

Robert Vannoy, OT History, Lecture 6

Genesis 1 “Days” [Yom] – Theories of Interpretation

Review: Yom [day]

a. Usage

1. Usage in the Old Testament in General
2. Usage in Genesis 1 Framework

We were discussing the meaning of the Hebrew word “*yom*”—day. Which is at the top of page two of your class lecture outline, and we were still under (a) usage of the word. (a) I divided into two subheadings: usage in the Old Testament in general and then usage in the framework of Genesis 1. We had discussed the usage in the Old Testament in general and we were in process as I recall of discussing the usage in the framework of Genesis 1. Just to quickly reorient ourselves, as I mentioned before it’s my view that there are a number of things in Genesis 1 that point toward understanding *yom*—as a period of time of creative activity rather than a solar day. Among those things I mentioned the word is used elsewhere and that sort of a meaning and usage elsewhere permits that kind of a view within Genesis 1.

Secondly, it’s not until the fourth day that the lights become used for a measure of time. So it’s not until the fourth day that you would have solar days. We discussed something of a source of light prior to that, in our discussion of that.

Thirdly, if you take “day” in the structure of Genesis 1 as a figurative designation rather than for a period of time—rather than a solar day—it would be appropriate to understand the phrase “evening and morning” as an expression for the beginning and ending of that period of time. We discussed that a bit.

Then, fourthly, I think this is where we stopped, we noticed a number of things, which took place on the sixth day. The sixth day you had the creation of animals, you had the creation of man, you had him placed in the garden, you had him given the task of tilling the garden, you had the animals brought to man, he was to name all the animals—we get this by combining information from chapter

2 with chapter 1. He was to name all the animals and in that process he found none that corresponded to himself, he became aware of that difference between himself and the animals of creation. Then the LORD God put a deep sleep on Adam and took the rib from Adam and created woman, and then he gives that exclamation, “Now, at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh...” and so forth. Now the question is, did all of that transpire within the light period of a 24-hour solar day? In my view, all that happened there seems to suggest that we’re in a longer period of time than simply a solar day. I think that’s where we stopped. In Genesis 2:23, let me see how the NIV word’s that, “The man said, this is now.” I think I mentioned just at the end of the hour that could better be translated “now at length.” The RSV there says, “This at last”—finally. “Bone of my bones, flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman.”

1. Length of the Seventh Day is Long Period

I just want to make one further point then under this discussion of usage of *yom* or “day” in Genesis chapter 1. The seventh day, on which God rested from his creative activity, is a day which has lasted for a long period of time (at least this is the way I would view it) and to me that would parallel the other six days as long periods of time. In other words, it seems to me when it says of the seventh day that God rested, he ceased then from his creative activity and in that sense that rest has continued from then until the present. So that is also speaking of a long period of time. The fact that the period of rest continues does not fit that he ceased just for a 24-hour solar day. He ceased from his creative activity and he rested. He continues to do that with respect to his creative activity.

So the conclusion that I would draw from the text of Genesis 1 itself is that there are factors in Genesis 1 that suggest that the word “day” or *yom* is to be understood as a period of time of God’s creative activity, which is of indeterminate length. I don’t think there is any way from the chapter you can tell how long or how short those periods were. I don’t think that sort of information is

given, but it does suggest that it's a period of indeterminate length.

I think the Hebrew for this passage does relate to it and undoubtedly that is also related to my conclusion there. But you read in chapter 2 verse 2, "the seventh day, God had finished the work he had been doing." So on the seventh day he rested from all his work. "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." So we're told that he rested from all the work of creating that he had done on the seventh day. You can just reflect on that text and what that means. Does that mean that in a period of seven successive 24-hour solar days somewhere way back in the beginning that God rested from creative work? Was it just for 24 hours, then he resumed it? It seems to me that what it's saying is that after the six days of creative activity he ceased creating and he rested. Now, of course, you can get into all kinds of implications theologically from that. You can get into the question of Creationism versus traducianism with respect to men's souls. How is it that life is transmitted from generation to generation? Is there a special creative act involved or is it something that is passed on from parents? Now a lot of those questions are complex and which we get very easily a lot of secular theology. I don't know. I wouldn't push this last point.

Argument for Solar Day Based on Exod. 20 Analogy

The counterpoint of it is, and we'll get to that shortly. Those that would argue for a 24-hour solar day would also use the analogy of the seventh day to support their case by appealing to Exodus chapter 20 and the analogy of six days you work, one you rest--that's obviously solar days. We work six days we rest one, and if God did that we are to imitate him in that and therefore he must have rested for a solar day. Now, my response to that would be the analogy is in the 6 + 1 sequence, not necessarily in the solar day framework.

Differing Opinions Allowed

(Student Question asked). Admittedly, I think it's an indicator that supports generally this idea that the word *yom* in Genesis 1 does not mean a 24-hour solar day. I don't think you can prove it. I think we're in this whole discussion in an area where there has to be an allowance of difference of opinions and conclusions. I don't think either side can say: It must be, here's what is the constraint of the text, you have to come to this conclusion. By just giving the reasons that have led me to the conclusion with which I have had.

b. Main Types of Views of the Days of Genesis 1

Let's go on to b., we're not done with this discussion. b. is: "Main types of views of the days of Genesis 1." Now if you glance at your outline, I want to mention this now so we don't get lost in the discussion. There are two sub-points under that. 1) is "actual days" and 2) is "non-actual days." Now that terminology might be confusing. I'm not talking about solar days versus period of time, when I talk about "actual days" and "non-actual days." If you glance again at your outline sheet you'll see that under "actual days" there's 24-hour solar day view and there's the period of time of indeterminate length view. They are both actual days. As distinct from a non-actual day view. Now what I mean by a non-actual day view we'll discuss in a minute. First, let's look at the actual day view with those two sub-points. Let me say this also before discussing this a bit further.

Perspective on the Length of "Days" in Genesis 1

We shouldn't lose perspective on the importance of this discussion of period of time versus 24-hour solar day. That's not, by any means, the most important piece of information in Genesis chapter 1. That general teaching we looked at earlier about God, about man, about the universe. I think that is what's important in Genesis 1 and 2. Whether the day was long in the sense of an indeterminate length of time or whether it was short is really not the big issue.

Don't lose sight of that or you're going to get all wrapped up in a discussion of this and push its importance way out of perspective. But let's go back to this then.

1) 3 Approaches for Actual Days

Actual days, first the 24-hour solar day view. There are really 3 approaches to this. Let me briefly mention them. One would be 7 successive 24-hour days. A second would be what we touched on earlier and discussed in Genesis 1. The restitution or gap theory, which is based on the verb "become" of Genesis 1:2 where the earth became void and darkness was over the face of the earth, interprets that the six days of creation are not really the original creation but a reconstitution. You had the initial creation in "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth became void." Then you have six days of reconstitution you might say, and all the geologic records, fossils included, by those of this viewpoint are placed in the time prior to Genesis 1:2. But then you get a reordering, a restructuring in the six days of the chapter. But many who hold that theory, hold to the six 24-hour day understanding of the days of Genesis 1. The third approach would be what is called an inter-period theory. The idea being there were long periods of time between the days of Genesis 1. So that would allow for the geological records to be placed in the framework of Genesis chapter 1. But the days that are spoken of would be 24-hour solar days, interspersed with long periods of time.

This third view—inter-period view—Dr. Newman holds a variation of, you might say, *Genesis 1 and the Origin of the Earth*. I think it is. It is a very useful book, you might look at it, at some point. I believe that's in your bibliography. Maybe not under this point but page six, next to the last entry on the page, there's an entry there I should've mentioned which I didn't. R. J. Snow, "How long is the sixth day" appendix 3 in Echlemans book, *Genesis 1 the Origin of the Earth*, InterVarsity Press, 1977. That article by R. J. Snow is an interesting and useful article about that sixth day that we just mentioned a few minutes ago. That's Dr.

Newman's book. He suggests that the days are 24-hours each, and that each one opens a new creative period of a 24-hour day. So that he doesn't view the day as a long period of time, but as introducing a long period of creative activity. Some form of an inter-period theory, but which would hold to a 24-hour day.

Vannoy's Position

I guess my difference with that would be, I don't see any necessity, myself, to conclude that there must be 24-hour days in the structure of the days of the chapter, and particularly because of that day 4—that the sun and the moon were not placed in position for measurement of days until the fourth day. So what was day 1, 2, and 3? Obviously not a solar day as I see it. That's the crux of the matter in my view. But as I said before I don't think this is something that we should get so tangled up in and involved in debate that we elevate it way out of proportion as far as its importance. I think the text allows for certain freedom in conclusion because of the lack of specificity.

b. 24-hour Solar Day Position

Alright, 24-hour day view is what we're discussing. I gave three possible alternative conceptions of how that 24-hour day works in the context of Genesis chapter 1. Arguments in favor of the 24-hour solar day view I think are the following. First, in its primary meaning, the word *yom* or *day* means a solar day. That's normally the way we understand it, and certainly if you just come to a chapter and read it that's probably your initial understanding. The gap theory would be number 2 where you have "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, the earth became without form and void." You have an initial creation and then a cataclysmic change. The six days that follow would be six successive 24-hour days in which that chaotic condition is restructured. Geologic time is pushed then in the gap between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

In the third view geologic time is in the structure of the six days, but it's

interspersed between these six days rather than pushed back prior to the six days-- that's the difference.

The first thing then was the primary meaning of *yom* is solar day. Secondly, the phrase evening and morning strengthens that conclusion. I think that's the most obvious initial understanding—evening and morning speaks of a solar day. The understanding I was arguing for requires a figurative understanding of that, and I don't think that's such an objection that it ruled out the day-age view, but it does require it—the use of evening and morning.

And then Exodus 20:9-11 what I just mentioned a few minutes ago. In Exodus 20:9-11 six days shall we work and the seventh we shall rest, because in six days God created the heavens and the earth, and the seventh he rested. The argument on the analogy with Exodus 20:9-11 is that day should be taken in the same sense as both passages—Genesis 1 and Exodus 20. So, those are the arguments in favor of a 24-hour solar day.

c. Day-Age Theory

b. on your sheet under actual days is the understanding of *yom* as a period of time of indeterminate length. This is often referred to as the Day-Age view. We've already discussed it, I've given arguments in its favor, so we won't go back into that at this point. But notice that it is an actual "day" even though it's a period of indeterminate length, it's still an actual period of time. It's a period of time in which God did certain things. And there's a sequence in the chapter of God's creative work. Now with the Day-Age view often the objection to it has been raised, is it not a view that has been adopted in an attempt to harmonize science and the Bible? Isn't that the reason for it? Isn't that view just something that's been generated or adopted in order to harmonize evolution and the Bible? I wouldn't deny that there's a very strong basis for coming to that conclusion.

Comments on the Relationship of Science and the Bible

Let me make two comments in that general area. First, I think we have to avoid hostility to science and the tendency to ignore minimizing the importance of this discovery. The Bible believer should not be an obscurantist. What the Bible believer must do is distinguish between well-established scientific facts on the one hand and various scientific theories that are really unfounded or philosophically biased. You have to make distinctions. There's a lot that's labeled scientific that's really not scientific. But we should not bury our heads in the sand and ignore or be antagonistic toward the findings of scientific research. Scientists have discovered a lot of things about the nature of reality through scientific investigations. A lot that scientists have discovered is quite fallible. We have to be able to distinguish between what is valid and what's not valid. That's one thing. We should avoid hostility to science, and use it discriminately.

But secondly, we shouldn't try to force agreement between scientific theories and the Bible by twisting or forcing some of the statements of the Bible to fit certain theories. Be careful of that. I think we should always be on guard against that. But having said that, I think at the same time we can say that sometimes scientific discoveries may give cause to reexamine certain biblical texts to see exactly what they say. Often you will find that the text may not be as specific as you may have initially thought it to be. And it's the scientific investigation and conclusions that become the stimulus or the motivation to look again at the text and look at it perhaps more carefully than you'd looked at it initially, and to see in what parameters the text itself allows you to move. I think that's important. I'm sure most of you are familiar with Francis Schaeffer's *Genesis in Space and Time*. On page 57 of that volume he's discussing the days of Genesis 1 and I won't read much of his discussion but at the conclusion of it he says "therefore we must leave open the exact length of time indicated by 'day' in Genesis." In other words, he doesn't come down hard one way or the other. Solar day or period of time view. Then he says, "From the study of the word in Hebrew

it is not clear which way it is to be taken. It could be either way. In the light of the word, as used in the Bible, and the lack of finality of science concerning the problem of dating, in a sense there's no debate, because there are no clearly defined terms upon which to debate." I think with Schaeffer the scientific materials have caused him to look again at the text, and then you see the text allows for certain room or freedom there, to move, in accordance with the scientific data where it may lead you without twisting or distorting the text. So I think those things are important. Avoid hostility to science, don't try to force statements of the Bible to fit theories, but on the other hand, let the scientific discoveries that do seem well founded, and may well be a stimulus to reexamine the text and see exactly what it says.

2. Non-Actual Days

Number 2. under types of days, years or days of Genesis 1 is non-actual days. What's a non-actual day? I think we'll see by way of illustration. In general, this would be a view that sees no real historical connection between the days of Genesis 1 and the sequence or process of God's creative activity. Now there are a number of varieties of non-actual day views.

a. Symbolic or Logical Order Days

The first one which would be small (a) is a view of Origen. Origen was a Church father from Alexandria, 185-253 AD. He viewed the days of Genesis 1 as symbolic of the order of God's creative activity. He says that creation came to pass in a moment and the six days are merely indicative of a logical order. Origen says, "No one of a good mind can accept that there was actually a first, second, and third day as well as an evening and morning without sun, moon, and stars." Leading back into that problem of the fourth day, and he has a point. The creation came to pass in a moment and the six days are merely indicative of a logical order. If you look at page 7 that I just handed out of your bibliography, third entry,

Origen, *On First Principles*, Harper and Row 1966, page 288, is where he makes that statement. So that's one variety of a non-actual day view going way back to the early centuries of the Church.

b. Augustine's Allegorical View of "Day"

Augustine also has a non-actual day view. I think you would call it an allegorical type of view. Understanding exactly what he means by some of his statements about the days of Genesis 1 is not easy. But in Oliver Buswell's, *Systematic Theology*, volume 1, this is at the top of page 7 the first entry there, pages 142 to 144. He discusses Augustine on the creative days, and he says in Augustine's *City of God*, book 11 section 6 and 7, he says, "What kind of days these are is extremely difficult or perhaps impossible for us to conceive and how much more to say." That's quoting Augustine. He goes on to say, "Morning returns when the creature returns to the praise and the love of the creator, when it does so in the knowledge of itself, that is the first day. When in the knowledge of the firmament—that is the name given to the sky between the waters above and the earth beneath—that is the second day. And when in the knowledge of the earth and the sea and all things that grow out of the earth, that is the third day. And when in the knowledge of the greater and lesser luminaries and all the stars, that is the fourth day." And so forth. Buswell comments, "It seems that Augustine took the word "day" in this Scripture passage to refer to the spiritual experiences of the creature in returning both to praise and love the creator. In view of the various aspects of creation." He comments, "We cannot judge Augustine by our standards and rules of grammatical or historical hermeneutics, he was notoriously allegorical on his exegesis, we can only note that this great father of the Church in the fifth century, probably the profoundest theologian since the apostle Paul, unquestionably loyal to the Bible, interpreted the days of Genesis creation record in what seems to us a rather fanciful manner." It seems it's an allegorical type of view of the days. They're non-actual days with respect to any historical sequence

in God's creative activity, that's the point. It has more to do with the spiritual experience of the believer in responding to God's creative work.

c. Revelational Day

A third category under non-actual day, would be the Revelational Day view. This would be c. Revelational Day view. On your bibliography down in the middle of page 7 you see, D. J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis* part 2, *Creation Revealed in Six Days*. D. J. Wiseman argued that God revealed creation in six days to Moses. So that the days of Genesis 1 are not solar days or age days indicating a time of creation, rather they are solar days indicating a time of revelation. It was creation revealed in six days. I find it very difficult to find that in Genesis chapter 1. It seems what's being spoken of is not God's revelation to Moses of what he had done in six days of revelational activity, but what he actually did in terms of creative activity. But this view is certainly a non-actual day view with respect to the days of creation.

Now see what's behind this, this is relatively recent—1977—I think again, is this harmonization of science and Scripture? If you have a certain sequence in God's creative activity, how do you match that up with what scientists are telling us about sequence and what we can find with respect to creation of different life forms? If you remove sequence from Genesis chapter 1 then you have no longer any problems.

4. Framework Hypothesis: "Day" as a Literary Device

The next view I'll mention, which is a non-actual day view, is the view that I would say is most popular among contemporary evangelicals, who hold to a non-actual day kind of view. I'll call that the framework hypothesis or double symmetry views. Probably the most influential advocate of this in English writing is N. H. Ridderbos, that's your fourth entry on page 7. In his little book, "Is There a Conflict Between Genesis 1 and Natural Science," Eerdmans, 1957. That's a

translation from a Dutch book. He later wrote a more extensive volume on the same subject in 1963 that I have listed there in Dutch, but it's never been translated into English. In Ridderbos' view the 7 days of Genesis 1 are a literary framework into which the creation narrative is set, thus framework hypothesis. It's a literary framework into which the creation narrative is set. In its view the days are a literary device and are not to be taken as having chronological significance. It is just a pure and simple literary device--there's no chronological significance. They're non-actual days, they're not days that actually took place. It's a literary framework to tell the story of creation. Ridderbos says, "The six days of Genesis 1 are obviously intended as the sum of 2 tridoms—that is, 2 sets of three—which consequently reveal a clearly pronounced parallelism, while the total arrangement is intended to place in bold relief the surpassing glory of man who attains his true destiny in the Sabbath. Given this plan of the creation account we may infer meanwhile that the author consciously used days and nights, evenings and mornings as a literary framework. The specific order belongs to the writer's method of work, not God's creative acts." The order belongs to the writer, not to the work—not God's creative acts. Although it may symbolize the idea that creation is well-ordered.

Parallelism of Days 1-3 and 4-6

Now you see what he did. He drew a parallelism between the first three days and the second three days. Day 1 you have light, whereas in day 4 you have the light bearers—sun, moon, and stars. Day 2 you have the firmament and the division of waters above and below, whereas in the fifth day you have fish and birds. The parallelism is something that's disputed but you can perhaps see it there, or perhaps you'll find a problem with it. But the third day, you have the dry land separated from the sea and vegetation, and then you have inhabitants of the earth—animals and man matching the sixth day. That leads up to the seventh day of special significance, the Sabbath, you find rest in the Sabbath.

Now, let me push that up a bit. You have 8 creative acts—4 on the first 3 days, 4 on the second 3 days. Which means you have 2 each on the third and the sixth days. Those creative acts are introduced by the phrase “and God said.” If you go down through the chapter you find that phrase “and God said” repeated. You see in verse three “and God said let there be light.” We have it once on the first day. Then verse six “and God said let there be a firmament.” That’s the second day. Verse nine “and God said” is on the third day, but verse eleven you see you have two on the third day—verse 9 and verse 11. Then verse 14 you have “and God said;” verse 20 “and God said;” and verse 20 is “and God said” that’s the fifth day, and then verse 24 “and God said” and 26, you get two on the sixth day. So you get two each on the third and the sixth days, and a total of 8. So with that kind of a schematic structure to the chapter, the conclusion is drawn that what you have here is a literary device to structure the creation account and that the days are not actually days of God’s creative activity, they’re a literary device of the writer in presenting God’s creative works.

Buswell in volume one of his *Systematic Theology* discusses this view. On page 143, here’s what he says of it, he mentions Ridderbos’ book, and then he says, “I must confess that the alleged symmetry between the two groups of three days each seems to me like seeing faces in the clouds. Yes the faces are really there and can be seen by others to whom they are pointed out, but the question is whether they were intended? What one person sees as a face in the clouds others may see as an animal or a tree, and the same person may see the same cloud formation in two different patterns depending somewhat on the way he directs his vision. I’m not at all convinced that Moses, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, intended any parallelism between days 1-4, 2-5, and 3-6. For one thing if the days are to be matched it would seem to me that day 3 matches day 5 better than it matches day 6.” In other words, if you’re going to see a parallelism, he sees dry earth separated from the sea and vegetation more with fish and birds than with the inhabitants of the earth—animals and man. And the parallelism seems stronger

between 5 and 3 than it does between 3 and 6.

Then he goes on and he says, “There are other points in which I cannot see that parallelism.” He adds, “Certainly it’s not a heresy for one to see or imagine that he sees such an intended parallelism. What I do object to is the inference that the alleged double parallelism in the six days of creation somehow or other erases the theme across the order of events enumerated one after another.” In other words, what he objects to is getting rid of the idea of sequence. But if you take the days as a literary device that has nothing to do with God’s creative activity in the six days, you have ridded the chapter of sequence in God’s creative activity. And of course that’s Ridderbos’ point—he wants to do that, because you notice the title of his book is, “Is there a conflict between Genesis 1 and Natural Science?” And the way he avoids the supposed conflict is by ridding Genesis chapter 1 of any sequence.

Now there you get back to this question, are you forcing something on the chapter that arises out of scientific data that really doesn’t do justice to the chapter? I want to discuss this double symmetry view a little bit further. There’s some other objections that seem to me to be important to this view. I would say I think this view is important because increasingly evangelicals seem to be latching on to it.

Transcribed by Austin Holt
Rough edited by Ted Hildebrandt
Final edit by Rachel Ashley
Re-narrated by Ted Hildebrandt