

SCHOLAR'S CORNER

I know that science says the universe is very old, but the Bible speaks of a six-day creation in 4004 BC (or something like that). Should we try to harmonize the two by saying the Days of Creation were each millions of years long? (I've heard many people say this.) Or should we just swallow hard and admit that Genesis is wrong about the age of the universe?

Ever since the discovery by Smith and Cuvier that fossils could be used to identify sedimentary strata and the first edition of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* was published in 1830, it has been clear that many once-living species have become extinct and that the layers of rock their fossils are preserved in were laid down not quickly in connection with Noah's Flood but over millions of years. This has posed a problem for Jews and Christians because the first chapter of the Book of Genesis speaks of a creation of the universe in six days approximately 6,000 years ago.

Since then, Jews and Christians have taken several positions on the discrepancy:

■ Genesis One is to be taken literally, and science is wrong about the age of the universe

■ Science is right, and the six days of creation should be considered not 24-hour days but six periods, each mil-

lions of years in length, so as to harmonize Genesis with science, and

■ Science is right, and Genesis One should not be taken as science at all but as poetry or some other non-literal form of writing expressing ideas such as that God is the Source of all that is, the grandeur of God, the order of the natural world, the goodness and rightness of the natural world, the equality of the sexes (man and woman are created together on the sixth day), etc.

It seems to me that the poetical/theological option works best for people who accept the basic validity of the modern scientific approach. The literalist option is not intellectually credible to many people. The harmonistic, million-year day option may appear at first to preserve the biblical account and intellectual credibility, but it breaks down on two points. It only solves this one problem but does nothing for the many other biblical verses that are contradicted by science, and it

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One do not read the conclusion of the (First) Creation Account in Gen. 2:1-4a: "And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation" (Gen. 2:2-3).

We know what the seventh day on which God rested and which God made holy is. It is the Sabbath. And the Sabbath is a known quantity: sundown Friday to sundown Saturday, 24 hours. It has always been this (a 24-hour period every seven days). The Bible is saying here that the Sabbath the Jewish people observe is not an arbitrary human convention but of divine com-

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goes against the clear intent of the passage that normal, 24-hour days are to be understood.

Perhaps because of how Genesis is divided into chapters, sometimes people when they read Genesis

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mandment and built into the fundamental structure of the universe, God Himself having observed the first Sabbath.

Since the seventh day of Creation (the Sabbath) is a 24-hour period, it is only reasonable that the six earlier days were also 24-hour periods. Also, the Sabbath does not come around every seventh million-year day; it comes after six normal-length days (once a week). Having the six be millions of years long prevents Genesis from establishing the pattern of six days of work followed by the sacred day of rest. If the seventh day on which God rested is the Sabbath, then clearly the six days are the six days of the week that precede it.

So my conclusion that the harmonistic approach, while it might be a comfortable position, is untenable because it does violence to the text's clear intention. Thus the poetical/theological interpretation that does not try to harmonize the Bible with science is the best approach for the non-fundamentalist.

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