

THE 'Days' OF THE GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNT

Dr Michael Jarvis

There are various ways of interpreting the Bible Genesis creation account. In this article I am only looking at the approach that views the account as a description of actual events – the so-called '**Concordist Interpretation**'.

Within this general category are several variations. The one I am looking at in this article is the so-called '**Day-Age Interpretation**'. This interpretation suggests that creation occurred over billions of years. Each 'day' of the Genesis account corresponds to a long epoch. Events occurred in the order given in the text, but stretched out over a much longer time period.

This approach to understanding the Genesis account has to overcome several important questions.



1. Can we interpret the Hebrew word for day 'Yom' as meaning a long period of time.
2. Does the phrase '*the evening and the morning*' have to mean a single day of 24 hours?
3. How can we harmonise the characteristics of each creation 'Day' with the discoveries of science?
4. Where do Adam and Eve fit into the creation account?
5. What impact does all of this have on the meaning of Bible teachings about original sin and redemption through the person of Jesus Christ?

I will discuss these questions in several articles. This first article looks at questions 1 and 2, as outlined above.

Origin of the Genesis account

Archaeology has discovered several creation accounts of ancient Near East religions and some similarities between them, but only the Bible account is monotheistic. We can ask the important question; which ancient creation account came first?

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Archaeology has revealed documents in Cuneiform writing on clay tablets, at the ancient city of Uruk, that date to 3200BC. The Genesis account was written down much later, somewhere between 1446BC and 1400BC .

If we accept that Moses was the main influence determining the incorporation of the Genesis account into the Hebrew scriptures, this has to lead us to the possibility that he had access to earlier documents. It is even possible that the libraries of ancient Egypt contained early creation accounts written close to the Bible date for Adam. Moses, as a Prince of Egypt would have had access to all the learning and libraries of ancient Egypt.

The Bible dates for major events are as follows:

Date of Adam: Approximately	4157BC
Birth of Noah:	3056BC
Great flood:	2456BC
Israelites go to Egypt:	1876BC
Exodus from Egypt:	1446BC



Until very recently archaeologists thought that Cuneiform documents such as shown here, were merely simple means of basic accounting, such as tallying grain sales.

However, in 2016 it was reported that recently deciphered ancient clay tablets revealed Babylonian astronomers to be more sophisticated than previously thought. Reported in the journal *Archaeology* (Editors 2016 & in Ball 2016).



These cuneiform tablets showed that ancient Babylonian stargazers used geometric calculations to predict the complex motion of Jupiter!

Cuneiform documents from 3200BC and possibly even earlier contain descriptions of historical events.

At left: Statue of a scribe dated to about 2400BC.

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It becomes increasingly probable that Moses was led by God to read the creation story on clay tablets dating from long before the other creation accounts that appeared in Near Eastern religions.

The Bible clearly states that **Moses used written accounts** detailing other information recorded in our Bible book of Genesis. For instance, chapter 5 starts with the words: *This is the **written account** of Adam's line.* Moses probably had access to other early written accounts relating to creation, events around Adam and Eve and other Bible characters. The account of the flood of Noah's time (2456BC) could have been written in Cuneiform by Noah himself !

If Moses used a creation account dating from 3200BC or even earlier, possibly originally recorded by Adam, then the accounts of other religions are probably distortions of the original account. The other creation accounts, such as the Sumerian, are known from clay tablets and archaeologists believe these accounts originated between 1400BC and 1800BC. (Mark 2011 and Luckenbill 1921).

Suggestions by some scholars that Genesis chapters 1 to 3, was primarily written to counteract the polytheistic accounts in other religions, may only be part of the truth. **I believe Moses was enabled to write the Genesis account through his knowledge of a much earlier Cuneiform document**

Suggestions by some scholars that Moses used oral traditions as his source for Genesis, is becoming increasingly unlikely. Oral traditions, passed on verbally from generation to generation, could not have maintained all the minute details of ancestors, including all of their ages at death and the other details we read about in Genesis.

God's evolving revelations about himself

It is important to understand that God has revealed aspects of himself in stages, during human history.

For instance:

1. Revelations about himself as Creator of all things (Genesis account).

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2. Revelations about the meaning of sin, demonstrated in the Garden of Eden.
3. Revelations about his character and the importance of faith, given to Abraham.
4. Revelations given to Moses, including the sacrifice rituals that pointed to a future fulfilment in Jesus.
5. Revelations given to the other Old Testament prophets, including prophecies about future events.
6. Revelations given through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He changed some of the teachings given to Moses and himself fulfilled prophecies. For instance, he changed the Mosaic teaching of '*eye for an eye*' to '*love your enemies*' .
7. Revelations given through inspiration of the Holy Spirit to Paul and other New Testament writers.
8. Revelations given about creation through the on-going discoveries of science. In other words, the expansion of passages such as '*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the works of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge*' (Psalm 19:1-2 NIV).

This leads me to an explanation of how I approach the questions listed at the start of this article.

1. Can we interpret the Hebrew word for day 'Yom' as meaning a long period of time?

Our first question relates to the Hebrew word 'YOM' that is translated in several ways in various parts of the Bible. According to Bible concordances such as Young (1971), this word is translated in the following ways and number of times:

Day 1167 times

Age (plural) 6 times

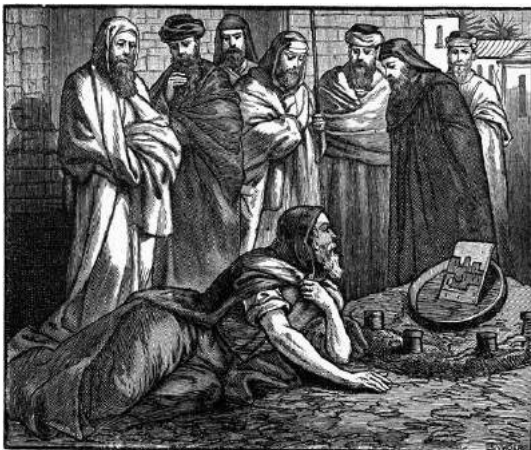
Time (singular and plural) 65 times

Season 3 times

5.

Other scriptures tell us that God operates independent of our time scales. For instance, *For a thousand years in your sight are like a day (YOM) that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night,* (Psalm 90:4 NIV). This does not say God's 'days' are 1000 years. It says that time is relative to God and he is independent from the limitations of time. In other places we are reminded that he exists from 'eternity to eternity' or 'timelessness to timelessness'!

Other scriptures tell us that God sometimes compares our earth 'days' with longer timescales. For instance, in Ezekiel we read how he was told by God to lie continuously on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days. Ezekiel was told by God that the 390 earth days represented 390 years that the nation of Israel had rebelled against their God. The 40 days represented 40 years of rebellion by the tribe of Judah (Ezekiel 4:1-6).



This prophetic act by Ezekiel is a good example of how a time period in our human experience can represent a much longer time period in relation to God.

The Ezekiel event helps us to understand that **when God spoke to Moses and told him that the Israelites must work for six days and rest on the seventh, we cannot assume he is saying that the 'creation days' are literal 24 hour days.** God is using the 'creation days' as an illustration of our human need for a day of rest but **it does not have to mean that the human days equal God's creative days.**

Compare the various ways YOM is used in the Genesis account

We discover that this word 'yom' is used in several different ways within Genesis chapter one and two:



1. In chapter 1 verse 5, *God called the light "day" (yom) and the darkness he called "night" (layelah).* **Here the light half of a day is called YOM.**

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2. After each creative 'day' (Yom) we read '*and there was evening and there was morning*'. **Here a full 'day' is called YOM.**
3. Chapter 2 records that on the seventh YOM God *rested from all his work*. However, unlike 'days' 1 to 6 this seventh day is not ended with the phrase '*and there was evening and there was morning*'. We might conclude that **we are still living in the seventh YOM.**
4. Chapter 2 starts off with a summary of creation. It is not meant to be a second creation account. **It is simply a summary that introduces us to the Garden of Eden account. The Garden of Eden events took place after the creative 'days' of Chapter 1.**
5. The true significance of the chapter 2 account is lost in some modern Bible translations. The King James and some others translate the Hebrew correctly. It reads, *This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, **in the day (YOM)** that the Lord God **made the earth and the heavens**, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had **not caused it to rain on the earth**, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and **watered the whole face of the ground.***(New King James Bible).

This fourth use of YOM is very significant for the following reasons:

- A. Each 'creation DAY' in chapter 1 is introduced with the words '**And God said**'. However, in Genesis 1:1 this phrase is not used. We were told that '*in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth*'. This was **before** Day one of creation. We are not told how long it took to create the heavens and the earth.
- B. In the Chapter 2 summary of creation we are told that the 'heavens and earth' and also events linked to watering the ground, **all took place in ONE YOM!**
- C. Watering of the ground could not have taken place until there was ground to water. We are told in chapter 1 that **land first appeared above the waters on creative Day 3.**

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- D. In other words, the creation of heaven and earth and the other creation events described during Day 1, Day 2 and Day 3 of chapter one, are all included in ONE YOM in the chapter 2 summary!
- E. This means that the YOM of chapter 2 is not limited by ‘an evening and a morning’ and it encompasses at least three creation ‘days’ plus an unlimited creative period described as *In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth*. This YOM of chapter 2 can have covered ‘ages’ of time.

This comparison of scripture with scripture should lead to the conclusion that the word YOM for ‘day’ is not limited to 24 hour days and the chapter 2 summary of creation shows that YOM can include ‘ages of time’.

But what about the use of the words ‘*evening and morning*’ in creative ‘days’ 1 to 6’?

Some Bible scholars suggest that this has to refer to a 24 hour days.

2. Does the phrase ‘the evening and the morning’ have to mean a single day of 24 hours?

The early Israelites naturally interpreted Genesis chapter 1 as speaking of creation in six literal days. This was long before the scientific age and so they had no inclination to look for other interpretations. Determining days as starting in the evening became the norm for Israel, based on their understanding of the Genesis days. Naturally, nearly all other Bible references to ‘evening and morning’ will refer to earth days of 24 hours because this definition of a day had been adopted by Israelites.

Although this term *evening and morning* normally refers to an earth day, there is one Bible passage where ‘evening and morning’ does not refer to a single day. This is in Daniel chapter 8. One of the visions given to Daniel included details of various empires that would rise and fall. Then in verse 26 Daniel is told, *And the vision of the evening and morning which was told is true: wherefore shut thou up the vision, for it shall be for many days* (King James Version).

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Unfortunately some Bible translations have wrongly changed the Hebrew '*evening and morning*' to '*evenings and mornings*'. Some translations have even added words such as '*sacrifices*' that are not in the original wording!

This example from Daniel is only one exception among the many where *evenings and mornings* refer to earth days. Do we throw out the Daniel reference because it stands as an exception or should it help us to consider other possible meanings of the Genesis creation days?

Some commentaries suggest this Daniel reference should not be taken too seriously because it occurs in a prophetic passage and the Genesis creation account claims to be historic, not prophetic. However, most prophetic passages are a combination of historic and prophetic and the Genesis creation account is no exception.

The prophetic nature of Genesis will become clearer in my follow up article that will consider how we can harmonise the characteristics of each creation 'Day' with the discoveries of science?

Why look for an alternative understanding of Creation days?

Reasons for looking again at the creation days are as follows:

1. **We live in the age of scientific discovery** that clearly shows us our earth is billions of years old and that God's creative actions have been spread over long time-scales. See my previous article: 'Scientific evidence for our ancient world'. [The age of our world](#)
1. **Reconciling the Genesis creation account with science is vitally important** if we are to help our scientifically literate generation to take the Bible seriously.
2. We have seen that comparing the differing use of YOM in Genesis chapter 1 and 2, reveals that YOM cannot be confined to meaning 24 hour days.

3. We know that the rest of the Bible mainly links 'evening and morning' with earth days. This is totally understandable since the Hebrew people had adopted this from their literal interpretation of Genesis, where earth days were taken to start at evening.
4. **We should accept that God's revelation of himself has taken place in stages.** It has been an 'evolution of revelation'. Furthermore, we are told that we can learn more about God from his creation. Since we live in an age where scientific knowledge has exploded dramatically, it is logical to conclude that the correct interpretation of science can be another stage in God's revelation of himself to man. Do we fight this evidence or do we accept that God is giving us these revelations, so as to better understand the Bible creation account? The universe reveals that God has used processes in creation and these were spread out over 'ages of time'.
5. When we accept God's revelation of himself through the discoveries of science, this can lead us to look again at traditional interpretations of the Genesis creation 'days' and to explore other meanings of the words '*evening and morning*'.

Are there other possible meanings of *evening and morning*?

There are other words that we normally associate with 'evening' and 'morning'. For instance, Sunset and evening means the approaching 'ending' of a day. Dawn and early morning are associated with the 'beginning' of a new day.

I am suggesting that the Genesis days are saying that the 'ending of an AGE also heralds the dawning of the next AGE.

Adopting an explanation such as this is needed if we are to take seriously **God's voice** speaking to us from his creation, telling us that creation did not take place over six 24 hour days. For those of us who favour the so-called concordist interpretation of Genesis, reconciliation with scientific discovery compels us to accept that the meaning of YOM in the creative days, is an extended period of time or an 'age'.

A suggested translation of Genesis chapter 1:1-5

From the information presented in this document, I believe we can consider the 'days' of Genesis chapter 1 as being extended periods of time, representing major new developments during the history of creation. The major events recorded in each creative 'day' continue into the next creative 'day' but each successive 'day' brings major new developments, in addition to the continuing events of the previous 'day'. For instance, the appearance of the light and dark portions of each earth day did not cease at the end of Day 1.

I suggest we can read Genesis chapter 1 as follows:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day" and the darkness he called "night"

That was the ending of the first AGE and the promise of a new one.

Keep in mind that the original wording puts 'evening' before 'morning' and so it is suggesting that the first AGE (yom) was ending and this was heralding the beginning of a new Age.

Conclusion

As I mentioned at the start of this article, The so-called 'concordist day-age' interpretation of the Genesis creation account, is just one of several different ways that Bible scholars have attempted to understand this very ancient document.

As a scientist I find it impossible to reconcile what science is revealing about our ancient earth, with an interpretation of Genesis that considers the creation days to be 24 hour days.

This potential conflict between science and Bible interpretation has led some contemporary scholars to view Genesis in ways that are not directly related to actual historical events, such as the sequential order of creation. However, I

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personally remain in the 'concordist day-age' category because I believe that a careful analysis of the creation events described in the Genesis account can be reconciled with science.

How can this reconciliation with science be achieved?

This important question will be discussed in my next article

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Previous relevant article. [The age of our world](#)

Dr Michael Jarvis

10 February 2018

PhD (1971. University of Cape Town)

Director: Fact and Faith Publications

Webpage: www.factandfaith.co.za

Webpage: www.ubuntuchristianity.co.za

Email: Mike@factandfaith.co.za

Telephone: (27) (21) 8641546

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