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**Genesis 1: interpretive models**


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**1) Young Earth****a) Clearly, the Bible says that God created the universe and all that is in it in 6 days**

- i) The ordinary meaning of יום "day" is a 24 hour period
- ii) Why complicate the matter?

**b) First, the Hebrew word יום yom almost always refers to a 24-hour period**

- i) Any period of time referred to by that word, then, is 24 hours long, unless we have some direct indication in the text that it isn't

**c) Second, whenever "yom" is used with a specific number before it, it always refers to a normal 24-hour day****d) Third, the fact that the author uses "evening" and "morning" when describing each creation "day" makes it clear that he intended the reader to see these as normal days**

- i) It is unusual to speak of a long period of time having a morning and an evening

**e) Fourth, Gen 1:14 talks about days and years; nobody questions that the days and years here are literal**

- i) And God said, 'Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years'
- ii) It doesn't make sense to assume that the author suddenly shifted from one usage of yom to another, in the same passage, without any indication

**f) Finally, God commanded Israel to imitate the pattern he set in Genesis 1 by working 6 days out of the week and resting on the 7<sup>th</sup>**

- i) Remember the Sabbath day, and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it (Ex 20:8-11)

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**2) Old Earth**
**a) The usage of "yom" isn't quite as clear as it would seem**

- i) While the word can of course refer to a 24-hour period, it can also refer to a longer span of time
- ii) Gen 2:4, "in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (ESV)

(1) Clearly the word is being used to refer to the period of time in which God created everything,

not just the 24-hour period

iii) Other examples

(1) Prov 25:13

(2) Isa 4:2

(3) Zech 14:1

**b) Interpreting the days of Gen 1 as 24-hour periods creates difficulties within the text**

- i) The sun does not appear until the fourth day; how then were the mornings and the evenings of the previous three days understood?
- ii) If we stay with the direct understanding of the text, it is difficult to see how some of the events could have happened in a 24-hour period (1:11-12)
- iii) On the 6<sup>th</sup> day, Adam named all the animals... this argument might look silly, but if we're taking everything at face value, looking for the simple and direct meaning...

**c) Third, several passages of Scripture seem to indicate that God's days are not measured like our days**

- i) A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by (Psalm 90:4)
- ii) But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. (2 Peter 3:8)
- iii) Hebrews 4 seems to indicate that we are still in the 7<sup>th</sup> day of creation

**d) Finally, a number of passages appear to teach that the earth is very old**

- i) He stood, and shook the earth; he looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled and the age-old hills collapsed—but he marches on forever. (Hab 3:6)
- ii) Hear, you mountains, the LORD's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. (Micah 6:2)
- iii) The frequent use of ancient as a description of the earth appears to correlate better with an earth that isn't 10000 years old
- iv) At least, these points show that it isn't implausible to believe that the Bible is comfortable with an old earth

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### 3) The Gap Theory

**a) Explanation**

- i) 1:1 speaks of the original creation. This creation became corrupted through demonic forces and came under judgment. It became a formless void. Then God restored the world and created

humanity to love God and care for & protect his creation

**b) Gen 1:2 describes the earth as a formless void (tohu va bohu) in which darkness covered the face of the deep**

- i) These words almost always refer to something that has been corrupted, wasted and judged
  - (1) Deut 32:10
  - (2) Isa 24:10
  - (3) Isa 34:11
  - (4) Jer 4:23
- ii) It is therefore reasonable to assume that Gen 1:2 refers to a condition where the world was under God's judgment
- iii) In fact, Isa 45:18 says explicitly that the Lord "did not create the world a chaos [tohu]"
- iv) Some Hebrew scholars think that the word translated "was" in 1:2 ought to be translated "became"

**c) In general, "the deep" has a negative connotation in the OT**

- i) The waters, the seas, the deep usually signified something that opposed God, that contained evil
- ii) So when we read that the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters, there is the sense of the Spirit guarding it, watching over it, keeping demonic forces at bay
- iii) Again, there is the sense that something evil has happened between 1:1 and 1:2

**d) There are other OT passages that speak of creation, and in many of them, God is seen as doing battle with hostile forces**

- i) The waters, the deep, Leviathan...
  - (1) Ps 74:12-17
  - (2) Ps 89:8-18
  - (3) Ps 104:1-9
- ii) So we have to reflect on where these conflict passages fit into the creation story of Gen 1-2
- iii) Also, where does the rebellion and fall of Satan and his angels fall into Gen 1-2 (Jude 6, Rev 12)

**e) It is significant that with the exception of animals and humans, Gen 1 does not use the word "create" (bara) but "make" ('asah)**

- i) God fashions things out of pre-existing material
- ii) This fits with the view that we're talking about the restoration of a corrupted world, rather than its original creation from nothing

**f) Finally, the use of the words "dominion" & "keep"**

- i) The Hebrew term "kabash" usually suggests suppression, conquering, or enslaving hostile forces
  - (1) Num 32:22, 29
  - (2) Josh 18:1
  - (3) Neh 5:5
  - (4) Jer 34:16
  - (5) Micah 7:19
  - (6) Zech 9:15
- ii) God commands Adam to "keep" (shamar) the Garden
  - (1) There's a sense of guarding it from something that shouldn't enter in
  - (2) Same word used in 3:24 to speak of the angels/cherubim guarding the Garden from Adam & Eve
  - (3) So what were Adam & Eve guarding the garden from?
- iii) And they fail to guard the garden, evil enters in, so God has to cover the earth with the waters again, and start over with Noah

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**4) The Literary Framework View**

**a) Explanation**

- i) Young earth creationists seek to fit modern science into a simplistic reading of Genesis 1. Old earth folk seek to fit Genesis 1 into modern science. The Gap theorists insert a speculative gap and seek to have their cake and eat it too.
- ii) All three are fundamentally misguided in how they approach the text.
- iii) They've missed the forest for the trees.
- iv) They haven't considered seriously the kind of literature we are dealing with in Gen 1
- v) The text is clearly poetic, a literary structure rather than a chronological or sequential structure

- vi) Therefore to try to match it up with scientific chronologies is an error of genre – in other words, the text does not address the age of the earth at all

**b) Gen 1:1 functions as a general introductory & summary statement**

**c) Gen 1:2 sets forth the problem that the rest of the chapter is to deal with**

- i) Specifically, three problems are laid out
- ii) One, there is darkness
- iii) Second, the earth is covered by the deep, the waters, that which contains evil covers the whole earth
- iv) Third, the earth itself is formless and void

**d) The creation week is divided into two sets of three days**

- i) Within each three-day group, four creative acts of God are identified by the phrase “Let there be...”
- ii) And there’s a mirroring, a paralleling between the first set of days/creative acts and the second set of days/creative acts
- iii) Day 4 mirrors day 1, day 5 mirrors day 2, day 6 mirrors day 3

**e) The first set of 3 days addresses the problems of the darkness, the deep, and the formlessness of the earth**

- i) God addresses these problems by creating good spaces within which good things may exist

**f) The second set of 3 days addresses the voidness/emptiness problem of 1:2**

- i) God solves this problem by creating good things to fill the good spaces he created in the first 3 days

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Solution: Step 1</b>	<b>Solution: Step 2</b>
Formless Void	Forming place	Filling void
Darkness	Day 1: light/separate darkness	Day 4: lights
The Deep	Day 2: heavens/separate waters	Day 5: birds & fish
Formless earth	Day 3: earth/vegetation	Day 6: animals & humans

**g) This sort of thematic arrangement isn’t unusual – the gospel writers do the same sort of thing with the Jesus narrative**

- i) The point is simply that Gen 1 is not concerned with the chronology, it is concerned with explaining a theology of creation using literary means

***Placing Ourselves in the Story*****Genesis 1:1-2:3 (NIV)**

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." And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." And it was so. God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds." And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky." So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth." And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind." And it was so. God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

So God created mankind in his own image,  
in the image of God he created them;  
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

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**In the beginning...**

תְּהוֹמֹת עֲרִבְיָהוּ (tōhû wābōhû)

Darkness and the Deep

**Isaiah 8:22**

Then they will look toward the earth and see only distress and darkness and fearful gloom, and they will be thrust into utter darkness.

**Job 38:8-11**

“Who shut up the sea behind doors  
when it burst forth from the womb,  
when I made the clouds its garment  
and wrapped it in thick darkness,  
when I fixed limits for it  
and set its doors and bars in place,  
when I said, ‘This far you may come and no farther;  
here is where your proud waves halt’?

**Question:** where do the darkness, chaos and waters come from?

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**God speaks...**

**Hebrews 1:1-3**

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

**Question:** to whom is God speaking?

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### Image of God/Mission

#### Genesis 1: 26-28

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

#### Colossians 1: 15-22

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

#### Revelation 5: 9-10

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

**Question:** why did God create humanity, for what purpose in this world? What mission does God give humanity?

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**Sabbath/Temple****7**

1:1—7 words

1:2—14 words

“God” 35 times

“Heaven” and “earth” 21 times

“Living things” and “It was good” 7 times

2:1-2:3 consist of 35 words, 21 of which occur in 3 sentences of 7 words each of which includes the expression, “the seventh day.”

**Psalm 132: 7-8, 13-14**

“Let us go to his dwelling place,  
let us worship at his footstool, saying,  
‘Arise, LORD, and come to your resting place,  
you and the ark of your might.  
For the LORD has chosen Zion,  
he has desired it for his dwelling, saying,  
“This is my resting place for ever and ever;  
here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.”

**Ezekiel 48: 35**

“And the name of the city from that time on will be:

THE LORD IS THERE.”

**Revelation 21: 1-5**

Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”

**Question:** What is the final goal of creation?