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Are the Events in the Genesis Creation Account Set Forth in Chronological Order?: No

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2 Are the Events in the Genesis Creation Account Set Forth in Chronological Order?

YES: ROBERT C. NEWMAN

Evidence for Chronological Order
The first chapter of Genesis certainly gives the impression that it is to be understood as a chronological account of God's activity in creation. Genesis 1:1—2:3 is primarily structured by a device consisting of a sequence of days numbered one through seven. Interspersed among these days are God's creation commands and the events fulfilling the commands.

NO: MARK A. THRONTVEIT

This study will focus upon the ordering of the events set forth in Genesis 1, discuss the major attempts to justify a nonchronological ordering of those events, and suggest an approach that sees the creative week as the basic unit of time in the creation account.

The Nature of the Problem
At first glance, one's immediate response to the question in the title is: "Of course they are! One has only to read the text to see that the order starts with 'beginning' (1:1) and proceeds subsequent days (1:2—31; 2:2-3). Except for the sequence of days and "evening and morning" commands, this account is very chronological. The "day" and "night" occurs followed by "seasons" and "years," indicating that these other chronologically ordered events are not a concept foreign to the text.

More important is the number of items cloud the question ambiguous. For example, if the events are chronologically ordered, one can explain the existence of the sun, before God's "day" (Gen. 1:16)?

Furthermore, plant life is not a concept foreign to the account. But as one reads the text to see that the order starts with "beginning" (1:1) and proceeds subsequent days (1:2—31; 2:2-3). Except for the sequence of days and "evening and morning" commands, this account is very chronological. The "day" and "night" occurs followed by "seasons" and "years," indicating that these other chronologically ordered events are not a concept foreign to the text.

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The account uses a number of chronological terms. It starts with a “beginning” (1:1), which is followed by the sequence of “days” mentioned above (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31; 2:2-3). Except for the seventh day (2:2-3) each member of this sequence of days also includes a reference to an “evening and morning” constituting that particular day. All of this is very chronological. Other chronological terms occur in the passage, although these are not so directly relevant to the question we are considering. Thus the pair “day” and “night” occurs three times (1:5, 14, 16); references to “seasons” and “years” occur in 1:14. It is generally agreed that these other chronological terms refer to literal days, nights, seasons, and years. Though they do not prove that the sequence of days in Genesis 1 must be chronological, they certainly indicate that chronology is not a concept foreign to the author.

More important is the numerical sequence itself. In Hebrew, as in English, there are two sets of numbers: (1) carn-
THE GENESIS DEBATE

dinal numbers, indicating quantity (one, two, three, four, etc.); (2) ordinal numbers, indicating sequence (first, second, third, fourth, etc.). The days in Genesis 1 are numbered with the standard ordinal numbers used in Hebrew sequences, though the first one is ambiguous and could be either cardinal or ordinal. Literally, we have “one day” or “a first day” (1:5); “a second day” (1:8); “a third day” (1:13); “a fourth day” (1:19); “a fifth day” (1:23); “the sixth day” (1:31); and, finally, “the seventh day” (2:2-3). Note also the presence of the definite article “the” with the last two days.

As mentioned above, the number used in 1:5, ‘ehad, is ambiguous; it could be either cardinal (“one”) or ordinal (“first”). Its usage overlaps with ri’son, “first.” Either may indicate first days; for some reason, ri’son is used for first months and ‘ehad for first years. The words for “second,” “third,” “fourth,” “fifth,” “sixth,” and “seventh,” however, are simply the usual ordinals; all are used now and then for days, months, and years. A sequence of numbered days

YES chronologically ordered sequence? In response to this problem the suggestion has been made that verse 16 should not be translated “and God made the two great lights,” as in the RSV and most other translations, but rather “Now God had made the two great lights.” Syntactically speaking, this pluperfect rendering of the verb is entirely possible. The difficulty with this solution is that it overlooks verses 14-15: “And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and for years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’” Even if one were to concede the translation “had made” in verse 16, the jussives of verses 14-15 (“let there be,” “let them be”) cannot be translated in a way that would allow the existence of the sun before day four.

Another suggestion takes seriously the parallel statements in verses 4 and 18 concerning the separation of the light from the darkness. In verse 4 we read that “God separated the light from the darkness.” In verse 18 “the two great lights” (verse 16) are said “to separate

NO the light from the darkness might indicate that the event days are coterminous, that separates light from darkness. In the text questions it does not harmonize the creation account modern science should be informed by a perspective of evolutionary theory; it is easy to see that the text of Genesis 1 is.

At this point it should be said that the interpretation of any bit of text questions it does not harmonize the creation account modern science should be informed by a perspective evolutionary theory; it is easy to see that the text of Genesis 1 is.

Natural, ordinal numbers are chronological words. In Genesis four rivers of Eden (2:10-14) areark (6:16). In such cases the ordering scheme in the mind of Eden, it is not clear what circuit around the compass which these rivers diverge from goes downstream. The context does not know enough about the ga. In the case of the ark, however, context indicates that the floor goes from the bottom.

But even when used with natural numbers often indicate a chronology.

of the six sons of Leah is narrated

that is clearly chronological
that is clearly chronological is the set of twelve days on which the tribal leaders in turn presented their dedicatory offerings to the tabernacle (Num. 7:10–83).

Naturally, cardinal numbers do not have to be used with chronological words. In Genesis, for example, we have the four rivers of Eden (2:10–14) and the three floors of the ark (6:16). In such cases the use of ordinals indicates an ordering scheme in the mind of the author. For the four rivers of Eden, it is not clear what this scheme was—perhaps a circuit around the compass points, or the sequence in which these rivers diverge from their source river as one goes downstream. The context gives no clue, and we do not know enough about the geography of Eden to be sure. In the case of the ark, however, the use of “lower” in the context indicates that the floors are numbered upward from the bottom.

But even when used with non-chronological words, ordinal numbers often indicate a chronological order. The birth of the six sons of Leah is narrated in Genesis 29:31–35 and...
30:17-20. The first four sons are not numbered, but the last two are labeled “fifth” and “sixth.” Clearly the ordering principle is chronological by time of birth. This is so even though the definite article is not used (paralleling days one to five of Genesis 1)—that is, Leah gives birth to "a fifth son" and "a sixth son." Since the genealogical term "generations" is used to structure the whole book of Genesis, a chronological ordering of Genesis 1 would fit in nicely with this pattern.

Ordinal numbers often occur with "day," "month," or "year" even when no explicit sequence is given. In each of these cases the day, month or year is the nth in some implied sequence, usually named in the context, such as the nth day of the week or month, the nth day since some event, the nth month of the year, or the nth year of a king's reign. I know of no cases where ordinal numbers are used with chronological terms when the sequence of ordering is not chronological. Consequently it seems that the burden of proof is upon those who nonchronological.

Of course, this need not be the case. Some have noticed in Genesis 1 that the days often depart from chronological order, with the first day being the day of creation, and the subsequent days being subsequent events. This is a reflection of the complexity of the creation process. The appropriate order of events will need to be determined by scientists and theologians, abiding by the canons of their respective disciplines.

Proposed Solutions

The scholarly community, cognizant of the difficulties involved in maintaining a chronological interpretation of the six-day sequence in Genesis 1, noticed early on that the number of creative works stands in some tension with the number of creative days. Eight works have been compressed into the space of six days, with two creative works each assigned to days three and six. The consensus today is that the framework of the six days has been imposed upon the earlier account of eight creative works. Several suggestions have been made in an attempt to account for this six-day structure. Three representative approaches follow:

1. Liturgical. S. H. Hooke, one of the first to introduce the six-day sequence in Genesis 1, specifically for a seven-day week. He noted that the day of creation was followed by six days of work, each day corresponding to a week. This approach received more support from some of Genesis 1's original readers.

2. Catechetical. A second approach was proposed by P. J. Wiseman who, after a careful examination of the text, maintains that the description of the six days of creation is not meant to be taken literally, but as a means of instructing the Israelites about the proper order of events. Wiseman argued that the purpose of the six days of creation was to establish a liturgical pattern for the Israelites to follow in their weekly rhythms. This approach received more support than Hooke's, as it provided a more comprehensive explanation of the text.

3. Polemical. A third approach suggests that the discrepancies in a chronological interpretation can be resolved by recognizing that the narratives of creation and the historical events are not meant to be taken literally. Instead, the purpose of the narratives is to convey spiritual truths about the nature of God and the world. This approach received more support than Hooke's, as it provided a more comprehensive explanation of the text.

The debate over the chronology of Genesis 1 continues, with different communities of scholars offering their own interpretations. The importance of understanding the intended meaning of the narratives is clear, as they have been a source of inspiration and guidance for generations of believers.
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Of course, this need not indicate that all events men­
tioned in Genesis 1 fall within this sequence. A narrative
will often depart from chronological order to carry some
strand through to a conclusion and then return to its chro­
nological sequence. This is commonly done for a character
who is about to enter or leave the narrative (Gen. 31:55;
Mark 5:20). Neither does evidence of chronological order­
ing require that the days of Genesis be twenty-four-hour
days or that they succeed one another immediately or
without overlap. Some of these possibilities will be dis­
cussed below, and others are treated elsewhere in this
book.

**Objections to Chronological Order**

A number of objections have been raised against inter­
preting Genesis 1 as a chronological account of creation.²
We will here try to respond to the main ones, moving from

1. *Liturgical.* S. H. Hooke suggested that Israel’s
priests introduced the six-day scheme (plus the addi­
tion of the seventh day in 2:1–3) to shape the creation
account as a “liturgy of creation” for use in the cult, spe­
cifically for a seven-day New Year festival modeled
upon the Babylonian akītu festival.¹ While few scholars
have accepted Hooke’s proposal of the New Year festi­
val, many have adopted his liturgical explanation for
the addition of the six/seven-day framework.

2. *Catechetical.* A second position is rep­re­
sented by P. J. Wiseman who, after a curious exegesis of Exodus
20:11, maintains that the six days were six days of
instruction given to Moses on Mount Sīnai rather than a
description of the six days of creation.² As in the case of
Hooke, this catechetical or instructional approach has
received more support than Wiseman’s specific appli­
cation.

3. *Polemical.* A third way of accounting for the dis­
crepancies in a chronological ordering of the creation
events is to recognize the polemical motivation present
in the text. This approach explains the creation of the
sun after the creation of light as either an utter denunci-
more scientific objections to more exegetical ones. Some have rejected a chronological interpretation of Genesis 1 as inconsistent with the findings of modern science. There are, in fact, tensions between some scientific theories and some chronological interpretations of Genesis 1. Such tensions, however, do not apply equally to all chronological interpretations.

Some of these tensions involve the time of creation: whether it began thousands of years ago or billions of years ago, whether it lasted one week or billions of years. For those who believe that science is mistaken about the age of the earth, there is no reason to reject the idea that Genesis 1 is to be interpreted chronologically. For those who believe science is right about the age of the earth (as I do), there are yet a number of interpretive schemes that harmonize Genesis 1 and science without rejecting a chronological interpretation of the Genesis account. An old earth with a long period of God’s creative activity does not itself rule out chronological order from Genesis 1.

Various critiques have been made against these representative attempts to understand the six-day sequence of Genesis 1 in a nonchronological way. It is not my intention to disparage these views or depreciate those who hold them. From an exegetical point of view, however, these are not the only possibilities. All three share the common presupposition that the creation account is comprised of a series of day-long units. But what if the basic unit of time described in Genesis 1:1—2:3 is in fact the creation week itself? Evidence for such a reconceptualization can be gathered from a spectrum of expositors that ranges from the conservative writings of Benno Jacob and Umberto Cassuto to the critical writings of Claus Westermann.

The English translation of Benno Jacob’s Genesis commentary begins: “The story of creation leads up to man, the subject of all history. The earth is prepared for him so that he may live, work and rest upon it. All this is placed into the frame of ‘six days’, not to write a historical account in the sequence of time, but to construct before our eyes the universe as a meaningful cosmos.”

Nor does it matter whether one argues for chronology based on common ancestry or a descent from common ancestry. Some objections in Genesis 2, the account of Adam and (especially) the fall. But the chronological self-explanation of every form of sun-worship or a desacralization of nature.

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After examining relevant materials, Umberto Cassuto claimed that consecutive days was considered a problem in which to develop a historical account lasting six days and their references to “a perfect work,” rather than “a historical process.”

Claus Westermann refutes the notion that Genesis presents creation events by pointing out that “cesion of six days ending on the seventh day presents a whole, an articulate and meaningful cosmos, rather than a historical time.”

Near the end of his discussion, Westermann returns to this
the basis of scientific evidence and Job 38:8–11, I believe that the earth was covered with a heavy cloud layer early in its history (when the oceans were born, approximately Gen. 1:6). As a result the source of daylight could not be observed from the earth’s surface (which appears to be the standpoint of the Genesis 1 narrative) until day four, when the cloud cover cleared.6

What about the survival of plant life without a sun? Young-earth creationists have their sun-like light illuminating the plants for a day or so, just as we sometimes grow plants with artificial light today; old-earth creationists have sunshine diffusing through the clouds with sufficient intensity for photosynthesis.7 In fact, for old-earth creationists it is this photosynthesis that oxygenates the earth’s atmosphere, not only to prepare breathable air for the animals that God is soon to create but also to convert the atmosphere from one that acts as a strong greenhouse and supports a heavy cloud cover to one that as a weak greenhouse will only support a partial cloud cover, thus leading to the appearance of day four.8

According to this latter scenario, stars were really made earlier than the sun, for instance, when God said, “Let there be light.” They are only made visible on day four. Thus the command “Let there be light” (NIV) is qualified by “to separate the day from night,” to be “light day and night.”

Does this view square with the programmatic statement: “We must take as our starting point that when P arranged the works of creation in a seven-day pattern he was not concerned merely with a succession of seven days, but with a whole, with a basic unit of time, which becomes a whole in the climax of the seventh day.”?9

These observations that the creation account is best described as “a chronological unity,” “a whole,” “a basic unit of time,” free the six-day schema from interpretations that emphasize the chronological ordering of the events of Genesis 1 and invite a more formal investigation of its structure to determine as precisely as possible what it is that God says through that structure. The remaining pages of this essay will be concerned with such an investigation.

Form and Function of the Creative Week

B. W. Anderson persuasively argues that the creation account in Genesis is a unity that runs from 1:1 through 2:3. He recognizes that the epilogue in 2:1–3 echoes the superscription of 1:1–2 and thus forms a frame that relates the end of the account to its begin-
and Job 38:8-11, I believe a heavy cloud layer early in the morning was born, approximately where the source of daylight could not be seen (which appears to be the narrative) until day four, when the sun and stars were visible at the earth's surface.

Does this view square with the Hebrew verb form of "made" in Genesis 1:16 (God "made" two great lights)? Can it be translated as a pluperfect ("had made") instead of simple past ("made"), or is this just special pleading? There certainly are cases in Hebrew where such verb forms must refer to an event preceding events just narrated. When Laban enters Rachel's tent to search for the stolen idols, this can be translated as a pluperfect ("had made") instead of simple past ("made").

The repetition of the salient parts of 1:1 in 2:1-3 serves to emphasize the unity of God's creative act, "his work" (singular). Within this unifying framework the six-day schema unfolds not to order the events of creation chronologically but, again, to emphasize other aspects of God's one creative event. To clarify what these aspects are we must turn to the structure of 1:3-31.

**ORDER OF CREATION EVENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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| We must take as our starting point the works of creation in the creation account is best read as a unity, "a whole," "a balanced schema from interpretation to formulation," which can be seen as a tightly symmetrical envelope structure, the end returning to the beginning: the first line of the passage ends with God's making or doing, as does the last, while the end of the last line, by also introducing the seemingly redundant phrase "God created," takes us all the way back to the opening of the creation story, "When God began to create." In P's magisterial formulation, everything is ordered, set in its appointed place, and contained within a symmetrical form.

The repetition of the salient parts of 1:1 in 2:1-3 serves to emphasize the unity of God's creative act, "his work" (singular). Within this unifying framework the six-day schema unfolds not to order the events of creation chronologically but, again, to emphasize other aspects of God's one creative event. To clarify what these aspects are we must turn to the structure of 1:3-31. |
construction is used to note that she "had hidden" them under a camel saddle (Gen. 31:34). In fact, evangelical interpreters do the same in Genesis 2:8, 19 (see the NIV rendering "had planted," "had formed") to avoid having the trees and animals created after man; otherwise there would be a different order of creation in Genesis 2 than in Genesis 1. A pluperfect translation is neither required nor forbidden by Hebrew grammar, so the choice will depend on the interpreter’s model of what is happening. In fact, we are frequently faced with interpretive decisions that we will solve one way if we believe the Bible is a revelation from God and another if we believe it is merely an ancient human work.

For the last one hundred years expositors have noticed the symmetrical arrangement of verses 3–31. The six days of creation are divided into two panels of three days and four creative acts each. Each panel displays the same structure with a first day containing a single creative act, a second day consisting of one creative act with two aspects and, finally, a third day with two separate creations. Further adding to the symmetry of these versions is the chiastic reversal of the products of the middle days. The whole structure is graphically represented in this chart:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PANEL ONE</th>
<th>PANEL TWO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Day 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>light (1:3–5)</td>
<td>lights (1:14–19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>firmament (1:6–8):</td>
<td>inhabitants (1:20–23):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sky</td>
<td>fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seas</td>
<td>birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dry land (1:9–10)</td>
<td>land animals (1:24–26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vegetation (1:11–13)</td>
<td>human beings (1:27–31)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Genesis 1 a correlation days one and four, two and five, day two of water, day five of land, day six of land animals is present in the account. But a chronological order as well, such as Genesis 1. No one would disagree that the days must exist (days two to three), sky and water (days three to four), land and land animals (days four to six) the realms of sky and earth, and land animals (days five to six) the realms of sky and earth. This structure is used to logical rather than a chronological order.

Some correlation of this sort is present in the account. But a chronological order as well, such as Genesis 1. No one would disagree that the days must exist (days two to three), sky and earth, and land animals (days five to six) the realms of sky and earth. This structure is used to logical rather than a chronological order.

There is good scientific evidence that whole process. As D. K. Day one to be described contains the counterpart of the twin categories, the earth and adornment” and “preparation” being the most frequently used. According to one remembers, however, "deposit" essentially involves bringing the product. In panel one God separates light from darkness, and in panel two the land animals and human beings are formed. In panel one God separates light from darkness, and in panel two the land animals and human beings are formed.

The tight formal correspondence between the two panels in verse 2 is significant. The three spheres, house and shelter life. In panel one God separates light from darkness, and in panel two the land animals and human beings are formed.
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years expositors have no­
3-31. The
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first day containing a single
consisting of one creative act
a third day with two separ­
g to the symmetry of these
ersal of the products of the
structure is graphically repre-

ORDER OF CREATION EVENTS

In Genesis 1 a correlation is often proposed between
days one and four, two and five, and three and six. That
is, day one speaks of the creation of light, day four of lights;
day two of water, day five of water animals; day three of
land, day six of land animals. This scheme is seen as an
important structuring for the whole account. The earth is
initially “without form and empty.” Then the days proceed
first to “form” (days one to three) and then to “fill” (days
four to six) the realms of sky, air/sea, and land respec­
tively. This structure is used to argue for Genesis 1 having a
logical rather than a chronological order.

Some correlation of this sort really does appear to be
present in the account. But it is not an argument against
chronological order as well, since both structures occur in
Genesis 1. No one would disagree that air, water, and land
must exist (days two to three) before one can have air, wa­
ter, and land animals (days five to six). The same must be
true for land and land vegetation (both on day three).
There is good scientific evidence for the sun beginning to

The tight formal correspondence evidenced by the
chart is matched by a close relationship in the content
of the paired days (day one with day four, day two with
day five, day three with day six). Various categories
have been suggested to describe the correlation be­
tween the two panels of God’s activity, with “separation
and adornment” and “preparation and accomplish­
ment” being the most frequently encountered. When
one remembers, however, that God’s creative action
essentially involves bringing order out of chaos it is in­
structive to see these panels as an orderly description of
that whole process. As D. Kidner says: “Indeed the six
days now to be described can be viewed as the positive
counterpart of the twin negatives ‘without form and
void,’ matching them with form and fullness.”

In panel one God separates from the formless chaos
of verse 2 three spheres, three areas that will eventually
house and shelter life. In panel two God fills those crea­
tively ordered spheres with corresponding inhabitants
(lights for light, fish for the sea and birds for the sky,
land animals and human beings for the dry land). Re­
gardless of the images chosen, the pronounced pan-
glow (early day one: "Let there be light") before the planet earth forms (late day one: "light" = "day," "dark" = "night," "evening and morning"), and for the oceans and atmosphere subsequently being outgassed from the formed planet (day two: "firmament in the midst of the waters"). Also the one peculiar feature that seems to be out of order in the Genesis account is vegetation, the first living thing, which is mentioned before sun, moon, and stars, the last nonliving things; otherwise the order is nonliving first, living afterward. But this really fits the scientific scenario of vegetation clearing the atmosphere and preparing it for animal life. Why not see God as giving an account with both a scientifically accurate chronological order and an easily remembered structure?

Other interpreters have argued that the purpose of Genesis 1 is polemic rather than scientific. The account is designed to parallel and rebut pagan cosmogonies with their chaos/order theme and their multiplicity of gods giving birth to and warring against one another. The Genesis account offers another explanation for the placing of the sun after the creation of light that was so problematic in a chronological ordering of these events. In addition, it also strengthens the impression that the creation week rather than day is the basic unit of time in our text.

As satisfying as this structure is, resonating with the orderliness and purposefulness of creation, there is another structure that binds verses 3-31 together. Westermann has discerned a fivefold pattern that repeats in each of the six days:

1. Introduction  
   And God said
2. Command  
   Let there be/Let them be gathered, etc.
3. Completion  
   And it was so
4. Judgment  
   And God saw that it was good
5. Time frame  
   It was evening and it was morning, day x

Westermann’s point is that each creative act is “essentially the same event,” but while he is surely right in this regard much more can be said. It is also important to note that each successive day is progressively longer. Day one contains only a fourfold pattern, whereas day two expands to a fivefold with a description of God’s proclamation; day three again is a fivefold, but day six has twice a proclamation than any other day. This progression serves to reinforce the impression that the six-day struc-

Further evidence for this can be seen from a closer examination of Westermann. Without gainsaying his conclusions, it is clear that the pattern remains essentially the same creative process. By the end of this account, on this model, the author has placed the multiple gods by their warfare motif for unknown reasons. This sequence is not just a reiteration of the light, earth, sky, and created beings rather than a poetic structure. It is also probably that the author of Genesis 1 is polemic rather than scientific. The account is designed to parallel and rebut pagan cosmogonies with their chaos/order theme and their multiplicity of gods giving birth to and warring against one another. The Genesis account offers another explanation for the placing of the sun after the creation of light that was so problematic in a chronological ordering of these events. In addition, it also strengthens the impression that the creation week rather than day is the basic unit of time in our text.

As satisfying as this structure is, resonating with the orderliness and purposefulness of creation, there is another structure that binds verses 3-31 together. Westermann has discerned a fivefold pattern that repeats in each of the six days:

1. Introduction  
   And God said
2. Command  
   Let there be/Let them be gathered, etc.
3. Completion  
   And it was so
4. Judgment  
   And God saw that it was good
5. Time frame  
   It was evening and it was morning, day x

Westermann’s point is that each creative act is “essentially the same event,” but while he is surely right in...
God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

There was day and there was night.

God saw that it was good.

God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their variety.

God finished creating everything, and it was very good. And God saw that it was good. 

Then he said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock and all the creatures that move along the earth and all the creatures that walk on earth."

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock and all the creatures that move along the earth and all the creatures that walk on earth."

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

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

So the LORD saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

And God finished creating everything, and it was very good. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

God saw that it was good.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.

God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fourth day.

God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the fifth day.

God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." 

And it was so. The creatures of the sea swarmed forth, and every winged bird soared across the sky.

God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures, beasts of the earth, and every creeping thing that creeps on the ground, and let them be livestock of the earth." 

And it was so. The earth brought forth living creatures by their kind: livestock, all sorts of livestock, and every sort of beast of the earth by their kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the ground by its kind. And God saw that it was good.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock and all the creatures that move along the earth and all the creatures that walk on earth."

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

God blessed them and gave them dominion over the fish of the sea and over the livestock and over all the earthly creatures that were made.

God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock and all the creatures that move along the earth and all the creatures that walk on earth."

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

God blessed them and gave them dominion over the fish of the sea and over the livestock and over all the earthly creatures that were made.

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.
Some have argued that the days of Genesis 1 are a chronology of God's revelation of the creation account to Moses on Sinai rather than a chronology of the creation itself. Thus during the forty days Moses was on the mountain, God told him about creation in the course of some seven days. On the first day he told Moses about the creation of light, on the second about creation of the firmament, and so on. The major problem with this suggestion is that it does not fit what the account says: There is nothing here about showing, and only God is described as seeing. The account is all about creating. Exodus 20:11 agrees with this: "For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day" (NIV). There is no good reason to assume that the chronology of Genesis 1 is other than that of the creation events.

through day five, day six systematically alters the pattern at every point except the introduction:

1. **Command:** Days one through five regularly employ jussives ("let there be," "let them be gathered," etc.) in this section. Day six breaks this established pattern by using the cohortative form, "Let us make."

2. **Completion:** In addition to the formulaic "and it was so" found in days one through five, much of the massive expansion found in day six can be attributed to the filling out of this report of completion or fulfillment. Furthermore, verse 27 employs poetry rather than prose in the report of the creation of humankind (cf. especially the format found in the Jerusalem Bible) as well as three of the six occurrences of the verb "create" found in this passage.

3. **Judgment:** Days one through five had been judged "good." Day six, on the other hand, receives the verdict "very good" (verse 31).

4. **Time frame:** The Hebrew text scrupulously avoids attaching the definite article to the number of the particular day in days one through five, regularly following the pattern "it was evening and it was morning, day x." The sixth day, however, does have the article, a nuance only recognized by the NASB and the New Jewish Version of English Bibles that I consulted. The omission of the definite article in days one through five show that a chronological order is the text's primary concern, ordering of the eight days of creation is clearly the issue, employs the order of the eight days of creation (Genesis 1) but always in co-occurrence (e.g. "a third day") and does not nicate the definite article in days one through five of the whole account point strongly that the first five days are days of six workdays and one day of creation. Others have suggested that choosing as a device for structuring because they have anything to do with creation but merely a device for structuring because they have anything to do with creation but merely "formless void" of chaos, the definite article is regularly present in the contexts can be seen from Numbers 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, Nehemiah 8:13, 18.

When the six-day schema is read differently. But it suggests that the Hebrews' seven-day week commemorates the creation, not the creation events. Others have suggested that chosen as a device for structuring because they have anything to do with creation but merely "formless void" of chaos, the definite article is regularly present in the contexts can be seen from Numbers 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60, 66, Nehemiah 8:13, 18.

When the six-day schema is comprehens...
Days of Genesis 1 are a chronological account to Moses about the creation of the firmament, and in this suggestion is that is not described as seeing. The Exodus 20:11 agrees with the text scrupulously avoids the number of the parenthesis (cf. Jerusalem Bible) as sentences of the verb "create" through five had been the other hand, receives the definite article "let them be gathered," "let us make," "and it was morning, day x." but when it is recognized that the sixth day regularly breaks that pattern at every point, in subtle but unmistakable ways, then the structure compels us to focus upon the sixth day. Theologically, this means that the

ORDER OF CREATION EVENTS

Others have suggested that the days of Genesis 1 were chosen as a device for structuring the creation account not because they have anything to do with what actually happened at creation but merely because the Jews had a week of six workdays and one day of rest. "If the Hebrews had had a five-day or seven-day workweek, the account would have read differently." But the Bible, on the contrary, suggests that the Hebrews' seven-day week was designed to commemorate creation, not vice versa (Exod. 20:8-11).

Conclusions

We have examined the evidence that Genesis 1 is a narrative in chronological order of the events of creation. We have suggested that its chronological terminology and its use of ordinal numbers with a sequence of days to structure the whole account point strongly in this direction. The fact that the first five days are designated without the definite article (e.g. "a third day") might allow for the days being a selection from a larger number and not immediately adja-
Objections to the Genesis chronology from science amount mostly to objections to a young earth. I suggest that the words of Genesis 1 are consistent with an old earth even though they have traditionally been interpreted in terms of a more recent creation.

The biggest stumbling block to a chronological interpretation from an old-earth perspective is undoubtedly the question of the creation of the sun. I suggest that this is no problem if its actual creation is seen as taking place when God says, “Let there be light.” Its appearance to an earthbound observer does not occur until day four with the oxygenation and clearing of the atmosphere.

The question of the time of origin of seed-bearing plants relative to animals is the sort of problem most easily handled by having either overlapping “age-days” or successive literal days with overlapping ages. The model that fits all the evidence to dismiss the rest.

With the sanctification of the seventh day (which also has the definite article), God completes the creative act and institutes time as a structured, orderly part of the created order. In a very real sense, any talk of chronology before this establishment of time is prema-
the idea that they are out of
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establishment of time is premi

 literal days with overlapping creative periods. Neither sug-
gestion is unreasonable when we recall that a genealogical
scheme organizes the whole book of Genesis and that
genealogies involve sequential but overlapping lifespans.

The questions of a literary structure correlating the cre-
ative days by pairs and of a polemic against polytheism merit
further study but seem to be reasonable suggestions. They
should not be allowed to explain away the chronological
structure of Genesis 1. Proper methodology demands a
model that fits all the evidence, not one that uses some evi-
dence to dismiss the rest.

### ENDNOTES

**YES**

1. E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964) 16–17,
sees the four rivers as tributaries to one river; M. G. Kline, *Kingdom Pro-
logue* (South Hamilton, 1981), 1, 68, sees them as distributaries from
one river, in parallel with the eschatological picture in Ezekiel 47 and
Revelation 22.

2. B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand
Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 217–23; H. Blocher, *In the Beginning* (Down-


4. J. O. Buswell, Jr., *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Reli-
gion* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 1, 159–62, 321–24; J. Murray,
*Collected Writings* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2, chapters 1
and 7; F. A. Schaeffer, *No Final Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity,
NO

2. P. J. Wiseman, Creation Revealed in Six Days, 33-34.
3. E.g. K. Barth, Church Dogmatics, 3, 1, 120-21. For an approach that combines all three see W. Brueggemann, Genesis (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 22-39.


7. Ibid., 171.


12. Day one, 3 lines; day two, 4 lines; day three, 7 lines; day four, 8 lines; day five, 6 lines; day six, 16 lines.

13. The judgment "And God saw that it was good" must be supplied from the Septuagint in verse 6.
