

Commentary on Genesis

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Background Information.

1). The Initial Records.

A careful consideration of the Book of Genesis can bring the reader to only one conclusion, and that is that it is made up of a number of differing ancient 'records' which have been welded together to form a whole without totally destroying the differences between them. These ancient records were built around 'covenants'. In ancient days it was the covenant that mattered rather than the background. Thus written records were regularly about covenants, with the history surrounding them included in order to demonstrate how they came about. That is what we have in Genesis, covenant accounts with their historical backgrounds, which at some stage were then built up into a whole.

A good example of this is found in Genesis 14. This chapter is so distinctive, and so different from the rest of Genesis, that it clearly once stood on its own. It begins by setting the action in history, 'in the days of Amraphel --- etc', a description unique in Genesis. It calls Abram 'the Hebrew', which is the only reference to Abram as 'the Hebrew', which suggests that it was either written by someone outside the clan, or that it was written so as to distinguish Abram to outsiders. And it gives an overall impression of being put together in an official form. It centres around a covenant made between Abraham and Melchizedek.

Again, chapter 23 is a small pearl of beauty describing a very personal event, the purchase of land by Abraham in the land of Canaan. It is patterned according to typical ancient Hittite covenants, and again gives off the impression of being a record within a record. It is a covenant concerning land purchase.

It is not accidental that both these accounts record events in which a firm 'covenant' (promises made between two or more people or groups and binding on both sides) or 'contract' (as we would usually call it today, although the idea of covenant stresses the personal element which is largely absent from a 'contract') was made between Abram and outside parties, in the one case the King Melchizedek, and on the other Ephron the Hittite. We clearly have here the actual records of covenants made between Abraham and his compatriots.

So we should not be surprised to discover subsequently that indeed every historical account given in Genesis is built up around such a covenant, for until chapter 37 Genesis is a record of covenants and genealogies.

We can also consider the difference between the grandeur and poetic form (although it is not pure poetry) of the Creation narrative of Chapter 1.1 - 2.4, compared with the following narratives. This account too almost certainly once stood on its own, possibly being read out at ceremonies at the beginning of the new year as a reminder of God's faithfulness and provision for man, or it may have been written as an introduction to the following records when they were compiled into Genesis 1-11. But again it is established around God's covenant with man (Genesis 1.28-30).

These conclusions are confirmed by a further interesting phenomenon which appears in Genesis. In a number of places we have the phrase 'these are the generations (toledoth) of ---', a phrase which has puzzled people through the ages. But here we should note that 'toledoth' differs from the normal word for 'generations' and means more a genealogical history, so that

it could read 'this is the history of --'.

This used to be thought of as a phrase used by an editor to divide up sections of the book of Genesis, and it was always a puzzle why there was therefore no 'these are the generations of Abraham'. However, we now know that when ancient clay tablets were used to record information it was customary to put at the top or bottom a brief phrase which described the content of the tablet (which we call **'a colophon'**) so that someone sifting through tablets could quickly find the one he wanted. It is apparent therefore that the phrase 'these are the generations of --' ('this is the history of ---') contains traces of such colophons which have been incorporated into the text of Genesis. This strongly suggests that the content of Genesis comes from a series of stone/clay tablets.

Thus we have evidence in the text of, on the one hand diversities of types of records which have been brought together as one, and on the other of clear indications that the events were once recorded on clay or stone.

Thus the phenomenon of the first part of Genesis (up to chapter 37.2) which we should always keep in mind is that, at the root of the significance of these chapters, and as the factor around which each section is built, there is some form of 'covenant' or 'saying'. This applies continually right up to the time of Jacob, when a more expansive history begins. The reason therefore that they were put into writing was because of this very fact. They evidenced the covenant and reminded the people concerned of the specific promises included. Genesis consists of a series of such covenant records. We may pass quickly over these sayings and covenants for we are interested in the history. But to the ancients the covenants were the supremely important thing.

We know from studies elsewhere that it was precisely such covenant material that was put into writing, especially when accompanied by a theophany, thus it cannot be accidental that all the accounts up to chapter 37.2 are built around such a covenant or saying, and this goes far to explain the 'patchiness' of the history.

It is further surely not without significance that it is only from Genesis 37 onwards that we have a connected record. It was at the time of Jacob that papyrus (a type of writing material made from the leaves of the papyrus plant found in Egypt, and forming a kind of primitive paper) became easily available for the writing of records due to Joseph's position in Egypt, thus making record keeping easier. And when Jacob became an important historical character in his own right as father to the Vizier of Egypt, a court where writing was far more common, Jacob's history would be looked on as important for its own sake, simply because he was Joseph's father. Here we have history which was not built around covenants. (A phenomenon which no later writer would ever have thought of inventing).

It must be remembered that in these ancient days the writing of history was probably not a common feature of life among the smaller semi-nomadic tribes, although it was so among larger groups. Writing materials were usually bulky, and much, though not all, history would be passed on by oral tradition from one generation to another, and passed on very accurately, for the ancients had far better memories for such things than we have due to constant practise. However, what *were* recorded in writing were covenants, and theophanies (god-appearances). The latter were seen as 'necessary' evidence of the covenant, and not only would the covenant itself be recorded, but also the events surrounding the covenant, that is, the events which gave rise to the covenant, as these were looked on as an important part of the whole picture.

Thus it must be seen as significant that the first part of the book of Genesis could well be called the 'book of covenants'. These records were made in writing and were considered worth carrying around, simply because they were the evidence of covenants made, and they were in

the large part covenants made between God and man. As such the latter were sacred, and they may well have been read aloud at certain special times throughout the year such as New Year and Harvest.

No inventor or later 'storyteller' would have even thought of confining himself simply to such events. It explains why we have such detail on the life of Abraham, the man of the covenants, and so little of Isaac, and this can give us the confidence that the Book of Genesis is based on very ancient genuine records which record events as they took place, (for when it became possible, with the invention of writing, any ancient covenants would be recorded immediately).

This also helps to explain why we have such gaps in the 'life of Abraham' and why Isaac is treated with such paucity. For when there were no theophanies or important covenants there were no written records, and it is surely significant that no attempt was made to incorporate any 'oral tradition' into the record in any large measure. This can give us the confidence, even from a human point of view, that what we have recorded is reliable and was not subjected to major change throughout centuries. Very occasionally an explanatory piece of information is recorded, or a change is made which bears the stamp of being added at a later date as a scribe 'updated' information, (a common feature of ancient records) but these are both rare and, in most cases, obvious additions.

At some stage, of course, someone did take the records and connect them together as we have them today, and connecting links were put in, but these were merely minor adjustments. A case could be put forward for arguing that Abraham, that God-fearing, well educated and astute man of business, might well have put together the epic from Genesis 1-11, which clearly has a Mediterranean background, (it may well have been his reading of the ancient family tablets in Ur that prepared him for the call of God), while the remainder of Genesis might easily have been incorporated with this as early as the time of Joseph, when the past history of the forebears of such an important personage would be considered as of such significance that it should be recorded on papyrus.

Backing up this idea is that such epics did exist elsewhere, in, for example, the epic of Atrahasis which is a continuing history of a kind and covers fairly similar ground to the first eleven chapters of Genesis.

While Moses, at a later date, is traditionally and rightly seen as having arranged for the putting together of most of the Pentateuch, with the exception, perhaps, of the report of his death and other small adjustments which were necessary and added on as time went by, we would be wrong to assume that nothing was done before then. Moses did not just receive it all from God, he called on previously existing material and inspired records.

2). The Salvation History.

So while Genesis is made up mainly of covenant records supplemented by the lives of Jacob and Joseph, it also became incorporated into a greater whole. For from Genesis to Joshua we really have one continuing record split up into six volumes, containing the salvation history of Israel, which begins with the primeval history in Genesis 1 to 11 and finishes with the triumphant conquest of Palestine and the receiving of the land from God. But necessarily only the first five were traditionally connected with the hand of Moses, and were combined into 'the Law (Instruction) of Moses'. This can be summarised as follows:

a). The Primeval History (Genesis 1 to 11).

God creates the world and puts man on it. Given a perfect environment and a position of authority man rebels against God and is cast out from that environment. Mankind expands

but sinfulness increases resulting in God's judgment of the flood. God begins again with Noah, but man's sinfulness increases still further until man is scattered over the face of the earth and languages are confused. But by this time the world is established in a number of nations. All is ready for God's next action.

b). The Patriarchs (Genesis 12 to 50).

God calls Abraham to leave his life among sinful men to begin a new life in the chosen land. Abraham obeys God and prospers in the new land, succeeded by Isaac and Jacob. He is given promises by God, Who enters into a series of covenants with him, that one day his descendants will possess the land, that kings will arise from him, and that through him all the world will be blessed. After Abraham comes Isaac, and after Isaac, Jacob. When famine threatens Jacob's own existence, Jacob's son, Joseph, becomes vizier of Egypt, and the family with their tribe move to Egypt.

c). The Deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 1 to 19).

Failing to return to the chosen land the people eventually find themselves enslaved in Egypt. But God raises up Moses to deliver them, and he obtains their freedom by God's power, and leads them out of Egypt to Sinai where they enter into covenant with God and are designated as His holy nation (Exodus 19.5-6).

d). God's Covenant with His People and the Establishment of the Tabernacle (Exodus 20 to 38).

At Sinai God establishes His covenant with them as their suzerain Lord, lays out the covenant requirements, and sets up the Tabernacle, His earthly Dwellingplace, as their place of worship. He gives them a symbol of His presence with them. His visible presence is known through cloud and fire.

e). God's Provision for their Worship and for the Maintenance of the Covenant (Leviticus).

In this book we find the provision of a sacrificial system, a priesthood, various covenant health restrictions, the day of Atonement, more covenant restrictions, the appointed Feasts, and provisions in respect of their future in the chosen land.

f). The Journey from Sinai to the Chosen Land (Numbers).

The tribes are numbered, the Levites appointed, the Tabernacle is consecrated, the provision is made of Manna, the chosen land is reached and spies sent out, the unbelief of the people is revealed, the sentence to wilderness wandering is passed, the law of offerings (a guarantee of their future) is described, the settlement at the oasis of Kadesh for 38 years is stressed, the advance by a roundabout route skirting Edom is depicted, resulting in defeating the Amorites, conquering Bashan, and philandering with Moab. The tribes are renumbered ready for entry into the land, none being left of those who were numbered at the beginning, Joshua is appointed to succeed Moses, the appointed Feasts are re-established, revenge is taken against Midian, the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh ask to be allowed to occupy Jazer and Gilead, which are the lands of Bashan and the Amorites (outside the 'promised' land), and promise to support the Conquest of the land. This is followed by a summary of the journey from Egypt, a command that the inhabitants of the chosen land be driven out, the delineating of the boundaries of the chosen land, the need for cities of refuge to be established. The result is that the people are now ready to enter the land.

g). Moses Speaks to the People in Preparation for Entry into the Land (Deuteronomy).

Their progress is summarised, the laws are revised in view of the imminent entry into the land and are reiterated in popular form for the people, all in the form of a treaty (in a recognised 2nd millennium BC covenant form) between their God and themselves, as spoken by Moses. Moses sees the land from Mount Nebo, which is followed immediately by the death of Moses.

h). The Conquest of the Land (Joshua).

The triumphs of Joshua and the tribes, the land is divided up, the Tent of Meeting established at Shiloh, the cities of refuge appointed, the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half Manasseh return home to Beyond the Jordan, Joshua gives his charge to the tribes of Israel, Joshua dies.

This being so why was the Book of Joshua not included as part of the Law? The reasonable solution to that question is that the first five books of the Law were already substantially in writing as the record of Moses' instructions to Israel and were already seen as sacrosanct. The fact that they were a record of what Moses had given them, set them apart.

3). The Place of the Records in the regular annual Festivals .

Many myths abounded in the ancient world to do with, among other things, creation, the nature cycle and the flood. But these myths were not just 'stories' written for entertainment. The very word 'myth' indicates their purpose, for the 'myth' (muthos) is something that is related as part of a religious festival in order to influence the order of things.

As the ancient world sought to maintain the order of things, and to ensure the smooth transition of the seasons and the fruitfulness of the land, they considered that an important part was played in this by their religious festivals, held at important times of the year, in which they acted out their relationship with the activities of the gods.

The king would take an important part in these ceremonies, for he was seen in some way as the embodiment of the people, and the proper keeping of the festivals with the recitation and acting out of the mythology was considered vital to the future prosperity of both land and people. Thus myths were not seen as something that were true or untrue, but as something which reflected the deepest truths, the very root of existence.

However, the genius of the patriarchs and of Israel lay in the fact that myth was replaced by real-life history. At their religious festivals they too would read out the activities of their God. This is clearly demonstrated by the way Moses urged such action on Israel in the book of Deuteronomy 6.21-25; 26.5-10; 27.11-26 see also 31.10-11; Joshua 24.2-24. But the assumption must be made anyway, for some ceremonies had to take place at the established festivals, and the people had to learn the covenants somehow.

But these festivals were closely associated with the covenants God had made with them, and their purpose was not to 'manipulate' Him but to re-establish that covenant, and thereby ensure by their loyalty that He was faithful to them. Thus the records of covenants kept and maintained throughout the generations almost certainly had a part to play in these festivals, as did also many of the Psalms. Indeed we see it as almost a certainty that the creation narrative had its part to play in at least one of these covenant ceremonies.

4). The Use of Numbers and Creation.

This subject is dealt with more fully in our articles on [The Use of Numbers in the Ancient Near East](#), but it is necessary at this point briefly to consider the facts, as they are important in the interpretation of Genesis.

In ancient days, around the time of Abraham, numbers were not generally in use, except for business and scholarly purposes. Most people in their everyday lives were probably limited to using the 'numbers' two and three, where 'two' meant 'a few' and 'three' meant 'many'. We know for example that in 1 Kings 17.12 the widow speaks of gathering 'two sticks' when she meant 'a few sticks'. Had she been gathering a large number she would have said 'three sticks'. So when numbers were used generally they were adjectival and had a significance over and above specific quantity. Indeed quantity was a secondary consideration.

Thus in the religious stories of ancient Sumer (Ur of the Chaldees from which Abraham came had been a Sumerian city) the numbers three and seven were the only numbers used. This was because 'three' denoted completeness and 'seven' had come to indicate divine perfection. There were seven gates to the underworld, not because someone had counted them, but because this constituted the divine perfection of the gates that barred the way to and from the underworld. The writer commenced with the use of the number seven, and built his account around it, in order to denote the divine perfection of what was written about. And this example can be repeated again and again. In the creation and flood narratives of Sumer and Babylon creation and the flood also take place in 'seven days', although in all other respects their creation narratives do not remotely parallel Genesis 1. Thus this was a recognised pattern and conveyed the sense of the divine completeness of the creation.

We will find that this use of numbers is paralleled in Genesis in the fact that all journeys are either 'three day' journeys or 'seven day' journeys. These phrases simply refer to journeys which are of a shorter or longer variety, and probably date back a considerable distance in the past. Some would do the journeys in more and some in less, but the description would always be in terms of those numbers, which were used adjectivally and not literally. Later, in the time of Jacob, Jacob can say 'you have changed my wages ten times'. Again the number is not literal but simply means 'a number of times'. We can compare with this how even in the present day we can speak of having 'a thousand and one things to do', meaning quite a number. It sounds precise but is in fact simply adjectival and not numerical. In the ancient world this was the everyday use of numbers.

So when we come to the account of creation we have to consider the question as to whether the 'seven days' are to be taken literally. Did God really bind himself in His actions to seven periods of around twenty four hours, or is the pattern one deliberately used by the writer to convey the perfection of God's handywork? And indeed we may ask the question, why on earth should He limit Himself to man's days, especially before the sun ruled the times and seasons?

All too often this question is considered as though it were either a challenge to orthodoxy, or a yielding to science, and one is left wondering whether the heat with which some argue for 'a literal seven twenty-four hour days' (which incidentally means days which have been scientifically established!) lies more in a fear of being seen as making concessions to 'science' than as a genuine attempt to face the question on the evidence. Part of the problem lies in the fact that once the concept of an almost universally agreed 'twenty-four hour day' was established it gradually began to become pre-eminently the *scientifically established* meaning of the term 'day' and rooted in the modern mind. Thus we find it difficult to go back to times when men's minds were not so fixed and the day was thought of in terms of sunrise, noon and sunset.

This is not completely true. We still, of course, call the period of light 'day' as opposed to 'night', and we speak of long months of uninterrupted light in the Arctic circle as an 'Arctic day', where we are entering more into the ancient way of thinking, but to the modern the twenty-four hour day is pre-eminent because it is scientifically exact and unvarying. It then determines the length of months and years. But this is very much a comparatively modern phenomenon.

This is very different from the situation in the ancient world when the term 'yom' had no such scientific definition, and people's minds were more flexible to ideas of time. To them an arctic day would have been just another 'day' like any other, although they may have remarked on how long it seemed to last. Even in our present day we might say 'the day has passed quickly' or 'it has been a long day'. When there were no hours, hour glasses, sun dials or clocks to judge by, men did not see days as being of a specific length and probably did think that some days were longer than others.

Thus in the Old Testament the term 'yom' (usually translated 'day', but sometimes 'time', or in its use in the plural 'year') could itself be used in various ways. In Genesis 1 'yom' can refer to a period of light as opposed to darkness, day rather than night, a usage that we still have today (1.5). It became used of the period from evening to evening, including both light and darkness (1.5). It could also refer to a longer period of time. For example, the 'yom' when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, referred to an appointed time and involved a period (Genesis 2.4). Consider also 'the day (yom) of the Lord' (Isaiah 13.6,9 and often in the Old Testament), where the idea is again of a period and an appointed time, this time of judgment. 'On that day' should regularly rather be translated 'at that time'.

So it could refer to a period of light, a time-period, or a moment of time (it is translated 'time' 64 times in AV, and should have been even more). It could even refer in the plural to periods up to a year (14 times in AV). And these were not, as with us, just a metaphorical extension of the usage of a term with a specific meaning. These were different aspects of the meaning of 'yom'. It related to time and indicated passage of time.

Even when applied to the period from evening to evening it was not specific. A 'yom' was a period between evening and evening of undefined length, depending on the setting of the sun. There were no such things as 'hours'. Indeed the word 'hour' does not appear in the Old Testament until the time of Daniel. It is a late concept. The concept of a 'a twenty four hour day' was thus totally unknown.

So a day in the sense in which we would normally understand it was to them an indefinite period between one evening and another evening, to which the term 'yom' could be applied, which varied in length without division, albeit for men in Palestine and the surrounding areas only differing marginally because it depended on the going down of the sun. But they would have had no problem with seeing an arctic day as a day. The term could also mean the period of daylight. Their minds and ideas of time were not fixed like ours.

Indeed it must be recognised that the ancients did not understand time as we do. It is significant that there is no Hebrew word for the chronological concept of time as such, for they did not think of time in that way. Time was a practical occurrence determined mainly by sun and moon.

There were words for an appointed time, the 'right' time, and so on (one of which was 'yom'), and they had words which could represent longer or shorter periods of time such as 'year' (made up regularly of twelve moon periods, and less regularly of thirteen moon periods, in order to keep up with the seasons), 'month (moon period)', 'day', and so on, but these also were fluid and related to activities of the sun and moon, and the changes in the seasons. Nothing was scientifically fixed.

There was, for example, no fixed length to a year. It consisted usually of twelve moon cycles, until this got out of line with the seasons when a thirteenth moon cycle was added. Although it is true that a 365 day year is witnessed to in the area which included Palestine, it was not a standard norm in every day living. Thus the prophets can think in terms of 360 (12 x 30) days to a year, (compare how the Flood record can see five months as '150 days'), and even this is

longer than most actual years which were for twelve lunar months (of 28-29 days per month), with an occasional thirteen month year required, to bring the year in line with the seasons. So 'years' varied in length.

Again actual 'months' (moon periods) were determined by the cycles of the moon of 28-29 days, although for convenience they could be thought of as being for approximately thirty days.

Days also were evening to evening, or morning to evening, not for an exact twenty four hours (an unknown concept). Nothing was precise. So the ancients did not think of time precisely. It is true, of course, that when speaking of 'days' in this sense, a general idea of its length in day to day life would be in mind, but Joshua's long day (Joshua 10.14) was still recognised as being one day, albeit unique. It was when evening came that a 'day' was ended and at that evening, or in the morning at sunrise, another 'day' began. Had they travelled in the arctic they would still have thought of an arctic day as a day, although recognising it was very long.

The uniqueness of Joshua's 'day' lay not so much in its appreciated length as such. It is questionable how far this would have been known. It lay in the fact that when it was actually coming to a close it was extended in response to prayer and 'natural' events occurred which were unusual.

So when the Psalmist says of God, 'For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as watch in the night' (Psalm 90.4), he was merely recognising that with God time was even more fluid, and that a yom (day) for God was of an even more undefined length, He acted above the earth not on the earth.

We should consider in this regard that in the Creation account the establishing of the approximate length of days for earth and for mankind according to the sun did not occur until the 'fourth yom'. It was then that the sun and moon were called on to establish 'signs and seasons, days and years'. This means that the writer is specifically telling us that the approximate length of an earth day was not determined until the 'fourth day', and he would not have, as with us, the problem of stepping outside a scientifically defined time period.

If we do claim that God did limit Himself to 'twenty four hour days' prior to that, (and we find it extraordinary as to why He should limit Himself to earth days, especially before there were any dealings with earth in day 2), we must recognise that it certainly had no connection with 'natural days'. They did not exist before the fourth day. It would purely be an arbitrary selection without rhyme or reason. This counts heavily against those who say 'the account naturally reads as though it were seven natural days'. We could argue that the account naturally suggests the opposite, that the days cannot be 'natural days' as natural days had not been established until the fourth 'day'.

It is of course always theoretically possible to argue that God did limit Himself to the equivalent of natural days, pedantically making that a pattern because the sun would do so later on, and that He was free to do what He wished, but it is difficult to see why He should have done so, or why He should 'speak' and then wait about twenty four hours before doing so again at a time when the sun was irrelevant. The truth is that it only appears to be the natural way of reading it because we approach it from a modern viewpoint. It is certain that the ancients did not have the same difficulty.

So when the writer speaks of God as acting in 'seven yom (days)' without direct reference to sun and moon which do not begin their work until the fourth day, we are well justified in seeing him as meaning 'days of God' which could be as long or as short as God pleased.

We must in fact ask ourselves the question as to what alternative words the writer had available in order to convey his meaning of seven 'time periods'. He had before him the mythical representations of creation as 'seven-day' events, where the essential meaning was of a perfectly created world (there was no conception of a 'week' among these people, seven days was simply a divine period). Indeed he also himself wished to represent God as completing His work in the perfect time-scale. And this he probably saw as God's working period of seven 'God-days' ending with the day of rest which signified the perfect completion of the 'work'.

The early Hebrew language did not have a multiplicity of time words with which he could express himself. Any other description than that of seven 'yom' would have been unnecessarily vague to his readers. And 'seven yom' is the only man period not specifically linked to the sun and moon (It may be argued that it rose from phases of the moon, but it is significant that this did not happen anywhere else). Thus rather than limiting God to earthly time he saw Him as outside that time.

Nor would any other description have fitted the probable pattern of the yearly feast for which the account may well have been written. All creation accounts in the outside world had as their reason for existence their importance for recital at festivals where the gods had to be manipulated. While God did not have to be manipulated, the celebration of the covenant, which bound Him to His people, did have to be carried out. A seven day pattern would fit a seven day feast.

The writer was not trying to be sophisticated. He was trying to express a divine pattern. It thus seems perfectly reasonable, and in accordance with ancient ideas of time, that his intention was that his readers should think in terms of 'days of God' as meaning periods in which God acted, without limiting Him to the length of earthly 'days', the latter being an idea which in the beginning had no place until the fourth period (except to mean something else). As we have seen men considered that a thousand years were to Him but as yesterday, or a part of the night. And that was another way of saying that to God time was seen from a totally different perspective.

So just as man would have a night's rest followed by a day's labour, and then again cease for the night, commencing again the next day, he decided to describe God's activity in a similar way. Each activity of God is seen as finishing 'at nightfall'. This also had the added advantage that it enabled the application of his record to the seven days of a religious festival, which was a common use of creation stories. But, we repeat, it must be considered very doubtful whether he wanted to restrict God to the length of earth days. What he was almost certainly more concerned to do was portray the activity in a sevenfold pattern to bring out the divine perfection of the work.

The very 'first day', for example, is in fact a problem to the 'twenty four hour day' theory. It has no recognised commencement other than the act of creation. It had no 'evening'. The truth is that the phrase 'the evening and the morning were of the first day' cannot be taken literally for there was no evening to the first day. All began with the darkness as created. And are we really to believe that God created that which was 'waste and empty' in total darkness, and then 'hovered' by His Spirit for a period of about eight or so hours before His incredible work of creating light? This really is to see God as acting rather pedantically.

And are we asked to believe that once this light pervaded the universe, He 'separated the light from the darkness' in a period of twelve hours or so? The impression is rather given that it was instantaneous. And he then goes on with the 'separation of the light from the darkness'. This must surely refer not to the primeval 'emptiness' into which he introduced light, but to the separation of light as we know it from darkness as we know it, earthly light and darkness. So as light has replaced the primeval emptiness, so also has the new darkness. Thus this must

mean that during that first 'day' He made periods of both. It is natural to read the account as though the division between light and darkness, taking place after light had been created, took place before the coming evening which was part of the second day. But 'day' was a period of light so that this suggests a number of 'days' in the first 'day' which is really going too far.

Thus on the first day there is a period of total 'emptiness', then light is produced, cancelling out the 'emptiness', then periods of light and darkness are established. Yet the Hebrews considered one day to be a single period of darkness followed by a single period of light. This is all very contradictory. But if the writer saw the term 'day' as metaphorically signifying a 'working period' of God, with no specific time limit, it all fits neatly into place. In that day He established patterns of light and darkness.

Are we really to think that He deliberately alternated light and darkness in accordance with the pattern the sun would later establish, before He created the sun or brought its activity to bear? Why on earth should He do so when there were no 'ruling lights'? We may also ask, did He also at the same time ensure that daylight varied at different periods of time around the world when the sun was not active? If not these were no standardised days.

Yet such a scenario is surely artificial. It is far more reasonable to believe that the writer intends his framework of 'the first day' to be an indication of a period of activity by God during which He arranged separation of day and night, which came to completion with the universe vibrant with light, and with periods of light and darkness clearly established, a period of unknown length, whether of a brief second or of a thousand years. By 'the evening and the morning was of the first day' he is indicating metaphorically, in a picturesque fashion, that God had completed the first of His six periods of activity in a succinct and recognised way, by creating light to dispel darkness. A specific length of earth time was surely outside his perspective.

Furthermore, as we shall see in the commentary, the whole account, while patterned in a clearly structured way, is necessarily simplified. On the first day light is brought into being, on the fourth it is controlled by sun and moon; on the second day the seas and atmosphere are brought into being and on the fifth they are populated by fish and birds; on the third day the dry land first appears and then the vegetation, while on the sixth are produced both the animals and man who populate it and eat from it. Thus the third and sixth day are connected with not one but two 'creative activities' in order to fit the 'six-day' period, and bring it within 'seven days'. This suggests more the activity of the writer in fitting his narrative into the six-day pattern than the actual timing of the activities of God.

The divisions must not, of course, be over-pressed. They do not take into account the complexity of many aspects of the creative work. For example, the birds need to eat and nest and needed dry ground as well as air and water. But what the writer is really drawing out is that God fully made His provision before further advancing His work. While it is always a remote possibility, and I think it can be rated no higher than that, (who can tell God what to do?), that God chose to work in a pattern restricted to an earth time which did not yet exist, it is far more likely that He worked to His own time and that the pattern is one of man's devising under God's guidance which was not intended to be taken as literally representing a human seven day period as experienced by men. It was a seven yom period of God's activity. And if a day is with the Lord 'as a thousand years', that is, is an extended period of time beyond man's imagining, what must a seven day period be?

A further point should also be borne in mind, and that is that while the first six 'days' are clearly defined as being 'the evening and the morning were of the ---- day', the seventh day is not depicted as ending at all. It is left open ended. This was probably because as the creation was seen as 'very good' there remained no further work for God to do. Thus these seven days

of God are seen as a unit in themselves, not something to be repeated. They are not just the first of the world's weeks, for in a very real sense they did not end. God's 'rest' continues.

So the contention is that the 'yoms' are 'yoms' (time periods) of God, not 'twenty four hour' days, and they represent whatever time God chose to use in fulfilling His work. They are seven so as to convey the idea of divine perfection, and it is this pattern that determines the dating of the Sabbath and not the other way around. And this is a view reached on the basis of the text and of the Hebrew meaning of words and concepts of time, not on the basis of some attempt to reconcile things with 'science'.

Note On The Question 'How Does Science Affect Our View Of Genesis 1?'

It is a sad thing that merely human questions should interfere with our contemplation of God and His works. But due to the day in which we live the inevitable question many will ask is, 'how does Genesis 1 fit into 'scientific' accounts of the process by which the universe, animals and man came into being? The answer is of course that science must rather fit into what God has truly revealed. But it does in fact do so very easily. For the Genesis account describes the prime cause, but nowhere tries to explain the processes. It simply describes the Source of all things, tells us that a process occurred (without describing it in detail) and gives us the end results. Evolution, adaptation and step by step creationism, each different ways of looking at the processes, can all fit happily into Genesis 1. The only position that is contrary to Genesis 1 is the atheistic one, and that has nothing to do with science. The man who says 'God had nothing to do with it' is simply providing us with a dogmatic and unprovable position and it can therefore never be scientific. True science does not try to comment on such things, for it recognises that science examines processes and physical facts, not prime sources and ends. Once a scientist does that he is ceasing to be a scientist and is becoming a philosopher, speculating on things for which he can have no 'scientific' evidence.

The supposed problems can therefore arise because of arrogance on both sides. On one side unwarranted dogmatism is expressed as to how Genesis 1 should be interpreted in a way that, in our view, is literal beyond what the writer intended (e.g. seven twenty four hour days), and the mind is then closed to all facts arrayed against it, which have in some way to be explained away. On the other unwarranted dogmatism is expressed in the name of science which is not scientific at all, but simply one man's opinion set against another's.

Much has in the past been made of the 'God of the gaps'. But where God is concerned there are no gaps. The gaps are simply examples of the parts that we understand less well than the parts that we like to think that we do understand, even though we are probably partly wrong on that too. But God lies behind all, for all has come from Him. He created all things, and by Him all things hold together.

All of us have heard the argument about whether creationism should be taught alongside evolution, meaning by this evolution as argued by some scientists who look at it atheistically and therefore from a totally unscientific position. Their view has been that science must keep God totally out of the argument, by which they mean denying Him any part in what happened. But that is not science, it is irrational dogmatism. And they are often very dishonest. For they then begin to speak of 'chance' as though that had been proved, which of course it has not. Until science has disproved God (which it cannot possibly do because God does not come within the realm of what science can prove or disprove. It was He Who created the test tube and no test tube is big enough to contain Him) that is a position which is both dogmatic and arrogant. Certainly we may say, 'let us keep God out of scientific explanations and recognise that we are looking at what happened, and not what caused it to happen', but then we must be consistent and leave 'chance' out of science as well. We must not talk about 'Evolution' as though it had a mind and purpose of its own. We must not suggest that the process happened

without God. We must be honest and disclude all such interpretations altogether. But in fact atheistic scientists are as dogmatic and faith-controlled as are believers. They introduce their own ideas of the basis of the world as though sciences somehow proved them, when it does not. So we must examine the processes without being dogmatic about the prime cause. It is equally reasonable to say, 'let us leave out of science anything that suggests that God was not involved'. For true physical science does not look at beginnings, it only looks at processes and physical facts, i.e. 'facts' as we experience them, not facts as they are, for in the end we only know them in terms of how we experience them. And it accepts that, from a physical point of view, all else is but hypothesis, including atheistic interpretation of those facts. To suggest otherwise is to reveal minds that are closed and incapable of going outside their own petty limits except to dogmatise. And being closed minds they are therefore 'unscientific'.

Of course there are other lines of evidence outside the physical sciences which can be introduced, ideas about mind and spirit, religious experience, beauty and ugliness, inventiveness, morality and aestheticism. But none of them can be decided on the basis of physical sciences and being outside the physical sciences reveal that there is more to the roots of our lives than just the physical sciences.

True science in its wider sense should take into account all possibilities, and that therefore necessarily includes the possibility, from a scientific point of view, of God's commencement of the creation process and His intervention in it. It is true that science cannot prove that. Necessarily so because by definition God is not subject to scientific examination. He is 'beyond science' But whatever else may be true no scientist can ever disprove that God is active in any process, and it must ever remain a possibility to any open mind. For God cannot be researched with the five senses and put under a microscope. He made them all and is bigger than them all. It is man's mind and spirit that must research the things of God, and those are two further things that science cannot examine, and yet which must exist for science to be rational. If a scientist says, 'I am right', he is making a claim that must go beyond the capabilities of the physical brain. For the physical brain is merely a machine that turns out what it is programmed to turn out. It is not capable of going outside the chain of physical cause and effect. It cannot therefore think independently. It simply responds to physical stimuli. Independent thought demands the ability to go 'outside' the brain, to something that is 'beyond' it, what we often call 'the mind'. Only then can we come to a specific conclusion rather than a programmed conclusion.

So true science must always be open to all possibilities until they have been disproved, and while I have never met a scientist who knows what happened before the Big Bang (if it ever happened), I have met Someone Who does know what happened, and whether it happened. So I prefer His version of events as given in Genesis 1, which looks not at the processes but at the prime cause.

Science may eventually sort out the processes, although it is still far from doing it correctly and in accordance with all the evidence, partly because in this regard it has become a dogmatic religion in its own right. What is taught in schools is not what is accepted by advanced biologists. It is a caricature of it, 'good enough for beginners', and the texts books used are decades behind what are considered by many leading scientists to be the facts. But however that may be, science even at its most advanced can never determine the Source, for it does not have the tools to do so. Whether, when a scientist has described his own view of the process that has brought about the world situation as it is today, that process came about by the guiding hand of God or simply as a result of random events is neither provable nor disprovable by science, and indeed can never be so. Large numbers of reputable scientists take one viewpoint, equally large numbers take the other.

The fact of creationism (not seven-day-creationism, but the idea that God was the source and

bringer about of whatever the processes were) must always therefore remain one possibility to any reasonable person, even scientifically speaking (unless we limit 'science' to what can be examined in a test tube, in which case no decision can be reached on the matter one way or the other) and therefore the reasonable position would be to be scientifically neutral on the question. And we should remember that while the scientist may look up at God and say 'who are You?' it is always God Who has the last word, and Who, when the coffin lid is closed, says, 'who are you?' (Indeed God has as good a laugh at Einstein's theories as He does at Newton's, for He knows the truth behind what they were both looking for, and know the limits of their understanding. In a few hundred years time, if the world survives that long, men will laugh at them too).

Equally sadly from the point of view of science's own validity are the unwarranted assumptions that are so regularly made about the facts themselves and what the facts point to. Sadly facts are manipulated and made to fit into a required pattern, and then the pattern is declared to be 'scientific' and is taught in school as 'fact'. But the truth is that that pattern has not been proved, it is usually assume because it fits in with what they want to believe. For in fact basic physical science is actually in a mess as far as biology is concerned when it comes to dealing with the past because far too much of the 'evidence' has been carelessly recorded and written about. So eager have many scientists been to prove their case that they have ignored any fact that does not fit in with it, and have jumped to unproved conclusions on the basis of the fact that they do have. They have continued to assume 'facts' that are not necessarily true, but simply express one possible viewpoint, and are based on misinterpreted evidence which is rarely scientifically re-examined but is simply repeated again and again as though it must be true because 'everyone says so'. It will probably be another hundred years, or even more, (by which time if global warming is true we will probably not be here), before popular science has rid itself of the shackles of Darwin's theories and come down to the kernel of truth in them, and is ready as a whole to reassess the evidence, for it is in the nature of man not to examine his own theories too carefully, because to do so can be uncomfortable. It is far more comfortable to ignore the facts and be confident that one is always right, especially if it suits ones atheistic religious viewpoint. That is as true of scientists as of anyone else. Far better, many of them feel, to rest happily on a foundation of unproven dogmatism and not allow themselves to be shaken in their beliefs. So many of them, although thankfully for the future of scientific truth not all, are the new dogmatic religionists, and their prophet is Darwin, and their God is Evolution. They believe as firmly in them, without satisfactory evidence, as others do in God, and with less reason. We only have to think of a recent TV programmes where we were regularly told that 'Evolution got to work'. What of course this meant was God, for evolution can do no such thing. Hopefully the future may yet persuade men to sort out the facts from the fiction. But as for many of them it has become their religion they will no doubt cling on to it with their eyes firmly closed. Meanwhile, however, their conclusions do not affect Genesis 1 one way or the other, for Genesis 1 does not argue about the processes. From the point of view of Genesis 1 Darwinism and its disciples are irrelevant. It is written from the point of view of God. (End of note).