

How do we understand 1) matters relating to time and the stages of the creation as given us in Genesis 1; 2) the succession of days; and 3) how do we correlate those days with the geological ages?

Now that is a very important and perceptive question, and I am grateful to you for it. I despair of answering it in a few moments because it is such a fundamentally important question, so I simply give you the present state of my thinking, which is extraordinarily obscure on the topic. This is not to avoid your question, but I think there are a lot of elements that go toward answering it.

Creation in stages

When I say that creation is done in stages, I meant it to refer to the fact that Genesis 1 does not tell us that in the beginning God spoke and the whole universe came into being forthwith, at once and immediately. It does not say that. If you ask me, 'Could God have done it that way?' well, I say God is almighty and he could have done it that way if he pleased. The question is not 'Could he have done it?' but, rather, what he actually did. According to Genesis I understand it that, on whatever interpretation you give, he did not do it all at once; he did it on a succession of days. And when we look at what he did, it wasn't just repeating day after day for accumulative effect. It was a progression from the less simple to the much more complicated and a succession that brings you to day six with the creation of man. That has theological implications. It seems to imply that the creation was done in progressive stages, getting ready for the crown of creation up to that moment, which was the creation of human beings.

And God said

Each of those stages in the creation were initiated by a word of God: 'And God said'. It is further to be noted in that connection, that whereas in most of the days the phrase 'And God said' comes once at the beginning, there are two days in which the phrase occurs twice. On the first occasion that it occurs twice, it occurs at the bridge between inorganic and organic material: 'God said . . .' on the third day, the dry land appeared and so forth. But then, when it comes to the creation of plant life, you have another occasion on that same day: 'And God said'. In other words, the inorganic did not become organic simply by development.

Development by design

Now that is significant because God has used the principle of development in the course of creation. The outstanding example is human beings themselves. God made one man and one woman. Paul asserts in Acts 17 that 'of one' (that is of one person), God has created all the races of men: red, yellow, black and white, all being precious in his sight. But red, black, yellow and white are not special creations; they are developments of the original creation, are they not?

That is what Scripture itself asserts, and God, having created the human gene pool, deliberately created it so that it could give variation in all sorts of features within the human species. It is not a matter of frogs developing into humans, but instead what is

normally called microevolution; that is, development within a species, and that God has deliberately done. So, therefore, all the different colours and races and characteristics of the humans have come by development out of the original creation. So God has used development, and that is an important thing to notice, but the bridge between organic and inorganic was not by development. It required another input of the divine word.

So it also is on day six. In the first half of the day we read, 'And God said', and he made animals. In the second half he spoke again and he made human beings, but not human beings by development out of animals. On that day the phrase, 'And God said' is used twice, because the introduction of human beings into the world required another input of energy.

Now this I say with all reverence. The coming into our world of the God-man Jesus Christ was not by a simple process of development. It meant nothing less than the incarnation of the Word of God.

So that's what I meant by stages.

The days of creation

Now, what do I think those days that are listed in Genesis are? Were they earth days of twenty-four hours as some people assert, or do they cover long periods of time? A third question worth asking is whether they were the days of one earth week, or were they days of twenty-four hours each, spaced out over undefined periods of time with periods of time in between each of those days? That is not an absurd suggestion. Seven days would still, even if they were interspersed with long periods of time, produce a series of days on which our human earth week could be constructed with its six days of work and one of rest on the seventh.

The debate has continued from time everlasting and I daresay will continue until we all get home to glory. Being a fence sitter by inclination I like to listen to the evidence from all sides. I wouldn't presume to be dogmatic on it. What I think one can say is this. First, if it comes to the point of a creative word, such as, 'And God said let there be light', I don't suppose God has to take more than a split second to say it. The reason I don't think he has to take ages to say that is because I believe, not just in development, but in a creative input: word, a command of creative input of information. What I personally think is open to much thought and perhaps interpretation.

A matter of time

Some will argue that when the creative word was said, what was commanded and created was created in a split second. So when God said, 'Let us make man', the human pair appeared out of nowhere in that same split second. But Genesis itself will say that's not so. Genesis 1 does just say God made man and woman, male and female but Genesis 2 explains that he took some time about it. He first made Adam, and he called all the animals in front of him and he asked Adam to name them. Then eventually he said there wasn't a help suitable for Adam among the animals and he put him into a deep sleep and he made Eve. So all that took some hours, I suppose. So it didn't happen

in a split second. Did it happen in a day of twenty-four hours? And did all the other things happen in days of twenty-four hours, such as God making the sun, the moon and the stars?

In relation to that issue I'm impressed by the efforts of some Christian scientists, such as Russell Humphreys, who has revised some of the explanations of the young earth position. I'm impressed by a Jewish physicist who wishes to be loyal to the Old Testament Scripture and creation and believes in it. Both of these scientists point to our concepts of time as Einstein formed them. Not only is time relative throughout the universe (meaning it is not the same in all places), but in certain conditions it is stretched. If you believe, for instance, in a Big Bang then you'll probably know about what is called the event horizon (sorry about these jungle of terms, I haven't got the time to expound them). As it shrinks it is mathematically demonstrable that time will increase, that is, be stretched. This gravitational stretching of time is not just space being stretched but time as well. The result is that if we measure the length of an event from earth's point of view, we might say it took a day. If you were to regard it in its own time and relevant part of the universe, it would perhaps involve millions of years. Now that is modern physics, and I'm not expert enough to tell you whether it is right or wrong; I refer you to the literature.

So the question is whether Genesis is saying that the formation of the stars and the heavens and so forth happened in one of our days. But if so, does that necessarily imply that our twenty-four hour days, as we call them, apply throughout the universe? I think that's another thing altogether. Our days are twenty-four hours long, but you say, 'What is an hour?' Well an hour is the 24th part of the time it takes our planet to turn around once. So time on Jupiter is quite different, because it turns round rather quickly. And a year is the time we take to go around the sun, but that's rather a different length of thing for people (if there were any) on Venus or Saturn. I think therefore, we have to allow for these things. That's one element in it.

A matter of the text

Secondly, I do notice that whereas the days of Genesis 1 all begin with the phrase 'And God said', if they are always the same, then day one doesn't begin until verse 3: 'And God said, "Let there be light".' In that case there were things happening before day one. In verse 2: 'God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void and darkness was upon the face of the deep.' What is the deep? 'And the Holy Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.' What waters? The Bible doesn't stop to explain. It seems to me a strong case can be made for the fact that not everything was done in six days; there were things before the six days started, namely the things mentioned in verses 1-2.

As I say, it is conceivable to me that the days were days of twenty-four hours but not necessarily the days of one earth week. It could be there were days of command and then times of development of the implications of the command then, subsequently, another day. More than that I wouldn't want to say because if I said more I should be unfair to both sides in the debate.

Death before sin?

I would just comment on one further thing. Those of our dear brothers and sisters in Christ who feel very strongly about a young earth (as distinct even from a universe) urge that if the claims of the geologists, palaeontologists and things are right, then there were long ages when dinosaurs were around and destruction happened and death existed. And they say it is quite contrary to the Bible to suppose there was death before Adam sinned. They quote to that effect Romans 5:12: 'By one man's disobedience, sin entered into the world and death by sin, so that death passed upon all . . .' Now the question is, what is meant by 'all'? Does it include lions and tigers and things or just all human beings? Was there no death at all before Adam? If the Bible actually teaches that, well I say in advance I believe it, for I believe whatever the Bible says. I believe that, if that's what the Bible actually says and means.

There are moments, some Wednesdays and Friday afternoons, when I wonder whether the Bible means that there was no death at all before Adam sinned. It's not meant to be a joke or facetious to say that Adam only had to walk across the ground in the garden of Eden and many biological, living things were crushed out of existence. Then there is the whole question of the food chain.

More strong than the argument in Romans 5:12 is the Scripture in Romans 8 that says God subjected the earth (or Adam did) to vanity, to frustration (Romans 8:20). The Greek for vanity is *mataiotēs*. 'One day creation shall be delivered from her bondage to corruption' (Romans 8:21). I think I would need still to be convinced that the words 'vanity' and 'corruption' should be applied to the food chain. I'm not sure myself that when our Lord ate fish, for instance (part of the food chain), that this was an instance of corruption. Disease is corruption, and frustration. But, that smaller things should be food for the sardines that I then eat, is another matter. Whether to call the food chain corruption and vanity, of that I'm not so sure. I think it is a thing that we all should take seriously, and I say that meaningfully. This is not condescension on my part, and I'm out for all the help I can get in thinking and deciding about these things.

David Gooding

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