

Genesis: Genesis 1 "Days" [Yom] – Theories of Interpretation

Robert Vannoy, OT History, Lecture 6

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Abstract

This lecture examines various interpretative theories regarding the "days" (yom) of Genesis 1, analyzing arguments for both literal and figurative understandings. Professor Vannoy discusses the limitations of the traditional 24-hour solar day view, including the late establishment of the sun and moon on the fourth day and the dense timeline of the sixth day. He then contrasts "actual day" views, such as the Day-Age theory, with "non-actual day" views, including symbolic, allegorical, and the popular literary Framework Hypothesis. Ultimately, the lecture advocates for a careful approach that avoids hostility to science while remaining loyal to the biblical text, recognizing that the text leaves room for interpretation.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Meaning of Yom (Day)

A. Usage of the word yom in the Old Testament

1. General Old Testament usage of yom for periods of time
2. Meaning of yom within the specific framework of Genesis 1

B. Key factors supporting a long period/figurative view of yom in Genesis 1

1. General OT usage permits yom to mean an indeterminate period of time
2. Time-measuring luminaries (sun and moon) are not created until the fourth day
3. The phrase "evening and morning" can figuratively signify the beginning and ending of a creative epoch
4. The numerous events of the sixth day (creation of animals and man, placing man in Eden, tilling, naming of all animals, recognition of solitude, deep sleep, and creation of woman) require a period longer than a 24-hour day
5. The seventh day of God's rest represents a long, ongoing period of cessation from creative work

C. Conclusion: Yom is a period of creative activity of indeterminate length, though the text allows for freedom of opinion

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

A. Actual Day Views (concerning real, historic periods of time)

1. The 24-hour solar day position (three distinct approaches):
 - a. Seven successive 24-hour days
 - b. Restitution or Gap Theory (geologic records and chaos placed between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2)
 - c. Inter-period Theory (24-hour days interspersed with long geological periods, including Dr. Newman's model of days opening long epochs)
 - d. Core arguments: primary lexical meaning of yom; standard reading of "evening and morning"; analogy of the 6+1 working rhythm in Exodus 20:9-11
2. The Day-Age View (yom as an indeterminate period of time):
 - a. Real, historical sequence of creative activities
 - b. Address of the objection that it is merely a modern tool to harmonize the Bible with evolutionary science
 - c. Vannoy's perspective on Science and the Bible: avoid hostility to well-established facts; distinguish valid facts from biased theories; avoid twisting Scripture to force agreement; allow science to stimulate careful re-examination of text parameters
 - d. Francis Schaeffer's position in "Genesis in Space and Time" supporting an open-ended length of time

B. Non-Actual Day Views (denying chronological/historical connection between the six days and creative process)

1. Symbolic or Logical Order Days (Origen of Alexandria, 185-253 AD):
 - a. Creation occurred instantaneously
 - b. Six days represent a logical rather than chronological progression
 - c. Impossibility of literal mornings and evenings prior to the fourth day's sun and stars
2. Allegorical View (Augustine of Hippo, 5th century):
 - a. True nature of these days is extremely difficult to conceive or explain
 - b. Day/morning represents spiritual experiences of the creature returning to love and praise the Creator in response to each aspect of creation
3. Revelational Day View (D. J. Wiseman, 1977):
 - a. Creation was revealed to Moses over six solar days of revelational activity
 - b. Criticism: Very difficult to find support for a revelational framework inside the text of Genesis 1 itself
4. The Framework Hypothesis or Double Symmetry View:
 - a. Highly popular among modern evangelicals, advocated by N. H. Ridderbos (1957)
 - b. Days as a pure literary device/framework with no chronological significance; specific order belongs to the author's structure, not God's creative sequence
 - c. Parallelism between two "tridoms" (sets of three days):
 - i. Day 1 (Light) parallel to Day 4 (Light-bearers: sun, moon, stars)
 - ii. Day 2 (Firmament/division of waters) parallel to Day 5 (Fish and birds)

- iii. Day 3 (Dry land/seas and vegetation) parallel to Day 6 (Land animals and man)
- d. Structural symmetry of 8 creative acts (introduced by "and God said"): 4 acts in days 1-3 (two on day 3), 4 acts in days 4-6 (two on day 6)
- e. Major objections (Oliver Buswell):
 - i. Symmetry is subjective ("seeing faces in the clouds") and may not be intended
 - ii. Parallelism is imperfect (e.g., Day 3 matches Day 5's fish and birds better than Day 6)
 - iii. Improperly erases the literal theme of sequence and the chronological order of events enumerated in the biblical text