly translated the first sentence says: *Let the lights in the expanse of the heavens be for separating the day from the night.*

In other words, this verse is not describing the creation of the lights; instead, it's stating their purpose.

Commentary

Genesis 1:16

And God made the two great lights – the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night - and the stars.

The parenthetical or explanatory Verse 16, references the two great lights being “made” (Hebrew verb ‘asah).

But, ‘asah appears in the proper form to indicate completed action and in English should read, “had made”.

Therefore, a proper understanding of this verse is that, from a position on earth, the “two great lights” became visible for the first time due to the clearing of the earth’s atmosphere.

Commentary

Genesis 1:20 (Sixth Episode)

And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.”

In the sixth episode, God expressed his desire to have the waters teem with living creatures
and for birds to fly in the sky above the earth.

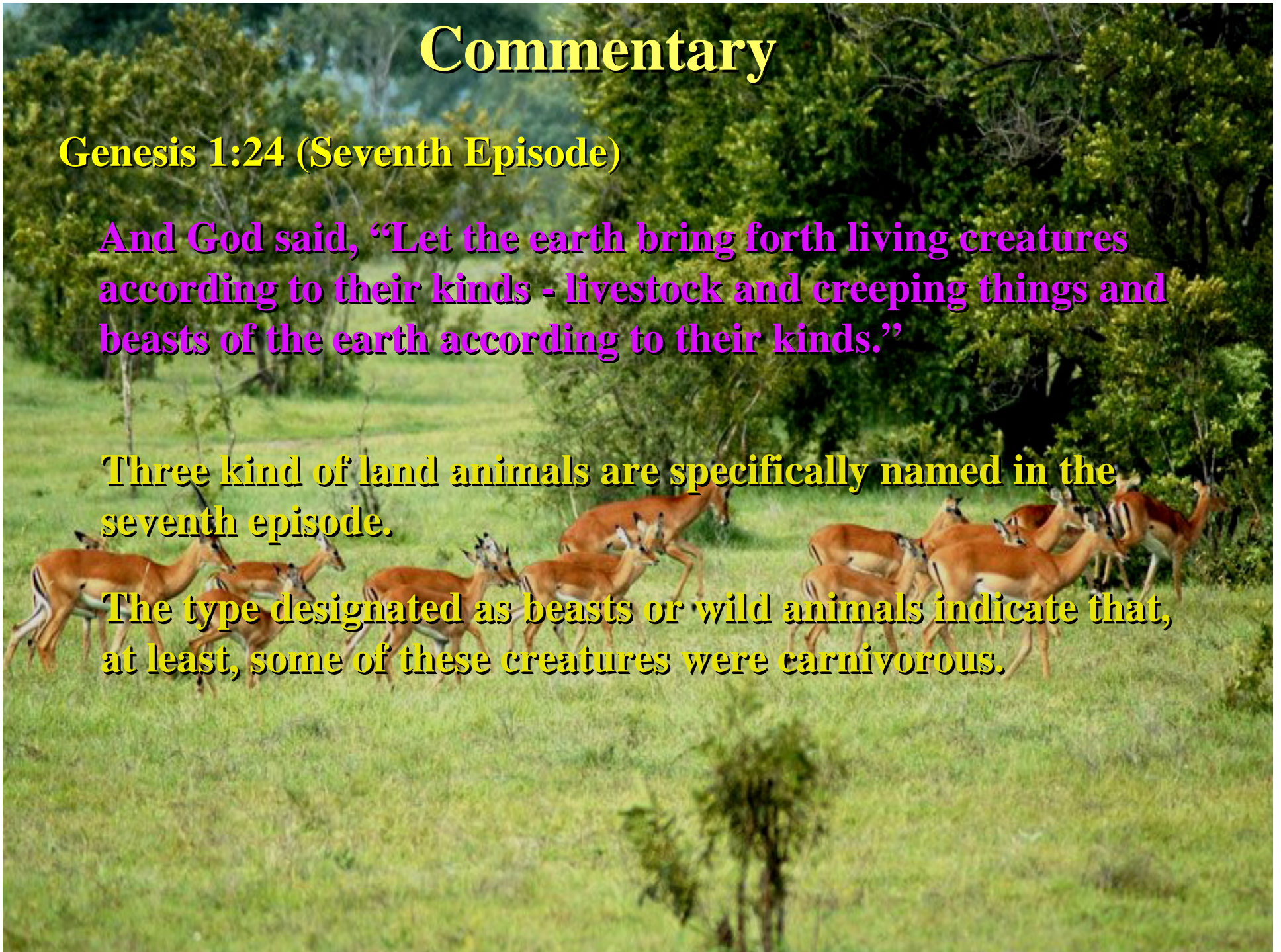
Commentary

Genesis 1:24 (Seventh Episode)

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds - livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.”

Three kind of land animals are specifically named in the seventh episode.

The type designated as beasts or wild animals indicate that, at least, some of these creatures were carnivorous.



Commentary

Genesis 1:26 (Eighth Episode)

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

In the eighth and final episode of the earth’s transformation, God stated his desire of creating man in His own image and to give them dominion over all creation to be royal stewards.

Being created in the image of God is a unique blessing and a pre-requisite to experience spiritual life.

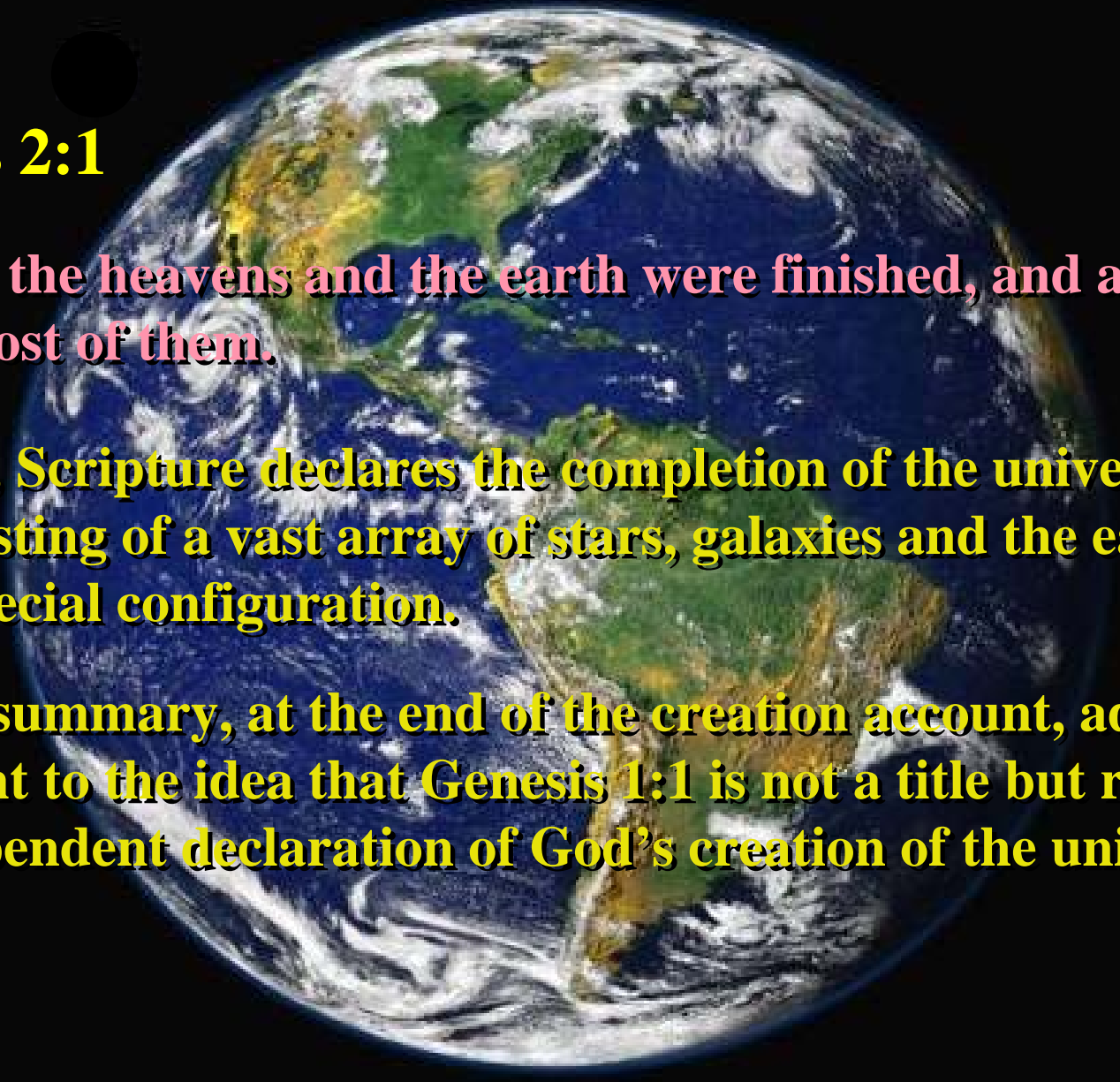
Commentary

Genesis 2:1

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Here, Scripture declares the completion of the universe, consisting of a vast array of stars, galaxies and the earth in its special configuration.

This summary, at the end of the creation account, adds weight to the idea that Genesis 1:1 is not a title but rather an independent declaration of God's creation of the universe.



Commentary

Genesis 2:2,3

And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The seventh day does not include the “evening and morning” phrase because those words symbolize a nighttime *physical* rest.

Whereas, God’s seventh day symbolizes *spiritual* refreshment, which is gained through the Sabbath day worship of God.

And, Hebrews 3 confirms that the seventh day continues to this day by warning that the disobedient will not enter God’s rest.

Followed by Hebrews 4:9-11, which encourages the obedient to make every effort to enter that rest.

Commentary

Exodus 20:11a

For [in] six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.

The words translated “heaven” (shamayim) and “earth” (eretz) should be understood to mean “sky” and “land.”

Thus it says, the Lord made three things in transforming the earth - the sky, the land, and the sea.

Therefore, this verse is not referring to Genesis 1:1, where God created the universe, but the rest of Genesis 1, where God made the sky, land, and sea and then filled them with various life forms.

Commentary

Exodus 20:11a

For [in] six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day.

It should be noted that the preposition “in” is placed in brackets because an equivalent word does not appear in the Hebrew text.

Its insertion significantly distorts the meaning of the verse by fostering the notion of a six-day time period.

Instead, the phrase “**For six days**” refers to the sequence of days established by the refrain verses, which reference earth days and not time periods of creation.

Thus, this phrase reflects the literary structure of Genesis 1 and its context mirrors that of the refrain as well as the preceding verse of Exodus 20:9.

Commentary

Exodus 20:9,10a

Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God.

These explanatory verses make the context of the fourth commandment quite clear because they describe a living pattern for man while extending it to include a seventh day of worship.

Therefore, in Exodus 20:8, believers are commanded to:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”

Thus, the overall structure of Genesis 1, fortified by the fourth commandment, prescribes a living pattern for man and adherence to this pattern is essential for his well being - both physically and spiritually.

**What can we
Conclude ?**

Conclusions

Genesis 1 is a highly structured narrative that conveys a number of theological truths that include:

- **God is the creator of all things.**
- **He is transcendent and above his creation.**
- **He alone is to be worshipped (not created things).**
- **He created man in his own image and then gave them dominion over creation to be faithful stewards.**
- **He provided man with a pattern of living that includes the observance of a Sabbath Day of worship.**

Conclusions

The Christian community has not been able to reach a consensus on a preferred interpretation of Genesis 1 and this has resulted in a variety of views.

Of the six historic viewpoints outlined earlier, each of them is considered defective for one or more of the following reasons:

- The viewpoint does not have scriptural warrant.
- The account is not accepted as a narrative delineating three major epochs and eight episodes of the earth's transformation.
- The use of *yom* is misinterpreted, which results in a misunderstanding concerning the nature of the Genesis days.
- The Genesis days are erroneously correlated with long geological ages of the earth.
- An attempt is made to establish some sort of time relationship between the so-called creation-day and an ordinary earth-day.

Conclusions

All Genesis 1 verses, in which *yom* appears, have as their context the communication of what will be experienced on *earth* rather than a description of what happened during *creation*.

Therefore, the expression *creation-day* (or *day-of-creation*) is quite misleading; since it implies the identification of a discrete time period of creation.

Likewise, the grouping of eight transformation episodes into a sequence of days does not mean that there were six time periods of *creation*; instead, the refrain divides the text, as a literary device, to establish a six-day work and rest pattern for mankind.

The transformation of the earth did not happen in six separate segments, with intervening rest periods; instead, the “making” of the earth was a long, continuous and essentially seamless process.

Conclusions

Other than the Framework View, the predominant viewpoints of Genesis 1 all assign some sort of duration to the Genesis days.

However, nowhere in Genesis 1 is *yom* used, explicitly or implicitly, to designate a partial segment (or day) of creation.

Therefore, it's sheer speculation to attribute any kind of duration to a supposed creation segment.

In other words, the Genesis days are not time periods of creation and it's a myth to think that a literal interpretation of Genesis 1 dictates a creation time period of six 24-hour days.

Augustine was quite right in thinking that it is “perhaps impossible to determine” what kind of days these were - as long as they are considered days of creation and that the sun was created on “Day Four”.

In reality, the days of Genesis 1 relate to days on earth and not to days of creation!

Conclusions

In summary, all viewpoints of Genesis 1 ought to be abandoned in favor of the Divine-Pattern View.

This view interprets the creation account in a straightforward manner recognizing that a literary-style analogy is used, as a communicative tool, to describe the progression of the Earth's transformation in the context and terms of sequential earth days.

And, importantly, this interpretation is compatible with the conclusions drawn from credible scientific investigations of the natural world.

Consequently, the Divine-Pattern View can serve as a consensus science/faith interpretation, especially for those who recognize the validity of scientific evidence and are desirous of upholding the harmony of both books of God's revelation.

Questions and Discussion

raywill@brmemc.net