

A DEFENSE OF LITERAL DAYS IN THE CREATION WEEK†

by

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Over the past decade, there has been a proliferation of articles defending either a literal or a figurative¹ interpretation of the days in the creation week.² While some of the issues associated with the debate about a literal versus a figurative understanding of the creation days in Genesis 1 have been discussed since the early days of the church,³ the figurative interpretation of the creation days representing each day as an extended period of time is of recent vintage.⁴ Though a few significant

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¹In this paper, I am using the expression “literal” day to refer to a normal, 24-hour day and “figurative” day to refer to a non-literal day.

²For a recent collection of essays treating both the literal and figurative interpretation of the days in the creation week, see *Did God Create in Six Days?* ed. Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999).

³For a historical survey of the interpretation of the creation days, see Jack Lewis, “The Days of Creation: An Historical Survey of Interpretation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32 (December 1989): 433–55.

⁴A recent article by Robert Letham attempts to demonstrate “that a non-literal view of Genesis 1 has a pedigree reaching back to the third century” (“In the Space of Six Days’: The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 [Fall 1999]: 151). Though it is true that there have been in the history of Christian doctrine dating back to the third century those interpreters of the creation days advocating a figurative understanding of these days, their non-literal interpretation was diametrically opposed to recent figurative understandings of the creation days. Under some influence from Greek philosophy, early figurative interpreters of the creation days, such as Origen and Augustine, taught that God instantaneously created the world (see Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time?” *Origins* 21 [1994]: 6–7). While we understand that some early interpreters had theological and hermeneutical ambiguities, none of them argued for any of the days of the creation week to be millions of years old (see David W. Hall, “Evolution of Mythology,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* p. 275). Consequently, Letham’s article is somewhat misleading and selective in his use of source material. For a more comprehensive and evenhanded treatment of the

interpreters prior to the Reformation did not consistently interpret the days of the creation week in a literal manner, they clearly did not support, nor could they have even envisioned, a figurative use for each of the creation days representing an extended period of time. However, since the days of the Reformation, with a renewed and more consistent emphasis on a grammatical-historical hermeneutic, a literal interpretation of the creation days has been the prevailing view of orthodox Christianity. This literal interpretation maintains that God created the heavens, the earth, and all things therein in six, successive 24-hour days.

The literal interpretation of the creation days has come under a more threatening and increasing assault within the last 150 to 200 years. With the rise of modern geology, it became apparent to some that if modern man were to be able to explain the earth's topography by the processes that he could observe, he would have to allow for an earth that has existed for millions of years.⁵ Because the geological data for an old earth seemed so overwhelming, some who claimed loyalty to the teachings of Scripture felt compelled to reevaluate the literal understanding of the days of the creation week and to find novel ways to bring their exegetical and theological results into conformity with an old earth. Because of this, reevaluation has resulted in a polarization of thought concerning the earth's age. As in the time prior to the Reformation, two broad interpretative groups have again surfaced: those who interpret the days of creation figuratively and those who interpret the days literally. While those who interpret the creation days figuratively may have some level of hermeneutical continuity with a few pre-Reformation interpreters, their conclusions are radically different: an old earth model supported by modern scientific belief and by "scientifically correct" reinterpretations of key biblical texts. Those who currently interpret the creation days figuratively maintain either that each day corresponds to a long period of time,⁶ perhaps millions of years or whatever amount of time is

historical data, see David W. Hall, "The Westminster View of Creation Days," *Premise* 5 (July 1998), available at <http://capo.org/premise/98/july/98/p980710.html>; David W. Hall, Mark A. Herzer, and Wesley A. Baker, "History Answering Present Objections," available at <http://capo.org/1540-1740.html>; and "The Patristics on Creation," available at <http://capo.org/patristics.html>. Although Hall's conclusions have been recently challenged by William S. Barker ("The Westminster Assembly on the Days of Creation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 [Spring 2000]: 113-20), Hall has effectively rebutted Barker's challenge by demonstrating that orthodox theologians prior to 1800 clearly and uncompromisingly maintained that God created the world and all things therein in the space of six literal days ("Still the Only View Expressed by Westminster Divines on Creation Days," at <http://capo.org/OpenLetter.html>).

⁵See L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), pp. 153-54.

⁶So Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1994),

demanding by current geological study, or that the days of the creation week are literary forms picturing a topical account of creation that focuses on vegetation and humanity, rather than a chronological sequence,⁷ and, concomitantly, providing tacit support for an old earth model.⁸ Generally, the advocates of this figurative interpretation hold to some form of day-age theory, progressive creationism, framework hypothesis, analogical view, or theistic evolution.⁹

Against the figurative use of "day," the literal interpretation of the days of the creation week has been a clearly expressed orthodox interpretation since the Reformation. Martin Luther reflected this interpretation: "We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six days, as the words read."¹⁰ John Calvin and Francis Turretin also clearly articulated a literal understanding of the days of the creation

pp. 45–52; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), pp. 56–57; James O. Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion*, 4 vols. in 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 1:139–59; R. Laird Harris, "The Length of the Creative Days in Genesis 1," in *Did God Create in Six Days?* pp. 101–11.

⁷Mark D. Futato, "Because It Had Rained: A Study of Gen 2:5–7 with Implications for Gen 2:4–25 and Gen 1:1–2:3," *Westminster Theological Journal* 60 (Spring 1998): 17; Futato's article is a complement to an article by Meredith G. Kline "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 (March 1996): 2–15; see also Kline's earlier article, "Because It Had Not Rained," *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (May 1958): 145–57; so also Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, trans. David G. Preston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), pp. 49–59.

⁸While advocates of the framework hypothesis may not explicitly argue for an old earth, the reinterpretation of the creation week as a topical account, rather than a chronological account, is certainly coordinate with old earth creationism. If there is any doubt about what is, at the minimum, implied by the framework hypothesis, its implications are explicitly stated by Meredith Kline, when he maintains that his understanding of Scripture's teaching about biblical cosmogony "is open to the current scientific view of a very old universe and, in that respect, does not discountenance the theory of the evolutionary origin of man" ("Space and Time," p. 15, n. 47), though he also insists that he adheres to the historicity and federal headship of Adam. He further laments that young earth creationism "is a deplorable disservice to the cause of biblical truth" (*ibid.*).

⁹For a summary of these types of categories, as well as varying levels of interaction with each, see Thomas Allen McIver, "Creationism: Intellectual Origins, Cultural Context, and Theoretical Diversity" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1989), pp. 403–530; C. John Collins, "Reading Genesis 1:1–2:3 as an Act of Communication," in *Did God Create in Six Days?* pp. 145–51. For a presentation and critique of progressive creationism and theistic evolution, as well as young earth creationism, see *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*, ed. J. P. Moreland and John Mark Reynolds (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

¹⁰Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Volume 1, Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1958), p. 5.

week.¹¹ Various Protestant and Baptist confessions of faith have also affirmed a literal understanding of the creation “days.” From our own Baptist heritage, the literal interpretation of the creation days is clearly revealed in the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689: “In the beginning it pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, to create or make the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good” (chapter 4, paragraph 1).¹² Many evangelical and fundamentalist schools are still affirming this historic, literal understanding of the days of creation in our present day. In Article 6 on “Creation,” Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary’s statement of faith says, “We believe in the original direct creation of the universe, a voluntary act of God whereby for his own glory and according to His eternal counsel, in six successive days of twenty-four hours each, He gave existence to all things in distinction from Himself.”

A fair assessment of the historical data demonstrates that a literal interpretation of the days of the creation week has been the normal position of orthodox Christianity. If we consistently affirm the perspicuity of Scripture, the literal interpretation of the creation days provides the most internally consistent synthesis of Scripture’s comprehensive message about the nature of the creation week. My objective in this article is to provide a biblical justification for a literal understanding of the six days of the creation week. To accomplish this objective, I will initially provide biblical evidence to support this literal interpretation and, subsequently, answer some of the reputed biblical problems encountered by this position.

EVIDENCE FOR LITERAL DAYS IN THE CREATION WEEK

English versions of Genesis 1:1–31 consistently translate the Hebrew noun יום as “day.”¹³ The semantic range of יום includes uses such

¹¹John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, 2 vols. (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 1:78; and Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. Francis Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:444–45.

¹²The Second London Baptist Confession’s doctrinal affirmation about creation is derived from the earlier Westminster Confession of Faith (1646): “It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of His eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days, and all very good” (chapter 4, paragraph 1).

¹³To cite a few examples, see the NASB, NASB ’95, NIV, KJV, NKJV, RSV, NRSV, NLT, TEV, CEV, and *NET Bible*.

as “daytime,” as opposed to nighttime, a calendrical “day” of 24 hours, a specific day, “lifespan,” “time,” “years.” When יום is part of compound grammatical constructions, it has an idiomatic nuance that allows for a non-literal sense, such as “when.”¹⁴ While the semantic range of יום reflects that its various uses range from a literal day to a figurative use of “day” as an extended period of time, lexicographers consistently cite the enumerated days of Genesis 1:1–31 as examples of a solar day.¹⁵

In opposition to Hebrew lexicographers, many interpreters would contend that the figurative use of יום warrants reinterpreting each of the enumerated days of the creation week as extended periods.¹⁶ If this figurative use of יום were consistent with Genesis 1, it would provide an acceptable harmonization of Scripture and many current views of science. However, we are persuaded that a figurative use of יום in Genesis 1 is incongruous with the semantics of the singular יום,¹⁷ its syntactical combinations, and its biblical parallels.

Do the semantical constraints of יום permit a figurative use of it in Genesis 1:1–31, or do they suggest a literal use of יום? Is the use of the singular number, as opposed to the plural, significant in this passage? How do the modifiers of יום as well as surrounding phrases impact its

¹⁴See David J. A. Clines, ed., *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 5 vols. to date (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994–), 2:166–85 [hereafter cited as *DCH*]; and William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), pp. 130–31 (hereafter cited as *CHAL*); see also the pertinent discussion by James Stambaugh, “The Days of Creation: A Semantic Approach,” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 5 (1991): 70–78.

¹⁵For example, see *DCH*, 2:166; Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (reprint ed., Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 398 (hereafter cited as *BDB*); Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 5 vols., rev. W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 2:399 (hereafter cited as *HALOT*). Not only do lexicons recognize the literal use, but it is also reflected in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. “יום,” by M. Saeboe, 6:23 (hereafter cited as *TDOT*); and *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. “יום,” by P. A. Verhoef, 2:420 (hereafter cited as *NIDOTTE*).

¹⁶Besides some of the previously cited sources in footnotes 6 and 7, see also Perry G. Phillips, “Are the Days of Genesis Longer than 24 Hours? The Bible Says, ‘Yes!’” *IBRI Research Report* 40 (1990): 1–5; and Thomas Key, “How Long Were the Days of Genesis?” *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 36 (September 1984): 159–61; Dick Fischer, “The Days of Creation: Hours or Eons?” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 42 (March 1990): 15–22; and R. Clyde McCone, “Were the Days of Creation Twenty-Four Hours Long? ‘No,’” in *The Genesis Debate*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), pp. 12–35.

¹⁷While we do not endorse James Barr’s denigration of biblical inerrancy (*The Bible in the Modern World* [London: SCM Press, 1973], pp. 13–34), we do concur with him when he maintains that biblical exegesis demands a literal interpretation of the creation days (*Fundamentalism* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], pp. 40–43).

literal or figurative use?¹⁸ How do other Scriptural passages interpret the days of creation? In responding to these questions, we will set forth five reasons why the unambiguous meaning of Scripture affirms that the days of the creation week be interpreted as six, successive 24-hour days.

Semantic Constraints of the Singular Use of יוֹם

The noun יוֹם fits into the semantic domain of Hebrew words used for time. The emphases of the subdomains for time words may focus on the general nature and/or duration of time. This would include words like עֵת ("time"), עוֹלָם ("time," "long time," "eternity"), עַד ("always," "forever"), דְּרָגָה ("ancient times," "antiquity"), זֶמַן ("season"), and דּוֹר ("generation"). Another subdomain is more specific periods of time, such as שָׁנָה ("year"), חֹדֶשׁ ("month"), יָרֵחַ ("month"), שָׁבֻעַ ("week"), יוֹם ("day"), and בֹּקֶר ("morning"). While this listing of time words is not exhaustive,¹⁹ it does suggest that the various biblical authors had at their disposal a more than adequate lexical stock to describe short or long periods of time, and, significantly for our purposes, יוֹם is a time word that may legitimately be used to describe a literal day. However, יוֹם, like our English word *day*, is polysemantic, involving literal and figurative uses. To determine if our specific time word, יוֹם, is used of a literal, 24-hour day or an extended period, we must more precisely consider its semantic constraints.

When יוֹם is used in the singular and is not part of a compound grammatical construction,²⁰ it is consistently used in reference to a literal day of 24 hours or to the daytime portion of a literal day. However, when יוֹם is used in the plural or is part of a compound grammatical construction, some of its uses in the plural may be extended to include the sense of "time," "year," or for any extended period of time. Hasel has stated the case in this manner:

¹⁸For a helpful study of the semantics of יוֹם, see Hasel, "Days," pp. 21–31.

¹⁹For other helpful treatments of Hebrew words for time, see Stambaugh, "The Days of Creation," pp. 73–74; Simon J. DeVries, *Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), pp. 39–47; *TDOT*, s.v. "יוֹם," 6:20–21; Russell Grigg, "How Long Were the Days of Genesis 1?" *Creation Ex Nihilo* 19 (December 1996–February 1997): 23–24; and *NIDOTTE*, s.v. "Time and Eternity," by P. A. Verhoef, 4:1252–55.

²⁰By compound grammatical construction, I am referring to the following types of items: the noun יוֹם being a part of a complex prepositional construction, יוֹם being a part of a longer prepositional construction which has a verbal immediately following it, יוֹם being a part of the multi-word construction known as the construct-genitive relationship, יוֹם being reduplicated (יוֹם יוֹם). For a more complete development of this construction, see *TDOT*, s.v. "יוֹם," 6:14–20.

The extended, non-literal meanings of the term *yôm* are always found in connection with prepositions, prepositional phrases with a verb, compound constructions, formulas, technical expressions, genitive combinations, construct phrases, and the like. In other words, extended, non-literal meanings of this Hebrew term have special linguistic and contextual connections which indicate clearly that a non-literal meaning is intended. If such special linguistic connections are absent, the term *yôm* does not have an extended, non-literal meaning; it has its normal meaning of a literal day of 24-hours.²¹

The noun “day,” יוֹם, is used in the Hebrew Old Testament 2,304 times. Of these uses, יוֹם appears in the singular 1,452 times. It is used in the Pentateuch 668 times. Of these, the singular form is used 425 times. It is used in Genesis 152 times, with 83 of these in the singular.²² In Genesis 1, יוֹם is used 11 times, 10 times in the singular and once in the plural. This lone use of the plural noun יָמִים, “days,” does not provide any support for the use of יוֹם as an extended period of time in the creation account. While the use of יָמִים, “days,” is clearly not a reference to any of the creation days, its use in 1:14 specifically has reference to calendrical “days and years.”

Of the 10 uses of the singular “day” in Genesis 1, 4 refer to “day” as opposed to “night,” לַיְלָה (1:5, 14, 16, 17).²³ As such, each full day of the creation week is divided according to the natural phenomena of “daytime,” יוֹם, and “nighttime,” לַיְלָה. It is this day and night cycle that constitutes each full day of the creation week,²⁴ as Genesis 1:5 indicates: “God called the light day, and the darkness He called night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day”²⁵ (see also in 1:16, where the greater light governs the daylight and the lesser light the nighttime). The remaining 6 uses of יוֹם make up the enumerated days of the creation week, the “first day,” “second day,” etc. (1:5, 8, 13, 19,

²¹Hasel, “Days,” pp. 23–24.

²²These statistics are derived from *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. “יוֹם,” by E. Jenni, 2:526–27 (hereafter cited as *TLOT*).

²³*HALOT*, 2:401.

²⁴*TDOT*, s.v. “יוֹם,” 6:22–23.

²⁵All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the 1995 edition of NASB; however, in my quotation of Gen 1:5, I have changed NASB’s translation of “one day” to “the first day.” The difference between these two options for translation relates to how we render יוֹם. While יוֹם is often translated as a cardinal number, it may also be translated as an ordinal, “first”; see *HALOT*, 1:30. The very nature of the progression of “second” through “seventh” supports יוֹם being taken as an ordinal. The grammatical significance of this has been stated: “The indefinite noun plus יוֹם has a definite sense in the opening chapter of Genesis: יוֹם יוֹם ‘the first day’ (Gen 1:5)” (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990], p. 274); so also Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 8, and see his discussion of this in his endnote 14, p. 353.

24, 31).

While we recognize that the semantic domain for the time word “day” is broad, the use of the singular in Genesis 1 suggests that a literal nuance is its intended meaning. In fact, the singular noun in the absolute state is consistently used in the Old Testament to refer to an ordinary day, and not to an extended period of time involving more than a 24-hour day.²⁶ In addition, this literal nuance may be corroborated by its patterns of collocation. When the singular “day” has a distinctive relationship with a numeral and the phrase “evening and morning,” the unambiguous meaning “day” is a 24-hour day.²⁷

Numeric Qualifiers and יום

When each day of the creation week is summarized, the singular “day” is modified by a numerical qualifier, “first day” (v. 5), “second day” (v. 8), and sequentially continuing to the “sixth day” (vv. 13, 19, 24, 31). Immediately after the sixth day, God ceased from his work. This day of cessation from God’s creative work is designated on three occasions as the “seventh day” (2:2 [twice], 3). The use of the numeric qualifier and sequential numbering suggest that this is a literal day.²⁸

The singular and plural forms of “day” are used with a number in excess of 350 times in the Old Testament.²⁹ A number is used to qualify the singular use of יום approximately 150 times.³⁰ When יום is qualified by a number, it is almost invariably used in a literal sense.³¹ An example of this is found in Leviticus 12:3, “On the *eighth day* the

²⁶Since Moses had at his disposal a number of time words that clearly describe an age, he could have chosen one of these words, such as לְעֹלָם (“long time”); so Arthur C. Custance, *Hidden Things of God’s Revelation*, The Doorway Papers, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 295.

²⁷Hasel, “Days,” p. 26.

²⁸Terence E. Fretheim, “Were the Days of Creation Twenty-Four Hours Long? ‘Yes,’” in *The Genesis Debate*, p. 18.

²⁹See Stambaugh, “The Days of Creation,” p. 3.

³⁰*TLOT*, s.v. “יום,” 2:528.

³¹See Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr. “Reformed Theology and Six-Day Creation,” *Chalcedon Report* 398 (September 1998): 28. There is a possible exception to this in Hos 6:2: “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day, that we may live before him.” Ross has attempted to use this passage to mitigate the force of this argument (*Creation and Time*, pp. 46–47). However, Hosea’s use of numbers “two” and “third” as qualifiers is different than the pattern we see in Genesis 1. Hosea’s use of these numbers is a common Semitic rhetorical feature known as a graded numerical device, or an $x/x+1$ pattern. As such, the emphasis is not on a literal numbering of days, but refers to a brief period of time (see David M. Fouts, “How Short an Evening and Morning?” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 11 [1997]: 307–8).

flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised.” The use of יום with a numeric qualifier is also illustrated in Numbers 7. In this context, leaders from each tribe of Israel brought various gifts to the Lord on 12 sequential, literal days. A number qualifies each use of the word “day.” Numbers 7:12 illustrates this point, “Now the one who presented his offering on the *first day* was Nahshon the son of Amminadab, of the tribe of Judah” (for the remainder of the days along with their numerical qualifiers, see vv. 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, 72, 78). Thus, the use of day with a numerical qualifier is a clear reference to a literal day.³²

Not only does the correlation of the singular “day” with a number support a literal understanding of each day, the use of consecutive ordinal numbers indicates a chronological arrangement of the creation days. The sequential use of the ordinal numbers “first” through “sixth” for each day of the creation week, followed by the “seventh day” (2:2 [twice], 3), indicates a chronological progression of days.³³ Hasel has concisely stated the issue:

What seems of significance is the sequential emphasis of the numerals 1–7 without any break or temporal interruption. This seven-day schema, the schema of the week of six workdays followed by “the seventh day” as rest day, interlinks the creation “days” as normal days in a consecutive and non-interrupted sequence.³⁴

“Evening” and “Morning” as Qualifiers of יום

The singular יום in Genesis 1 is qualified further with the words “evening” and “morning.” The clauses in which these two nouns are found, “and there was evening and there was morning,” stand in juxtaposition with each enumerated day of the creation week (1:5, 8, 13, 19,

³²This type of syntagmatic relationship with יום and numbers is true for the numbers 1 through 1000 (so Hasel, “Days,” p. 26). An exception to this literal understanding is found in Zech 14:7, where יום יחיד is apparently used with a non-literal sense of a “unique day” or a “continuous day.” In arguing against a chronological sequence in Genesis 1, David Sterchi suggests that there is a contextual correlation between Zech 14:7 and Gen 1:5 (“Does Genesis Provide a Chronological Sequence?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 [December 1996]: 532). While Zech 14:7 may be an exception and presents some translation difficulties, as a comparison of various English versions reflects, it certainly cannot be used to undermine the clear usage in Genesis 1 (see Stambaugh, “The Days of Creation,” p. 75).

³³E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964), p. 99; see also Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* p. 183.

³⁴Hasel, “Days,” p. 26.

23, 31). Whether “evening” and “morning” are used together in a context with עֶרֶב (19 times beyond the 6 uses in Genesis 1) or they are used without עֶרֶב (38 times), they are used consistently in reference to literal days.³⁵ Commonly, “evening” and “morning” have been taken as a reference to the entire 24-hour day.³⁶ With this understanding, “evening” is used to represent the entire nighttime portion of a literal day, and “morning” to stand for the entire daytime segment of a day.³⁷ If the use of “evening” and “morning” were intended to recapitulate a whole day of creation, we would expect that the order of the two terms would be reversed: “morning” followed by “evening.”³⁸ While it is true that “evening” and “morning” are always used as a reference to segments of literal days, I am persuaded that “evening” and “morning” in Genesis 1 refer exclusively to the beginning and conclusion of the nighttime period that concludes each of the creation days, after God had ceased from that day’s creative activity.³⁹ There are two reasons for this understanding.

First, this understanding is consistent with other Old Testament uses of “evening” and “morning.” The noun עֶרֶב, “evening,” is related to a rarely used verb עָרַב, to “turn into evening.”⁴⁰ In its Qal stem, this verb is used in Judges 19:9 to indicate “the arrival of evening, as indicated by its description as the ending of the day.”⁴¹ While it would be imprecise to define “evening” for the first three creation days as “sunset” since the sun is not actually created until the fourth day,⁴² “evening”

³⁵These statistics are derived from Stambaugh, “The Days of Creation,” p. 72; see also Abraham Even-Shoshan, *A New Concordance of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Kiryat Sefer, 1985), pp. 451–59.

³⁶Fretheim, “Days,” p. 19.

³⁷Hasel, “Days,” p. 28.

³⁸Leon J. Wood, *Genesis*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), p. 25.

³⁹See Robert E. Grossmann’s helpful article, “The Light He Called ‘Day,’” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 3 (1987): 7–34; and Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 8.

⁴⁰*HALOT*, 2:877.

⁴¹*NIDOTTE*, s.v. “בָּרַךְ,” by A. H. Konkel, 1:715.

⁴²Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 8. The sun is not created until the fourth day of creation; however, at God’s command in v. 3, some form of cosmic light came into existence, with the earth possibly rotating on its axis (so Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Record* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976], p. 65), though this is not necessarily required. However, we must insist that the text of Genesis requires that the absolutely sovereign and omnipotent God created a cosmic light source that in some sense “waxed and waned in periods of ‘evening’ and ‘morning’” (Frank Walker, Jr. “A Critique of the Framework Hypothesis,” *Chalcedon Report* 398 [September 1998]: 32). This would suggest that the earth’s relationship to the cosmic light source on the first three days of creation was the same as its relationship to the sun from the fourth day of creation and following;

and “morning” basically refer to the same type of physical phenomenon. This is to say, it is a transitional period of light between the twilight of day and the darkness of night.⁴³ The noun בֹּקֶר, “morning,”⁴⁴ may refer to all the hours of daylight or from midnight until noon.⁴⁵ It may also indicate “the arrival of daylight.”⁴⁶ This last use is the most consistent with the overall context of Genesis 1. The terms “evening” and “morning” “respectively signify the end of the period of light, when divine creativity was suspended, and the renewal of light, when the creative process was resumed.”⁴⁷

These two terms are used in a similar fashion in other passages in the Pentateuch and picture the “evening” and “morning” cycle as completing a day. In Exodus 27:21, Moses instructed Aaron and his sons to keep the lamps in the Tabernacle burning all night until they were extinguished in the morning: “In the tent of meeting, outside the veil which is before the testimony, Aaron and his sons shall keep it in order from *evening* to *morning* before the LORD; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout their generations for the sons of Israel.” The command for Aaron and his sons to keep the lamp burning all night is reiterated in Leviticus 24:3: “Outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from *evening* to *morning* before the LORD continually; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations.” In keeping records of Israel’s wilderness wanderings, Moses describes in Numbers 9:15 how the theophanic cloud would hover over the tabernacle all night when it had been set up: “Outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from *evening* to

see Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, 2 vols. (Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1994), 1:187–88; and Robert C. Harbach, *Studies in the Book of Genesis* (n.p.: Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, 1986), p. 15. Because the sun is not created until the fourth day of creation, some have inferred that the first three days of creation were extended periods of time (so McCone, “Days,” p. 24). Because each day of the creation week is successively numbered and qualified by the “evening” and “morning,” the first three days and the last three days must be equivalent in duration. While John H. Stek is no friend of recent creationism, he also makes the same point about the duration of the six days, whether they be extended periods of time or, according to our interpretation, calendrical days (“What Says the Scripture?” in *Portraits of Creation*, ed. Howard J. Van Till, Robert E. Snow, John H. Stek, Davis A. Young [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], pp. 237–38).

⁴³See U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part One—From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, the Hebrew University, 1961), p. 28.

⁴⁴HALOT, 1:151.

⁴⁵DCH, 2:252.

⁴⁶NIDOTTE, 1:711; see also TDOT, s.v. “בֹּקֶר,” by Ch. Barth, 2:222.

⁴⁷Sarna, *Genesis*, p. 8.

morning before the LORD continually; *it shall be* a perpetual statute throughout your generations” (see also v. 21). The night cycle of evening to morning is also reflected in the description of the Passover ritual in Deuteronomy 16:4: “For seven days no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory, and none of the flesh which you sacrifice on the *evening* of the first day shall remain overnight until *morning*.”⁴⁸ These uses suggest that a literal use of “evening” and “morning” refer to the nighttime. As such, the alternation of “evening” and “morning” in Genesis 1 pictures the nighttime portion that concludes a literal day.⁴⁹

Second, the general framework for each of the creation days also reflects that “evening” and “morning” are used to describe the completion of each day. The creative activity and its cessation are summarized by a fivefold framework that is reflected in the days of creation: divine speech (“God said”), fiat (“let there be,” or an equivalent, such as “let the waters teem,” v. 20),⁵⁰ fulfillment (“there was,” “it was so,” “God created,” etc.), evaluation (“God saw that it was good”),⁵¹ and conclusion (“there was evening and there was morning,” the first day, etc.).⁵² This framework reflects that the “evening-morning” conclusion is consistently used to conclude each creation day. This understanding of the “evening-morning” conclusion depicts “the period of darkness that completes a regular day.”⁵³ This is to say, the “evening” and the “morning” mark

⁴⁸The words *evening* and *morning* in the four verses cited in this paragraph, are italicized for my own emphasis.

⁴⁹Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 184.

⁵⁰The verbs used in the fiat segment of this fivefold framework are usually jussives, with the exception of v. 26 where a cohortative is found, “let us.”

⁵¹The only exception to this evaluation (“God saw that it was good”) is the second day. In contrast to the Masoretic Text, the Septuagint contains an additional clause of evaluation in v. 8. This addition was apparently to harmonize all the days of the creation week, but it does not represent the reading of the original Hebrew text. The omission of this clause in the Hebrew text may indicate that the author saw the creation of the expanse on this day “as only a preliminary stage to the emergence of dry land in v. 10, and thus he reserved the phrase until its most appropriate time” (Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], p. 124). Whatever the reason for the omission of this by Moses, we understand that this fivefold framework was intended only as a general framework.

⁵²With some qualification, Young follows this fivefold pattern (*Studies in Genesis One*, p. 84); this framework is also recognized by critical scholar Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 84–85. Others have seen a sevenfold scheme; see Gordon F. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), pp. 17–19; see also the discussion in Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), pp. 53–54. While either framework needs some qualification, the fivefold framework is generally more consistent with the text of Gen 1.

⁵³Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 184.

“the beginning and end of the *night*, the period in which no creative activity is reported, the period which follows the day.”⁵⁴

Therefore, “evening” and “morning” are respectively used to represent the conclusion of the daylight portion of a literal day, when God suspended his creative activity, and the reemergence of daylight, when God resumed another day of his creative work. As such, each “evening-morning” cycle concludes a creation day and provides a transition to the next day of creative activity.⁵⁵

Scriptural Parallels with יום

Having examined the semantic and syntactic considerations associated with יום, we must also consider the hermeneutical principle of “the analogy of faith,” *analogia fidei*.⁵⁶ Because this hermeneutical guideline maintains that Scripture interprets Scripture, some feel a more appropriate designation is the *analogia scriptura*.⁵⁷ Since Scripture is a self-authenticating special revelation from the triune God, Scripture is a self-interpreting book.⁵⁸ As such, “what is obscure in one passage may be illuminated by another. No single statement or obscure passage of one book can be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by many passages.”⁵⁹ In essence, *analogia scriptura* maintains that the entirety of Scripture is the context and guide in interpreting the specific passages of Scripture. As applied to a literal interpretation of the days of

⁵⁴Grossmann, “Day,” p. 23.

⁵⁵Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 184; so also C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols. in 1, trans. James Martin, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 1:50–51.

⁵⁶For a concise treatment of this hermeneutical subject, see Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), pp. 579–81; and Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994), pp. 181–83.

⁵⁷Grant Osborne observes that *analogia fidei* is at times understood as the interpreter’s personal “faith” being the final interpreter of Scripture (*The Hermeneutical Spiral* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991], p. 273). While this type of understanding misses the mark of the historical use of *analogia fidei* by the Reformers, it is perhaps better to describe this as the *analogia scriptura* (so also Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998], p. 394).

⁵⁸This hermeneutical axiom is stated this way in the Second London Baptist Confession: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched by other places that speak more clearly” (chapter 1, paragraph 9). This axiom is predicated upon the earlier Westminster Confession of Faith (chapter 1, paragraph 9).

⁵⁹Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, p. 579.

the creation week, we should expect this to be confirmed by other Scriptural texts.⁶⁰ There are two passages, dealing with regulations for the observance of the sabbath that cogently reinforce a literal interpretation of the days in the creation week. These passages are Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:14–17.

The fourth commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20:8–11 is for Israel to set the sabbath day apart as a holy day to the LORD. This command is given in vv. 8–10:

Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you.

The motivation for this command is stated in v. 11: “For in six days the LORD made⁶¹ the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.”

While some have attempted to reduce the relationship between the fourth commandment and the creation week to one of “analogy,” in that man’s sabbath rest cannot be identical to God’s rest, but only analogous to God’s day of rest,⁶² this understanding oversimplifies and misrepresents the correlation between these two texts. Exodus 20:11 has a number of connections with the creation week: a “six-plus-one” pattern, “the heavens and the earth,” “the seventh day,” “rested,” “blessed,” and “made it holy.”⁶³ All of this suggests that, at the least, one of God’s purposes in creating the world and all things therein in six, successive literal days followed by a literal day of rest was to set up a pattern for his people to follow. According to this text, Israel’s workweek is patterned after God’s creative activity.⁶⁴ If, for argument sake, we assume that each day was a geological age, we could interpret Exodus 20:11 in this fashion: “For in six geological ages of a million years or so, the LORD made

⁶⁰See Noel Weeks, “The Hermeneutical Problem of Genesis 1–11,” *Themelios* 4 (April 1978): 16–17.

⁶¹Collins’s translation of the verb עָשָׂה as “worked on,” rather than “made” is tenuous (“Reading Genesis 1:1–2:3,” pp. 141–42); cf. *TLOT*, s.v. “עָשָׂה,” by J. Vollmer, 2:949; Exod 20:11 is derived from Gen 2:2 where עָשָׂה is used in the sense of “done.” The use of “done” focuses on the accomplishment of God’s creative activities, as the use of “create,” בָּרָא, in Gen 2:3 clearly indicates.

⁶²So Collins, “Reading Genesis 1:1–2:3,” p. 139.

⁶³Hasel, “Days,” p. 29.

⁶⁴Noel Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1988), p. 112; see also Raymond F. Surburg, “In the Beginning God Created,” in *Darwin, Evolution, and Creation*, ed. Paul A. Zimmerman (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), p. 61.

heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh geological age of a million years or so; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath geological age of a million years or so and made it holy.” Any interpretation other than literal days is problematic for Israel’s proper observance of the sabbath, and seriously undermines a literal interpretation of the days of Genesis 1.⁶⁵

This literal understanding of the creation week is reiterated again in Exodus 31:14–17:

Therefore you are to observe the sabbath, for it is holy to you. Everyone who profanes it shall surely be put to death; for whoever does any work on it, that person shall be cut off from among his people. For six days work may be done, but on the seventh day there is a sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall surely be put to death. So the sons of Israel shall observe the sabbath, to celebrate the sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the sons of Israel forever; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, but on the seventh day He ceased *from labor*, and was refreshed.

In this context, Israel’s observance of the sabbath is a sign of the Mosaic Covenant. God’s commanding Israel to keep the sabbath is grounded in the creation week.⁶⁶ As in Exodus 20:11, 31:17 has a number of links with the creation week: a “six-plus-one” pattern, “heaven and earth,” and “ceased” is the same Hebrew verb, שָׁבַת, translated as “rested” in Genesis 2:2. Obviously, Moses had six literal days in mind with the seventh day also being a 24-hour period.

Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 confirm that the days of the creation week are literal days.⁶⁷ According to these two texts, the references to the creation week are not analogous—man’s rest is not simply like God’s rest on the seventh day—instead, man is to imitate the divine Exemplar. Since God worked for six days and rested on the seventh, the nation of Israel must follow his example.⁶⁸

⁶⁵Robert L. Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), p. 255; see also William Einwechter, “The Meaning of ‘Day’ in Genesis 1–2,” *Chalcedon Report* 398 (September 1998): 13.

⁶⁶J. Gerald Janzen, *Exodus*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox, 1997), p. 222.

⁶⁷While there are a number of New Testament passages that may have some bearing on this subject, our purpose is to treat those biblical texts that have direct impact on whether the days of Genesis 1 are to be interpreted as literal or figurative days. For more information on other texts used in the New Testament, see Douglas F. Kelly, *Creation and Change* (Fearn, Great Britain: Mentor, 1997), pp. 129–34; and Sid Dyer, “The New Testament Doctrine of Creation,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* pp. 221–42.

⁶⁸Fretheim, “Days,” p. 20.

Sequence of Events and יום

The nature of certain aspects of the created order assumes a literal interpretation of the days of the creation week rather than a figurative understanding. On the third day of creation, God created vegetation with fruit trees and seed-bearing plants (Gen 1:11–12). Much vegetation needs insects for pollination. Insects were not created until the sixth day (vv. 24–25). If some plants were dependent upon insects for pollination, it would be impossible for them to survive if each creation day was an extended period of time.⁶⁹ This is to say, a symbiotic relationship between plants and animals is coordinate with literal and successive days in Genesis 1, but this would not be the case if the days refer to extended periods.

Furthermore, if the days are figurative and if there is any consistency in interpretation, then there must be extended periods of light corresponding to “morning” and of darkness corresponding to “evening.” This would guarantee that both plant and animal life would be unable to survive.⁷⁰ Consequently, certain aspects of God’s creation work are more readily harmonized with a literal understanding of the days in the creation week than with a figurative understanding.

In summarizing the evidence for a literal interpretation of the days of the creation week, we have provided five reasons supporting our argument that each day of the creation week was a 24-hour day and that these days immediately followed each other in the space of six days. If semantics, syntax, and overall Scriptural context mean anything in a literal hermeneutic, then יום must refer to a literal day. Therefore, it is clear that the creation account unequivocally communicates that God created the universe and all things therein in six, consecutive literal days.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST LITERAL DAYS IN THE CREATION WEEK

While we have attempted to positively argue for a literal interpretation of the days in the creation week, we have not fully interacted with some of the interpretative arguments used by those who deny this position. In order to demonstrate that a literal interpretation of the creation days is an internally consistent synthesis of Scripture’s comprehensive message about the creation week, we will now show that the arguments

⁶⁹Morris, *The Genesis Record*, p. 64; see also Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 155.

⁷⁰Hasel, “Days,” p. 30.

against this position have no real merit and can be readily answered.

The Seventh Day

Opponents of literal creation days generally use the seventh day of the creation week as a justification for elongated days in Genesis 1. Since no “evening-morning” conclusion is explicitly stated in Genesis 2:1–3, it is argued that the seventh day of “God’s rest was and is still going on.”⁷¹ According to Blocher, this is the “most simple and natural conclusion” that can be drawn from this deliberate omission.⁷² Genesis 2:1–3 implies that the seventh day is unending. This implication supposedly becomes the basis for the use of Genesis 2:1–3 in other passages such as Psalm 95, John 5, and Hebrews 4.⁷³ According to this interpretation, Hebrews 4:3–11, while drawing from Psalm 95:7–11 and Genesis 2:2, suggests that God’s “rest” began when God ceased from his creative activity and still continues until the present. The author of Hebrews uses God’s sabbath rest to challenge his audience to enter into God’s unending sabbath rest.⁷⁴ When the Jews were prepared to persecute Jesus for healing a man on the sabbath, Jesus responded in John 5:17 by claiming, “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.” Blocher maintains that “Jesus’ reasoning is sound only if the Father acts *during his* [Father’s] *sabbath*; only on that condition has the Son the right to act similarly on the sabbath;... God’s sabbath, which marks the end of creation but does not tie God’s hands, is therefore co-extensive with history.”⁷⁵ Based upon these passages and the deliberate omission of the “evening-morning” conclusion in Genesis 2:1–3, “the seventh day of Genesis 1 and 2 represents a minimum of several thousand years and a maximum that is open ended (but finite). It seems reasonable to conclude then, given the parallelism of the Genesis creation account, that the first six days may also have been long time periods.”⁷⁶

Is an open-ended seventh day the “most simple and natural conclusion” to draw from the omission of the “evening-morning” conclusion

⁷¹R. Laird Harris, “The Length of the Creative Days in Genesis 1,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* p. 109.

⁷²Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 56.

⁷³Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 49.

⁷⁴C. John Collins, “How Old Is the Earth? Anthropomorphic Days in Genesis 1:1–2:3,” *Presbyterion* 20 (Fall 1994): 119.

⁷⁵Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 57.

⁷⁶Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 49; so also Mark Ross, “The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* p. 122.

in Genesis 2:1–3? While it is true that this omission is significant, the textual data within Genesis 1:1–2:3 suggests a more natural interpretation. The omission of this “evening-morning” conclusion has a dual significance. We will initially look at the twofold significance of this omission and then interact with the texts used to support a figurative interpretation of the seventh day.

First, the “evening-morning” conclusion is one part of a fivefold framework that Moses uses in shaping the literary fabric for each of the creation days.⁷⁷ It should be noted that none of the other parts of this fivefold framework are mentioned on the seventh day.⁷⁸ Moses uses this fivefold literary framework to represent, in a concise yet accurate manner, God’s work in creating the heavens, the earth, and all things therein for each of the six days of his six-phase program of creation. By excluding the fivefold framework, his theological emphasis is to demonstrate in literary form that the seventh day was a day of cessation from God’s creative activity. This is to say the omission of the “evening-morning” conclusion is related to the omission of the other four parts of the fivefold framework. Since the other four parts of his framework are not needed in that God’s creative activity is finished, his concluding formula is not needed either. The overall framework is not used for the obvious reason that God is no longer creating after the sixth day. Because the seventh day is a normal, 24-hour day, it is numbered like the previous six days.

Second, the “evening-morning” conclusion has another rhetorical effect in that it also functions as a transition to the following day.⁷⁹ If the first week is completed, there is no need to use the concluding formula for transitional purposes. Pipa has precisely summarized this argument.

The phrase “evening and morning” links the day that is concluding with the next day. For example the morning that marks the end of day one also marks the beginning of day two. Thus, we do not find the formula at the end of the

⁷⁷As Moses gave literary shape to represent in written form the events from the creation week, we should understand that the way he shaped his material was controlled by two necessary elements: the actual events that took place during the creation week and his divinely-given theological interpretation of the material (see John Sailhamer, “Genesis 1:1–2:4a,” *Trinity Journal* 5 [Spring 1984]: 73). In the case of the creation week, God obviously had to give direct revelation concerning the details of the creation week to someone as early as Adam but no later than Moses, and Moses has accurately preserved this in written form. That which actually happened during the creation week placed certain limitations on Moses’ use of this material, and his actual message controls how he selects and arranges this material. Inerrancy allows for literary shaping but never at the expense of the historical accuracy of the actual events, and it requires that the historical account sets parameters on literary shaping.

⁷⁸See above, pp. 108–109.

⁷⁹See above, pp. 106–107.

seventh day, since the week of creation is complete.⁸⁰

Therefore, the more “natural conclusion” to draw from the omission of the “evening-morning” conclusion is that the seventh day was not a day of creation, but a day of rest. The focus of Genesis 2:1–3 is not on what occurred after a literal seventh day but what transpired on the seventh day. According to v. 3, “God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work.” In the first week of history, God set up a “six-plus-one” pattern of working six days and resting on the seventh.⁸¹

We now need to interact with those passages used to support a figurative interpretation of the seventh day. It is our contention that the biblical texts used to support an elongated seventh day do not provide explicit support for this interpretation. The “rest” used in Psalm 95:11 is a reference to the promised land of Canaan. Because of their disobedience, God prohibited the generation of Israelites who left Egypt from entering the promised land.⁸² The use of John 5:17 to force a figurative interpretation upon the seventh day in Genesis 2:1–3 is also problematic. Blocher’s logic is that Jesus’ healing on the sabbath is only valid if the Father works on *his sabbath*. Therefore, the Father’s sabbath on which he works has continued from the seventh day up through the present.⁸³ Weeks correctly observes that Jesus’ logic has “equal force if God was working on the regular weekly sabbath. In context, the work in question would not be primarily a work of creation or providence but the work of redemption and mercy.”⁸⁴

The use of “rest” in Hebrews 4 does not provide unquestionable support for a figurative use of the seventh day. While the author of Hebrews, in 4:3–11, cites Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7–11, his argument is to provide a warning against unbelief. If one does not persevere in the faith, he will not enter into God’s eternal rest. The eternal rest described by the author of Hebrews is built off the model of God’s sabbath rest in Genesis 2:1–3. The author of Hebrews apparently uses the Mosaic omission of the concluding formula as a type patterned after God’s eternal rest. This is similar to what he does in 5:6–10 and 7:1–4 where he uses Melchizedek’s lack of a genealogy in Genesis 14 as well as no

⁸⁰Pipa, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” p. 168.

⁸¹Grossman, “Day,” p. 21.

⁸²Mark Van Bebber and Paul S. Taylor, *Creation and Time: A Report on the Progressive Creationist Book by Hugh Ross*, 2nd ed. (Mesa, AZ: Eden Communications, 1995), pp. 71–73.

⁸³Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 57.

⁸⁴Weeks, *The Sufficiency of Scripture*, p. 114; see also John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 33.

mention of his death in Scripture to serve as a type of Christ. The silence of Scripture about Melchizedek's family background and death serve as a pattern for the eternal priest, Jesus Christ.⁸⁵ As it would be invalid to deny the historical reality of Melchizedek's family background and death based upon the omission of these two items in Hebrews, so it would also be invalid on this basis to deny the historical reality of a literal seventh day in Genesis 2:1–3.⁸⁶ As such, Hebrews 4:3–11 may be used to establish that God's eternal rest is patterned after God's rest on the literal seventh day of the creation week,⁸⁷ but it cannot be explicitly used to preclude the seventh day as a literal day.

Consequently, neither the omission of the "evening-morning" conclusion in Genesis 2:1–3 nor other biblical texts discussed provides indisputable evidence to sustain a figurative interpretation of the seventh day.⁸⁸ In reality, the omission of the concluding formula and the immediate context of Genesis 2:1–3, with the threefold repetition of the "seventh day" as well as the singular use of יוֹם along with a numeric qualifier, indicate that the "most simple and natural conclusion" to draw is that the seventh day was a literal day, just like the preceding six literal days of the creation week.

The Use of "Day" in Genesis 2:4

The use of "day" in Genesis 2:4 has been used by some as evidence that the singular form of יוֹם may be used to refer to the entire creation week, and it therefore substantiates interpreting each singular use of "day" in Genesis 1 as referring to an extended period of time. This is the manner in which Wayne Grudem uses Genesis 2:4.

In favor of viewing the six days as long periods of time is the fact that the Hebrew word *yôm*, "day," is sometimes used to refer not to a twenty-four-hour literal day, but to a longer period of time. We see this when the word is used in Genesis 2:4, for example: "In the *day* that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens," a phrase that refers to the entire creative work of the six days of creation.⁸⁹

⁸⁵Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972), p. 82, n. 32.

⁸⁶Pipa, "From Chaos to Cosmos," p. 169.

⁸⁷See Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, p. 32.

⁸⁸See Kelly, *Creation and Change*, p. 111.

⁸⁹Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), p. 293; this is the same argument used by Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 52; Gleason L. Archer, Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1994), p. 20; and Otto J. Helweg, "How Long an Evening and Morning?" *Facts and Faith* 9 (1995): 8–9.

We would not deny that the singular noun יום in Genesis 2:4b is used figuratively for more than a literal day in that it apparently summarizes the entire time covered during the first six days of creation. However, this type of comparison disregards the grammatical differences between the use of the singular, *absolute* noun “day” in Genesis 1 and the singular, *construct* noun “day” in Genesis 2:4. This construction in v. 4 requires further explanation.

In Genesis 2:4, “day” appears in a compound grammatical construction.⁹⁰ A literal translation of v. 4b will assist in explicating the significance of this construction: “in-the-day-of-making by the LORD God earth and heaven.” The five hyphenated words in this translation are what constitute this compound grammatical relationship. These five words involve three closely related words in the Hebrew text: the inseparable preposition ב (“in”), immediately attached to the construct, singular noun יום (“day”), and an infinitive construct עֲשׂוֹת (“making”). Thus, the “day” in 2:4 is not simply an example of a singular noun but is part of a compound grammatical construction.

When the preposition ב is prefixed to the construct noun יום and these words are followed by an infinitive construct, this complex construction forms a temporal idiomatic construction.⁹¹ The temporal nature of this construction is reflected in its more than 60 uses in the Old Testament.⁹² When a particular day is in view in a specific context, it may be translated as “on the day when.” When the temporal reference is more general, this construction is more generally translated as “when.”⁹³ As a result, rather than translating יום ב in Genesis 2:4b as “in the day of,” a more concise English equivalent would be to render it as “when.”⁹⁴

We should also note how the rendering of this construction as “when” fits the immediate context of Genesis 2:4. This verse has a few overlapping concepts, and these are apparent in NASB’s translation: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were

⁹⁰For my earlier qualifications of a compound grammatical construction, see above, n. 20.

⁹¹E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev. A. E. Cowley, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910), pp. 347–48, sec. 114e; and Paul Jouön. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2 vols., trans. and rev. T. Muraoka (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1993), 2:471, sec. 129p.

⁹²*TLOT*, s.v. “יום,” 2:529.

⁹³*TDOT*, s.v. “יום,” 6:15; see also *NIDOTTE*, s.v. “יום,” 2:420; Cassuto, *Genesis*, p. 16; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, p. 183; and John C. Whitcomb and Donald B. DeYoung, *The Moon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), p. 77.

⁹⁴See BDB, p. 400, and *HALOT*, 2:401.

created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.” The verbs “created” and “made” are used synonymously. In addition, “heaven” and “earth” are used in both clauses. The passive clause “when they were created” has a corresponding active clause where the agent is given “in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.” While we recognize that there are grammatical differences between the two clauses, it appears that the passive clause is balanced by the active clause. As a result, “in the day that” is best taken as a temporal construction that functions in an equivalent manner to the temporal conjunction “when.” In contrast to NASB’s translation, we would prefer to translate v. 4 like this: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when [וּבַיּוֹם] the LORD God made earth and heaven.”⁹⁵ Therefore, the use of Genesis 2:4 as a justification for “day” being an extended period is grammatically invalid. Although he supports an old earth model, Collins nevertheless recognizes the linguistic deficiencies in justifying the figurative use of “day” with Genesis 2:4.

Unfortunately, the linguistic case for this theory [day-age view] is weak. Gen 2:4 does not provide evidence of a broader semantic range for *yôm*, since the word appears in a bound expression.... But when *bēyôm* (“in the day”) precedes an infinitive, as it does here (*‘āśōt*) it is properly translated “when” as in NIV. Thus the bound form *bēyôm* in Gen 2:4, being part of an idiomatic expression, gives us no information on the range of meanings of *yôm* outside the bound form.⁹⁶

Texts Connecting “Day” with a Thousand Years

By equating a creation day with a thousand years, two other biblical texts have been used to support a figurative interpretation of “day” in Genesis 1: Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8.⁹⁷ If these texts genuinely equate a creation day with a thousand years, the argument for a literal interpretation of the creation days is certainly weakened. However, a closer examination of these two texts reflects that they cannot legitimately be used to rule out a literal interpretation of the days in Genesis 1.

Psalm 90:4 is a passage that has often been used to suggest that “day” may refer to an extended period of time: “For a thousand years in Your sight are like yesterday when it passes by, or *as* a watch in the night.” The argument is that Moses interprets his use of day in Genesis 1 in Psalm 90, the only psalm ascribed to him.⁹⁸ Psalm 90:4, as the

⁹⁵Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, p. 250.

⁹⁶Collins, “How Old Is the Earth?” p. 110.

⁹⁷Phillips, “Days of Genesis,” p. 4.

⁹⁸Ibid.

argument goes, indicates that “God’s days are not our days”; that is, God’s days are not 24-hour days but long periods of time.⁹⁹

Can this argument be sustained from Psalm 90:4? In comparing the use of “day” in this verse with its use in Genesis 1, three observations will be helpful. First, in Psalm 90:4 the comparison between “a thousand years” and “yesterday” involves a simile, “like” (כִּי). However, in Genesis 1 God describes his actual activities on each creation day. He is not making comparative statements, as is the case in Psalm 90:4. The simile in v. 4 compares “a thousand years” to two brief periods of time, “yesterday when it passes by” and “a watch in the night.” This is to say, the author is not using “a thousand years” in comparison with a solar day, but with a short period of time. The point of this verse is that God does not evaluate time the way man does.¹⁰⁰

Second, though “day,” יוֹם, is used in Genesis 1 and Psalm 90:4, יוֹם is consistently used in Genesis 1 as a singular noun. However, in Psalm 90:4, יוֹם is part of a compound grammatical construction, “like-a-day-already-past” (i.e., “like yesterday,” כִּי־יוֹם אֶתְמַלֵּךְ). As such, this comparison is grammatically deficient. Third, Psalm 90 is not a creation hymn, and the stanza in which v. 4 is located does not focus on any items from creation.¹⁰¹ Therefore, if any attention is given to exegetical detail, Psalm 90:4 cannot be used to support a figurative interpretation of the days of Genesis 1.

The second text used to support a figurative interpretation of the creation days is 2 Peter 3:8: “But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day.” It has been suggested that if we take this passage at face value along with Psalm 90:4, it explicitly rules out a literal interpretation of the days of Genesis 1.¹⁰² In contrast to this type of naïve interpretation, we should notice that the immediate context of 2 Peter 3:8 is not a creation context. Furthermore, as in Psalm 90:4, a simile is used to make a comparison.¹⁰³ For those using this text to suggest that a “day” in Genesis 1 is a thousand years, or however many years, Whitcomb’s response is apropos:

The latter verse [2 Pet 3:8], for example, does not say that God’s days last a thousand years, but that “one day is with the Lord *as* a thousand years.” In other words, God is above the limitations of time in the sense that he can ac-

⁹⁹Ross, *Creation and Time*, p. 45.

¹⁰⁰Hasel, “Days,” p. 12.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰²Fischer, “The Days of Creation,” p. 20.

¹⁰³Hasel, “Days,” p. 13.

comply in *one literal day* what nature or man could not accomplish in a vast period of time, if ever. Note that one day is “*as* a thousand years,” not “*is* a thousand years,” with God. If “one day” in this verse means a long period of time, then we would end up with the following absurdity: “a long period of time is with the Lord as a thousand years.” Instead of this, the verse reveals how much God can actually accomplish in a literal day of twenty-four hours.¹⁰⁴

The Sixth Day

Another challenge to a literal interpretation of the creation days pertains to the many activities that took place on the sixth day. All the activities involving Adam’s participation appear to be humanly impossible to accomplish in a portion of a literal day. Grudem provides a summary of this line of reasoning:

An additional argument for a long period of time in these “days” is the fact that the sixth day includes so many events that it must have been longer than twenty-four hours. The sixth day of creation (Gen. 1:24–31) includes the creation of animals and the creation of man and woman both (“male and female he created them,” Gen. 1:27). It was also on the sixth day that God blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). But that means that the sixth day included God’s creation of Adam, God’s putting Adam in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it, and giving Adam directions regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:15–17), his bringing all the animals to man for them to be named (Gen. 2:18–20), finding no helper fit for Adam (Gen. 2:20), and then causing a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and creating Eve from his rib (Gen. 2:21–25). The finite nature of man and the incredibly large number of animals created by God would by itself seem to require that a much longer period of time than part of one day would be needed to include so many events.¹⁰⁵

Against this type of reasoning, we should ask this question: Is *God* incapable of doing all these activities in one day, or a portion thereof? Of the many activities represented by old earth advocates, is not God the One performing most of them? However, one activity might superficially appear too involved for Adam to accomplish in a portion of a literal day—assigning names to the animals. However, Adam’s giving names to the animals is not quite the mammoth task that old earth

¹⁰⁴John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *The Early Earth*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), p. 28.

¹⁰⁵Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, p. 294; so also Archer, *Old Testament Introduction*, p. 201; and Collins, “How Old Is the Earth?” pp. 118–19.

advocates would lead us to believe. There are three reasons for maintaining that Adam was capable of doing this in a portion of a literal day.

First, Genesis 2:19–20 specifically informs us that God “brought” the animals to Adam so that he could assign them names.

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought *them* to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

If Adam had to round up the animals, this would have certainly increased the difficulty, but the text informs us that God “brought” them to Adam.

Second, Genesis 2:19–20 also inform us that Adam named only “all the cattle,” “the beasts of the field” and “all the birds of the air.” To say that this was an “incredibly large number of animals” appears somewhat exaggerated. In considering the text of Genesis 1–2, Adam did not assign names to “those creatures that move along the ground” (Gen 1:24) and the sea creatures (1:20). Adam gave names only to those animals with which he would have primary contact as he exercised his rule over them (1:26–28). According to Henry Morris,

At the most this would include only the birds and the higher mammals. Furthermore,...the created kinds undoubtedly represented broader categories than our modern species or genera, quite possibly approximating in most cases the taxonomic family. Just how many kinds were actually there to be named is unknown, of course, but it could hardly have been as many as a thousand.¹⁰⁶

Just as God created the prototypes for the vegetation and for mankind, he also did the same in the animal kingdom. The DNA structure for Adam and Eve was undoubtedly designed to allow for their subsequent descendants. As Adam and Eve were the prototypes for humanity, so there would have been a male and female proto-dog. There would have also been a male and female proto-horse. Thus Adam’s task as described in Genesis 2:19–20 is not nearly as large as many advocates of an old earth would suggest. This is to say that it would not require many days or years to do this. Adam was naming the prototypes of only a portion of the various created “kinds” (כִּי, *chi*): “all the cattle,” “the beasts of the field,” and “all the birds of the air.”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Henry M. Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), pp. 128–29.

¹⁰⁷The created “kinds” in Genesis 1–2 have also been referred to as *baramins* (*bara* [בָּרָא], “create,” plus *min* [מִין], “kind”). For further information, see John C.

Third, we should also keep in mind that Adam was created perfectly programmed. From an unfallen, human state, Adam's mind would have been programmed from the beginning to exercise his subordinate sovereign rights over the animal kingdom including the ability to name each "kind" (יִרְדָּ). Even if Adam named a thousand animals, at the maximum, this would seem like a large task to us. However, this task must be balanced by the biblical fact that God directly and perfectly created Adam. As the perfection of humanity, he came equipped to function as God's vice-regent in exercising dominion on earth. Along this line Morris has said:

It should be remembered that Adam was newly created, with mental activity and physical vigor corresponding to an unfallen state. He certainly could have done the job in a day and, at the very most, it would only have taken a few days even for a modern-day person, so there is nothing anywhere in the account to suggest that the sixth day was anything like a geological age.¹⁰⁸

While I recognize that this explanation is not necessarily as explicit as the other exegetical data we have used, my intention is to demonstrate that recent creationism has a consistent biblical explanation to account for the many activities performed by God and man on the sixth day of the creation week. Because Adam was the quintessential man, was in an ideal environment where God brought the animals to him, and was naming the prototypes for "all the cattle," "the beasts of the field" and "all the birds of the air," I would understand that Scripture affirms that Adam gave names to these animals during a segment of the sixth day of the creation week. Not only is it feasible that Adam assigned names to these animals on the sixth day, but this explanation, given the nature of God's creating in six, successive 24-hour days, is highly probable, since it provides a consistent harmonization with the text.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this essay has been to provide a biblical justification for a literal understanding of the six creation days. To accomplish this, a dual approach was taken. First, five reasons were set forth to defend this literal interpretation. Because of the semantic constraints for "day," its syntactical constraints, and overall scriptural context, we concluded that Scripture univocally maintains that God created in six, consecutive normal days. Second, four arguments against literal days in the

Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1961), pp. 66–68.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 129.

creation week were addressed: an open-ended seventh day, the appeal to Genesis 2:4 to support a figurative use of “day,” the use of Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 to support figurative creation days, and a figurative understanding of the sixth day to account for the many activities of that day. These four objections do not provide clear-cut evidence to abandon what God has clearly communicated about a literal creation week.

In the final analysis, the figurative understanding of the creation days engenders more exegetical and theological problems than it solves, and is, therefore, indefensible when viewed from the perspective of Scripture’s comprehensive message about the nature of the creation week. Consequently, the cumulative weight of the examined evidence demands that the literal interpretation of the days in Genesis 1 is the most internally consistent synthesis of this subject in Scripture.

While many Christians and Christian organizations relegate a literal creation week to a secondary or tertiary level of Christian doctrine, I would suggest that it is an essential part of the faith. To relegate literal creationism to a peripheral doctrinal level minimally suggests an inconsistent view of Scripture’s perspicuity on this subject and pervasively promotes deterioration in other facets of orthodox doctrine.¹⁰⁹ Thus, this essay concludes that the sovereign triune God created, for his own glory and according to his eternal counsel, the heavens and the earth and all things therein in the space of six, consecutive literal days.

¹⁰⁹For a beneficial discussion of the theological ramifications of creationism, see Morton H. Smith, “The Theological Significance of the Doctrine of Creation,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* pp. 243–65.