

## Personal Essay

Laura Adele Price

A young lady walked into a Sunday school classroom. She heard the teachers discussing the day's lesson.

"Did creation occur in six days or millions of years?" she heard them query. Mentally she answered, "Well, I know the Bible *says* it was in six days but I don't know if it matters."

I was that teen six years ago. Little did I know as I entered the classroom that the LORD was about to revolutionize my understanding of Genesis 1-11. My family and I began a journey of dedicated study with a growing passion to share what we were learning.

We recently taught the high school/adult Sunday school class at our church on astronomy, dinosaurs, radiometric dating, information science, etc. It was during this time that I began comparing the claims of progressive creation with Scripture. I chose the days of creation as my research topic because I felt that it was a vital issue. If Scripture does *not* mean what it clearly says regarding these days, infallibility is questioned and the message of the gospel is compromised (e.g. death before sin).

I have shared my research paper with a student whose convictions were strengthened by it, and with eleven Christian organizations and seminaries because I know there has been much compromise on this issue. One of the responses I received was particularly encouraging. The Navigators' president, Mr. Mike Treneer, has been overseas as a missionary for a number of years and feels out of touch with the creation/evolution debate. However, after reading my paper he is convinced of the need to study the issue.

It is my prayer and passion that my life would be used of God to show others their need to see His Word as truth from cover to cover.

**A Biblical Case for Literal Creation Days:**

**So How Long Were They?**

**By Laura Adele Price**

The judge takes his seat. The courtroom is respectfully quiet, but tense. Two opposite claims are in direct conflict. A lawyer rises to his feet to defend one view and refute the other. Which one will the evidence best support?

Likewise, two views of the meaning of the word “day” as presented in Genesis 1:1-2:3 are in direct conflict. There are two goals in the writing of this paper: (1) to give the biblical case for normal, 24-hour days as the understanding of the creation week in Genesis, and (2) to refute one specific view of how these “days” are understood.

### **Biblical Case for the 24-Hour Days of Creation Week**

The Hebrew word for day is *yom*. In both its singular and plural forms, it occurs 2,291 times in the Old Testament (Stambaugh) and means a literal 24-hour period unless the context is clear otherwise. Some modifiers that occur with *yom* when it means a literal day include: night, evening and/or morning, and a number (either ordinal or cardinal).

One has only to look at the text of Genesis 1 to see how it is used (Green 1-4):

Day 1: night, evening, morning, *yom*, number—one (Gen. 1:5)

Day 2: evening, morning, *yom*, number—second (Gen. 1:8)

Day 3: evening, morning, *yom*, number—third (Gen. 1:13)

Day 4: evening, morning, *yom*, number—fourth (Gen. 1:19)

Day 5: evening, morning, *yom*, number—fifth (Gen. 1:23)

Day 6: evening, morning, *yom*, number—sixth (Gen. 1:31)

(The seventh day is mentioned in the beginning of Genesis chapter two and will be discussed presently.) In the presence of such important, modifying words, it is obvious that *yom* must mean an actual, 24-hour day in each of its occurrences in Genesis 1.

Two of the literary genres in the Old Testament are narrative/prose and poetry. Interestingly enough, the sentence structure of the Hebrew language reflects their distinction. For example, when a text is poetry, the sentences will reflect a subject-verb-object word order. In narrative writing the order is verb-subject-object (Riddle). Knowing this much, it is a simple exercise to look at the text of Genesis and see what construction is portrayed. A Hebrew/English Interlinear Bible clarifies this; the literal rendering of Genesis 1:1 is “In the beginning created God the heavens and the earth” (Green 1). This follows the verb-subject-object pattern, which continues throughout the text of Genesis 1:1-2:3, showing that it is a narrative account.

There is an even more thorough way to discern a text genre, however. In statistical analysis, the tenses of the Hebrew verbs are assessed. Certain tenses tend to dominate a specific genre. Therefore, they can be used to predict to which genre a text belongs. Dr. Steven Boyd, a member of the RATE<sup>1</sup> group, conducted such a study. He is a Hebrew expert and he concludes:

“[S]tatistical analysis categorizes biblical texts as narrative or poetry to a high level of accuracy. Genesis 1:1-2:3 is determined to be narrative with a probability of virtually one...[therefore,] it is not statistically defensible to interpret [it] as poetry or metaphor...[Also,] since Genesis 1:1-2:3 clearly is narrative, it should be read as other Hebrew narratives are intended to be read. That is, the creation account describes actual events which carry an unmistakable theological

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<sup>1</sup> RATE stands for Radioisotopes and the age of the Earth. This eight-member group worked for eight years doing original research on the rates of radioactive decay in the past. They attempted to explain from a literal creationist perspective how the extremely old dates from radiometric dating could be reconciled with the Bible’s account of a universe only 6,000-10,000 years old.

message...[and] when [it] is read as narrative, there is only one tenable view: God created everything during six literal days” (DeYoung 169).

Since Dr. Boyd’s study shows that the text is narrative, it would be improper to assign an allegorical meaning to any of the words in Genesis 1:1-2:3—including the word “day.”

The final verses of the above-mentioned section, Genesis 2:1-3, speak of the seventh day of creation:

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.”

There is no indication from the text that the seventh day was different in duration from the previous six. Note also that a number, one of the modifiers that defines a literal day, qualifies the seventh day.

In the middle of the Ten Commandments God makes this statement: “For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:11). It is clear that the creation week of seven literal days sets the pattern for our workweek of literal days.

Dr. James Barr sums up this argument nicely:

“...probably, so far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1-11 intended to convey to their readers ...that...creation took place in a series of

six days which were the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience...”

(“Oxford Hebrew scholar” n. pag.)

Dr. Barr does not believe that creation occurred on literal days. His conclusion, therefore, is all the more compelling.

As one can see, there is linguistic evidence strongly supporting the view that God’s work of creation and His subsequent rest occurred in seven literal, 24-hour days. For, “if...the word ‘day’ in these chapters does not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless” (Dr. Marcus Dods, qtd. in Sarfati).

### **Refutation of the Equating of the Days of Creation Week with Millions of Years**

Some Christians, known as *progressive creationists*, believe that each day of creation was an epoch of millions of years.<sup>2</sup> One progressive creationist, Astronomer Dr. Hugh Ross, founder of the Reasons To Believe organization, has written several books and has traveled extensively, lecturing on various subjects related to faith and science. Dr. Ross himself believes that God used the Big Bang to create the universe approximately 15 billion years ago. He also proposes that stars and galaxies formed by natural means, after which God made the earth and moon. Dr. Ross and other progressive creationists believe God successively and supernaturally created distinct species of life, going from “simple” to “complex” over the past few million years. (Hence the name “progressive” creation.) Thus, progressive creationists believe that the “days” of creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 were each an epoch of millions of years (Ham et al. 26-29). Although this paper is not an attack on Dr. Ross personally, nor on progressive creationists in

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<sup>2</sup> Contrastively, *young-earth creationists* are Christians who believe God supernaturally created the universe in six 24-hour days approximately 6,000 years ago, followed by a global, catastrophic flood.

general, the author will compare their beliefs regarding the creation days with Scripture to see if they are a valid interpretation of the text. Dr. Ross's works will be referenced extensively simply because he is one of the most vocal progressive creationists and his books contain helpful information regarding progressive creationists' views.

So, what defines a "day"? Does the Hebrew of Genesis 1:1-2:3 really show that the "days" are 24 hours long—or are they each an epoch of millions of years?

In stating his case Dr. Ross declares the following:

"With so many words available in English to describe long time periods (having specific start and end points), many readers don't realize that in biblical Hebrew only one such word exists...*Yom* remains the only...word... that can refer to a long time period with a definite start and end point" (*A Matter of Days* 61, 76).

This assertion is incorrect. *Yom* does not have a meaning of a long time period with "a definite start and end point." It can mean longer than a day (or the daylight part of a day) but only as: (1) a year, (2) "a specific point of time," (3) "a general or vague concept of time" (Stambaugh). There are several ways in which the Hebrew could have been written so that the reader would have instantly known that a long period of time was meant (Stambaugh). However, none of these were used in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

"God, through the 'pen' of Moses, is being redundant for redundancy's sake. God is going out of His way to tell us that the 'days' of creation were literal solar days...[He] has communicated the words of Genesis 1 in a specific manner, so that the interpreter could not miss His point. God could not have communicated the timing of creation more clearly than He did in Genesis 1" (Stambaugh, n. pag.).

Dr. Ross also asserts, “Here [Gen. 2:4], the word ‘day’ (*yom*) refers to all six creation days, a period longer than 24 hours” (*A Matter of Days* 76). This is true, and young-earth creationists agree. It does not, however, help in his argument that the days of creation were not literal days. *Yom* can have the meaning of “a specific point of time” or “a general or vague concept of time” if the context so indicates (Stambaugh). Since *yom* is not qualified by any of the modifiers seen in Genesis 1:1-2:3, here in Genesis 2:4 it does not mean a literal day.

Another suggestion by Dr. Ross is that the days of creation were God’s days so we cannot expect them to be like ours (*Creation and Time* 45). Examples of biblical texts he uses to support this are Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8<sup>3</sup>. However, the context of these verses speaks of the timelessness of God and His transcendence of time, respectively. Both references contain the word “as,” indicating the use of simile, where one thing is likened to another in a comparison meant to aid the reader’s understanding. Furthermore, these verses are not a reference to creation. In contrast, Genesis 1:1-2:3, the specific creation account, is in literal, narrative form, as was previously seen. Therefore, such a suggestion is self-refuting. If the creation week really consisted of “God’s days,” it would logically follow that they would no more be millions of years than the 24-hour days clearly defined in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Dr. Ross seems to reduce the importance of the words “evening” and “morning” in Genesis 1 by implying that they must be metaphoric: “In other words, ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ refer to the beginning and ending of a day, whatever definition of ‘day’

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<sup>3</sup> Psalm 90:4, “For a thousand years in your sight are but **as** yesterday when it is past, and **as** a watch in the night” (emphasis added).

2 Peter 3:8, “But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the LORD **as** a thousand years, and a thousand years **as** one day” (emphasis added).



applies” (*A Matter of Days* 74). As was demonstrated earlier, Genesis 1:1-2:3 can only be seen as a narrative, historic account requiring a *literal*<sup>4</sup> interpretation.

Dr. Ross also speaks of the seventh day of creation week: “According to the [Hebrews 4:4-11<sup>5</sup>] passage, the seventh day of the creation week carries on through the centuries, from Adam and Eve, through Israel’s development as a nation, through the time of Christ’s earthly ministry, through the early days of the church, and on into the future” (*A Matter of Days* 82).

However, the main passage in such a discussion must be Genesis 2:1-3 itself, where it speaks of the seventh day. The Hebrew verb for “rested” in this passage is in the past tense (Van Bebber, Taylor 70). We are also living in a cursed, fallen world today, which does not fit harmoniously with a blessed and sanctified Sabbath (Van Bebber, Taylor 70-71). Andrew Kulikovsky answers the assertion that Hebrews 4:4-11 teaches an ongoing Sabbath,

“The ‘rest’ of Hebrews 4 clearly refers to the Kingdom of God...Nowhere in the text is it equated with the seventh day of creation, nor is there any grammatical or contextual data suggesting [this]...Thus, the progressive creationists’ claim that the seventh day of creation is still continuing is without any exegetical [from the text] foundation whatsoever” (n. pag.).

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<sup>4</sup> The dictionary meaning for “literal” states: “adhering to fact or to the ordinary construction or primary meaning of a term or expression: actual, obvious” (Webster’s 671).

<sup>5</sup> Hebrews 4:4-11, “For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest [on] the seventh day from all His works...Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein...There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God. For he that entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from His.”

In summing up the section on the seventh day, Dr. Ross states the following: “Given the parallelism of the creation days in the Genesis account, it seems reasonable to conclude that the first six days were also long time periods” (*A Matter of Days* 83). Since the argument for an ongoing Sabbath was built on a misunderstanding of Hebrews 4 and other passages, it is not possible to argue that because the seventh day is a long period of time, the other six days of creation must be the same.

Progressive creationists also believe that both Scripture and nature give reliable information regarding the subjects that they address.

“The Bible teaches a dual, consistent revelation. Just as readers rightfully expect valid interpretation of Isaiah to be consistent with that of Mark, so too they can expect accurate interpretation of the facts of nature to be consistent with the message of Genesis and the rest of Scripture. The inspired words of Scripture confirm that this ‘voice’ of nature faithfully communicates information about God” (*A Matter of Days* 89).

Young-earth creationists likewise believe that the creation bears witness to the Almighty Creator. However, the disagreement regarding dual revelation comes with the progressive creationists’ belief that the conclusions of secular scientists are absolute truth, just as Scripture is absolute truth. The study of the creation necessitates interpretation of facts. Scientists view the creation through the “glasses” of their presuppositions. “Starting with the wrong presuppositions [will lead] people to believe in the wrong history of the earth” (Patterson 106). The creation cannot give us completely accurate information about God and His character because the creation has been cursed (see Genesis 3:17-18). God’s Word is not cursed but completely trustworthy on all matters.

Dr. Ross asserts that eminent scholars during church history have regarded the days of Genesis 1:1-2:3 as non-literal (*Creation and Time* 16ff, see *A Matter of Days* 41-49). In his previous work, *Creation and Time*, Dr. Ross listed 14 men to support this statement. Two were Jewish scholars, Philo and Josephus, and the rest were Christians who lived in the early centuries of church history. Authors Van Bebber and Taylor discuss Dr. Ross's claims of the beliefs of these men. They show that Ross misunderstood at least 9 of these 14 men (93-99). In his more recent book, *A Matter of Days*, many of these errors seem to have been continued (41-47). For example, Dr. Ross declares in *A Matter of Days*, "Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 100-165)...drew support from Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 to suggest that the 'days' could be epochs, perhaps thousand-year-long creation periods" (43). However, Van Bebber and Taylor point out that Justin Martyr "definitely" believed in literal creation days (95).

This quote from the late Dr. Gleason Archer is very telling in its honesty:

"From a superficial reading of Genesis 1, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four-hour days. If this was the true intent of the Hebrew author... this seems to run counter to modern scientific research, which indicates that the planet Earth was created several billion years ago" (qtd. in Mortenson n. pag.).

In other words, Scripture is plain but modern scientists say otherwise. The following quote from Dr. Ross is very sobering indeed:

"Loving God with 'all your mind' means *looking beyond the most simplistic interpretation of a given text*, especially if that interpretation leads to complications and convolutions of other texts. God calls us to 'rightly divide' the

Word (see 2 Timothy 2:15, KJV) to search for the simplest, most elegant, most complete, and consistent interpretation—one that aligns with both His stated character and purpose” (*A Matter of Days* 229, emphasis added).

Sadly, it is the progressive creationists’ interpretation of Genesis that “leads to complications and convolutions of [it and] other texts.” However, these quotes show that these highly qualified and respected men—and they are not alone—have given man’s interpretations of the creation a higher rating than the infallible Word of God—probably without even realizing it.

### **Conclusion**

The judge rises from his seat as the whole room stiffens with climactic suspense. What will he say? The verdict: It seems clear, then, that the only proper interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis is that the Almighty Creator made the universe in six 24-hour days and rested on the seventh day. To say otherwise is ultimately to force Scripture to say what it obviously does not. “Every word of God is pure...Add thou not to His words...” says Proverbs 30:5-6. Let us reverence His Word and make it our *supreme authority*.

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