

**“THE DAYS OF CREATION”**

Tonight, we come to a matter of interpretation over which there is substantial disagreement among Christians, even among Christians in our own denomination. It concerns the nature of the “days” in the creation account. Are they literal, twenty-four hour days or are they something else? Sometimes, the disagreements over this issue reach a heightened pitch. And this is one reason why it is important for us to address it, even though it is not, at least in my opinion, a matter of great importance when it comes to how we understand this passage and apply it to our lives. I want you to understand the differing views Christians hold on the interpretation of the days of creation and the reasons why they hold these views so that you can deal with those with whom you disagree on this matter in an understanding and charitable manner.

In this sermon, I will briefly explain the four main ways in which this interpretive problem is addressed by Christians who affirm the biblical doctrine of creation and agree that the theory of evolution runs contrary to the teaching of the Bible. These interpretations have been found in conservative Presbyterian circles for some time now, and there are advocates for each of them within our denomination. In fact, the report produced by our denomination’s study committee on creation concluded that these four views are consistent with our system of doctrine.

We begin with the view that says that the days of creation were the same as our normal, solar days, which are twenty-four hours in length. This interpretation has in its favor the fact that it is the view that has been held by most Christians for most of church

history. The other views may have had some proponents in earlier church history, but there is no disputing the fact that those views became more popular as our scientific understanding of world changed. And this is the chief argument used by proponents of the Twenty-Four Hour view against the other views. They argue that science should not change how we understand the Bible. But the problem with that argument is the fact that science has changed the way everyone reads the Bible, at least in some areas. For example, the 17th century church persecuted Galileo for teaching that the sun, and not the earth, was at the center of the solar system. At that time, the church argued that such a view contradicted the plain teaching of Scripture. But nobody thinks that today. Nobody interprets Psalm 104:5's declaration that God "set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved" to mean that the sun revolves around a stationary earth. Instead, we now understand such passages as phenomenological descriptions of the world, not scientific ones. They simply describe things by how they appear under normal observation.

The greatest strength of the Twenty-Four Hour view is that it is the most straightforward way of understanding the days of creation. This is a significant point in its favor. However, this interpretation, like all the others, is not without its problems. And it should be noted that, from an interpretive standpoint, the most important problems are not the ways in which the Twenty-Four Hour view might conflict with the views of modern science, but the ways in which some parts of the biblical text itself seem to argue against seeing the days as normal, twenty-four hour days.

For one thing, the biblical text says that God created light on day one, but it also says that he did not create the sun until day four. A twenty-four hour day is measured by the earth's relationship to the sun. What reason then, do we have for saying that days one through three must be twenty-four hours in length?

And what about day seven? The text calls it a day, but it is a day that does not end the same way the other days end. You will notice that it lacks the formula that concludes each of the other days: "And there was evening and morning..." Furthermore, both Heb. 4 and Jn. 5:17 indicate that God is still in the Sabbath rest that began on the seventh day. Obviously then, day seven is not a regular day. Why then is it necessary to see the other days as such?

And then there is the problem of day six. It is difficult to see how all of the events that are described on day six could have taken place in a normal twenty-four hour day. God creates all the land animals and the first man; the Lord brought all the animals before Adam so that he could give them names; Adam falls into a deep sleep in the middle of the day; and God creates Eve and brings her to Adam. Not only that, but the first words out of Adam's mouth when Eve is presented to him are "This at last," which is a Hebrew phrase that usually indicates the passage of a significant amount of time.

There, in a very small nutshell, you have the strengths and weaknesses of the Twenty-Four Hour view. The three other views differ from the Twenty-Four Hour view in that all of them see the days of creation in a non-literal or figurative sense. We turn to them now.

The Day-Age interpretation says that the word “day” is not being used in its primary sense as a period of twenty-four hours, but in a secondary sense in which it refers to an age or an epoch of time. This view has been held by a number of Reformed scholars and pastors, including the great Princeton theologians Hodge, Warfield, and Machen, as well as Francis Schaeffer and James Boice. It is certainly true that the Hebrew term for “day”, *yom*, does not always refer to a twenty-four hour period. In fact, we find an example of this in Genesis 2:4, where all six days of creation are referred to by the phrase “in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” And then there are passages like Psalm 90:4, which says that “a thousand years in [God’s] sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.”

But the Day-Age interpretation suffers from the fact that there is little indication in the context of Genesis 1 that the term day is being used in anything other than its normal sense. In fact, the repeated refrain of “morning and...evening” does not seem to fit with the notion that the term “day” is describing an epoch of time. And finally, critics of the Day-Age view often dismiss it for being too much of a science-driven approach to the biblical text. When you read the writings of the Day-Age men, they tend to be very heavy on science and fairly light on exegesis. While we certainly believe that God’s revelation in nature and his revelation in Scripture are in harmony with one another, we need to remember that the human author of Genesis was not writing with the same kind of scientific understanding that we have today. When we approach the text without

keeping that clear, we can end up making the text say some things that it was not really intended to say.

The third view of the creation days is known as the Framework view. It is an interpretation that has come to be held by a number of men in our conservative Presbyterian circles due to the way it was taught by Meredith Kline, a professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Seminary, Reformed Theological Seminary, and both Westminster Seminaries. This view says that the days of creation, though describing God's historical acts of creation, are intended to be understood as a literary framework that is not necessarily chronological. In other words, while the events described are indeed historical, they are arranged in a topical manner.

Now, upon first hearing, this may strike some Christians as a dangerous way of handling the biblical text. However, even those who completely disagree with this interpretation accept its most fundamental insight. There is no arguing against the fact that the six days of creation reflect a clear pattern that almost certainly requires us to see a purposeful arrangement of the days. The pattern looks like this: days one through three describe God's creation of the principle *realms* of creation, and days four through six describe God's creation of the corresponding *rulers* of those realms. You can see this by picturing days one through three in one column and days 4-6 in another column alongside it. On day one, God creates day and night; then on day four, he creates the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. On day two, God creates the sea and the sky; then on day five, he creates fish to fill the sea and birds to fill the air. On day three, God creates

the dry land and vegetation; then on day six, he first creates land animals to fill the earth and then concludes his creative work by creating man to have dominion over it all.

As I said, there is no disputing the fact that this pattern is present in Genesis 1. And this pattern is a great help to us in understanding the theological meaning of the passage, as we will see at the close of tonight's sermon. But this pattern by itself is certainly not sufficient evidence to conclude that the days of creation were not literal days but a literary device. It could just as easily be the case that God simply wove this wonderfully meaningful pattern into the creative work that he did over six successive days or periods of time.

But the proponents of the Framework view have another card up their sleeve. They point to Genesis 2:5-6, where it says that God caused vegetation to grow by means of the ordinary mechanisms by which he providentially cares for the world. In other words, God made plants grow by causing a mist to rise from the ground. The reason why this is significant is because it could also be used to argue that God would have used the sun to provide light on day one. And if that is correct, then the days of creation are not a chronological week but a literary device that God used to describe his creation of the world.

The main problem with the Framework view is the fact that the text of Genesis 1 reads most naturally as a chronological sequence.

The last view that I want to talk about is what has been called the Analogical Days view. "Analogical" may sound like a big word, but it simply means that the days of

creation function as an analogy. There are indications that Augustine and Origen suggested such a view [Kidner, 56]. Currently, its main proponent is a professor of Old Testament at our denominational seminary, Covenant Seminary, named Jack Collins. The Analogical Days view says that the creation week is a chronological week, but that it is not necessary to see the days as twenty-four hour days since God is using the human concept of a day's work to communicate something about his work in creating the world. Whenever God reveals himself, he always speaks to us by means of analogy. The words that he uses to describe himself have to be human words, but those words do not apply to him in the exact same way in which they apply to us. For example, the Bible reveals that God is our Father, but this does not mean that he is a father in the exact same way in which I am a father. Likewise, God's rest on the seventh day is something like the rest that we enjoy after completing our work, but it is not exactly like our rest either. God uses these words as analogies. The Analogical view says that the days in Genesis 1 are intended to be taken in the same way.

The primary arguments against the Analogical view are similar to the ones raised against the Day-Age and Framework views, since it bears similarities to them.

As you can see, none of these views is without problems, and each has ways of resolving the problems that are peculiar to it. Which one is right? It is hard to say. For my part, I can see merit in each of the views, though I presently lean more towards either the Analogical or Framework view.

However, as I said at the beginning, we should not allow the debate over the meaning of the days of creation to dominate our reflections upon this passage. The main point of this passage is a theological point. By patterning his creative work in the way that he did, first creating the realms and then creating rulers to govern those realms, God shows us that the creation account is about his establishing the world as his kingdom. And this is very significant. The universe is a vast place, so vast that man can sometimes feel that he is really quite insignificant. But Genesis 1 tells us that God created the world to be the place where man lives under his blessing. We see this in 1:28, where the creation of mankind is immediately followed by these words: “And God blessed them.” The creation account shows us that God has prepared a place for us, a place in which we can love and serve him, a place in which we can enjoy the blessing of living in communion with him. And though that blessing was lost for all of us when Adam sinned against God, those of us who belong to Jesus Christ have been restored to that state of blessing. As we read at the end of the book of Revelation:

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.” [Rev. 22:14]