

Theistic Evolution

And The Day-Age Theory

by Richard Niessen

THE ALLEGED BASIS FOR THE DAY-AGE THEORY

Two elements are essential for any evolutionary scheme, whether it be theistic or atheistic: long periods of time and the assumed validity of the *molecules-to-man* evolutionary scenario. Atheists care little for the biblical account, except to ridicule its statements. Theistic evolutionists, however, profess a certain allegiance to the Scriptures and must attempt to harmonize the biblical account with the evolutionary scenario. The biblical text, at least to the unbiased observer, indicates a universe and earth that were formed in six days; evolutionists suppose at least six billion years. The mechanism by which theistic evolutionists harmonize the two is known as the *day-age theory*.

The key term in this attempted harmony is the word *day* as it is used in Genesis 1. The Hebrew word for *day* is *yom*, and, we are reminded, it is used in a variety of ways: (1) the daylight period in the diurnal cycle as in Genesis 1:5, 14, 16, 18; (2) a normal 24-hour period; and (3) an indefinite time period as in Psalm 90:10.

A passage that is invariably appealed to is 2 Peter 3:8: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day." Also, it is claimed that too much activity took place on the sixth day (Genesis 2) to fit into a normal day: Adam's naming of thousands of animals, his perception of his loneliness, and the subsequent creation of Eve.

The claim, then, is that the *days* of Genesis 1 are really long periods of time, which correspond to the major periods of evolutionary geological history.

A REFUTATION OF THE DAY-AGE THEORY

Most Bible-believing creationists maintain the day-age theory is an unbiblical option for the following reasons:

(1) An improper interpretation of 2 Peter 3:8.

It is axiomatic in hermeneutics (the science of biblical interpretation) that "a text without a context is a pretext." Just as a tape recording can be edited to make the speaker say whatever the editor desires, so the Scriptures can be juggled to suit a person's fancy or predisposition. For example, "And Jesus answered... 'What is truth?' " (John 18:37-38). All the above words are straight from the Bible, but a closer examination discloses that it was actually Pilate who uttered the statement, and that the intervening words have been "edited" out.

2 Peter 3:3-10 is a unit. The context speaks of scoffers in the last days who will ridicule the second coming of Christ. Their rationale is uniformitarian in nature: Jesus promised to come quickly, He has not come yet, therefore He is not going to come at all. Peter refutes these uniformitarian assumptions with a reference to the Flood and the certainty of judgment for these scoffers. Then, responding to the charge that Christ has failed to fulfill His promise, Peter writes the words in question, and concludes by reaffirming the certainty of the second coming of Christ.

Verse 8 was never intended to be a mathematical formula of $1 = 1000$ or $1000 = 1$. The point is that God created time, as well as the universe, and therefore stands above it (cf. Heb. 1:2). While we mortals think 1000 years is a long time, God can scan 1000 years of history—past and future—as quickly as we can scan from one end of the horizon to the other. The verse could have equally been worded, "Five minutes is with the Lord as ten thousand years," and still have conveyed the same message. Note the use of the word *as*, describing similarity, is not the same as an equal sign. Conversely, God is able to do in one day what would normally require a thousand years to accomplish. A pertinent suggestion here, in light of the passage's reference to Creation and the Flood, is a possible allusion to the Flood's rapid buildup of the sedimentary layers of the so-called *geologic column*. One day's Flood could build up layers of sediments that would normally take a thousand years to form by uniformitarian (slowly acting) processes.

2 Peter 3:8 has nothing whatever to do with the length of the creation week. Genesis 1 needs to be interpreted in its own

context and not by an irrelevant verse written 1500 years later.

(2) The inadequacy of a thousand-year *day*.

Let us grant, for the sake of discussion, the mathematical formula that the theistic evolutionists desire. In that case, day one is the first thousand years of earth's history, day two the second thousand years, etc. Consistency would logically dictate that each of the six periods be the same length, resulting in a 6000-year period of creation from nothing to Adam. But 6000 years is only a drop in the bucket compared to the time required to make the evolutionary system work. A lack of a vast time period is the death knell of the evolutionary process. So, let us try 1 day equals 10,000 years. No, 60,000 years is not enough time either. How about 1 day equals 100,000 years? 1 million years? 10 million years? 100 million years? 1 billion years? Ah, yes, that does it for the required time! But what does it do to language as a tool to communicate meaningful information? If words have this kind of infinite flexibility, then the art of communication is indeed a lost cause. These tactics would be laughed to scorn if they were attempted in any other field of study. We should certainly not tolerate them in the study of God's Word.

It appears that 2 Peter 3:8 is merely the wedge used to get the camel's head into the tent. The Hebrew word *olam* was available to communicate the idea of a long time period if Moses had intended to convey that idea. And the Hebrew word *yom* was available had he wanted to convey the idea of a 24-hour day.

(3) The demands of primary word usage.

Every language has certain words that are used, in different contexts, with different meanings. For example, *Webster's Dictionary* defines the noun *ship* as follows:

ship (n) 1: a large seagoing boat 2: airplane 3: a ship's officers and crew. If you were able to see the noun form of ship, in isolation and without a context, which of the three definitions would first come to mind? Obviously the definition listed as #1, or the primary definition of the word. If the context absolutely demanded it, #3 could be used, but it would certainly be an unusual usage of the word.

It is likewise in the biblical languages. The lexicons (Greek and Hebrew dictionaries) list the words and then the definitions in descending order of usage. The translation of Greek and Hebrew is not accomplished by the casting of lots, nor by the spin of a roulette wheel. The primary usage of any term is always given priority in any translation and secondary uses are tried only

when the primary usage does not make sense in the context in which the term is set.

The Hebrew word *yom* is used more than 2000 times in the Old Testament. A cursory examination reveals that in over 1900 cases (95%) the word is clearly used of a 24-hour day, or of the daylight portion of a normal day. Many of the other 5% refer to expressions such as "the day of the Lord" (Joel 2:1) which may not be exceptions at all, since the second coming of Christ will occur on one particular day (1 Cor. 15:51-52), even though His reign extends over a longer period of time.¹ Therefore, even without a context, an unbiased translator would normally understand the idea of "24-hour period" for the word *yom*.

(4) The demands of context.

Words generally do not hang in space and in isolation from other words. When they appear in writing, they are always surrounded by other words which serve as modifiers and/or clarifiers. Let us take the word *ship* used as an illustration in the last point. It is only necessary to add two words to not only differentiate between the noun and the verb forms, but to clarify which of the uses is intended within that form. For example: "The ship flew." The definite article identifies the form as a noun; the verb identifies the secondary usage of the word as an airplane rather than a boat.

We need not belabor the point by multiplying examples here. If I write: "I spaded the garden on my day off," it is quite clear from the surrounding words that this activity is confined to one particular day. So it is in Genesis 1: all the surrounding words convey, to the unbiased reader, the idea that each activity is confined to one of the particular 24-hour days of this creation week.

(5) The numerical qualifier demands a 24-hour day.

The word "day" appears over 200 times in the Old Testament with numbers (i.e., first day, second day, etc.). In every single case, without exception, it refers to a 24-hour day. Each of the six days of the creation week is so qualified and therefore the consistency of Old Testament usage requires a 24-hour day in Genesis 1 as well.

(6) The terms "evening and morning" require a 24-hour day.

The words *evening* (52 times) and *morning* (220 times) always refer to normal days where they are used elsewhere in the Old Testament. The Jewish day *began* in the evening (sunset)

and *ended* with the start of the evening the following day. Thus it is appropriate that the sequence is *evening-morning* (of a normal day) rather than *morning-evening* (= start and finish). The literal Hebrew is even more pronounced: "There was evening and there was morning, day one.... There was evening and there was morning, day two," etc.

(7) The words "day" and "night" are part of a normal 24-hour day.

In Genesis 1:5, 14-18, the words *day* and *night* are used nine times in such a manner that they can refer only to the light and dark periods of a normal, 24-hour day.

(8) Genesis 1:14 distinguishes between days, years, and seasons.

And God said, "Let there be light-makers in the expanse above to divide the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for the determination of *seasons* and for *days* and for *years*."

Clearly the word *days* here represents days, *years* represents years, *seasons* represents seasons.

It is a *red herring* to claim that, if the sun did not appear until the fourth day, there could be no days and nights on the first three days. The Bible clearly says that there was light source (apparently temporary in nature, Genesis 1:3), that there were periods of alternating light and darkness (1:4-5), and that there were evenings and mornings for those first three days (1:5, 8, 13).

(9) Symbiosis requires a 24-hour day.

Symbiosis is a biological term describing a mutually beneficial relationship between two types of creatures. Of particular interest to us are the species of plants that cannot reproduce apart from the habits of certain insects or birds. For example, the yucca plant is dependent upon the yucca moth, and most flowers require bees or other insects for pollination and reproduction. The *Calvaria* tree, on the Mauritius Islands, was totally dependent upon the dodo bird to ingest its seeds, scarify its hard coating, and excrete the seeds before germination could take place. Since the dodo bird became extinct in 1681, no reproduction of this tree has taken place. In fact, the youngest trees are 300 years old! Many additional examples could be cited.

According to Genesis 1, plants were created on the third day (vv. 9-13), birds on the fifth day (vv. 20-23), and insects on the sixth day (vv. 24-25, 31). Plants could have survived for 48 or 72

hours without the birds and the bees, but could they have survived 2-3 billion years without each other according to the day-age scenario? Many birds eat only insects. Could they have survived a billion years while waiting for the insects to evolve? survived a billion years while waiting for the insects to evolve? ² Hardly.

(10) The survival of the plants and animals requires a 24-hour day.

If each *day* were indeed a billion years, as theistic evolutionists require, then half of that *day* (500 million years) would have been dark. We are explicitly told in verse 5 that the light was called *day* and the darkness was called *night*, and that each day had one period of *light-darkness*. How then would the plants, insects, and animals have survived through each 500 million year stretch of darkness? Clearly a 24-hour day is called for.

(11) The testimony of the Fourth Commandment.

It is a marvelous thing to observe the unity of the Scriptures and the orderliness with which God carries out His plans. Have you ever wondered why there were six days of creation, rather than some other number? In the light of the apparently instantaneous creation of the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21, and the instantaneous nature of the miracles of the New Testament, why is it that God takes *as long as* six days to create everything? And why is it that God *rested* on the seventh day? Was He tired after all this exertion? No, Psalm 33:6-9 state that "the heavens were made by the Word of the Lord...He spoke and it was done. He commanded and it stood fast." There was no hint of exertion here. Genesis 2:2-3 merely means that He ceased working because the created order was completed, not because He was tired.

The commentary on these questions is found in Exodus 20:8-11, and it reads as follows:

verse 8—Remember the sabbath *day*, to keep it holy.

verse 9—*Six days* you shall labor and do all your work,

verse 10—But the *seventh day* is the sabbath (rest) of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work...

verse 11—*For in six days* the Lord *made* heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them and rested on the *seventh day*...

Verses 8-10 speak of man working six days and ceasing from his work on the seventh. These are obviously not eons of time, but normal 24-hour days. A key word in verse 11 is *for*, because it introduces the rationale or foundation for the previous command. It continues by equating the time period of creation with the time period of man's work (six days plus one day) and states that God Himself had set the example in Genesis 1. That indeed is the reason why the creation week was 7 days—no more, no less. The passage becomes nonsense if it reads: "Work for six days and rest on the seventh, because God worked for six billion years and is now resting during the seventh billion-year period." If God is resting, who parted the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus 14? And what did Jesus mean in John 5:17 when He said, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working"?

Sometimes the claim is made by theistic evolutionists that we do not know how long the days were way back in Genesis 1. In the first place, Genesis 1 was not *way back*, but was only a few thousand years prior to the writing of Exodus. Since the earth is constantly slowing down in its rotation, the early earth would have been spinning faster and therefore the days would have been shorter, not longer.

But the day-age people have overlooked something even more obvious here: Genesis 1 and Exodus 20 were written by the same author—Moses—at about the same time (ca. 1500 B.C.). Therefore, the common authorship of both passages is evidence that he had the same time period in mind when he used the word *day*. Furthermore, we might note that the Fourth Commandment was actually written by the finger of God Himself on tablets of stone (Ex. 31:18, 32:16-19; 34:1, 28, 29; Deut. 10:4). If anyone should have known how long the days were, it should be the Creator Himself!

(12) The testimony of the rabbis.

The Talmudic literature contains commentaries on virtually every passage in the Old Testament. The liberties they take in interpreting some passages boggle the imagination and yet one thing is certain: they are unanimous in accepting a normal, 24-hour day for Genesis 1. If there were the slightest grammatical or contextual indicator within that chapter that would point to a longer period, you can be sure they would have spotted it and developed it at length. The fact that they do not is a strong testimony for interpreting the days as normal, 24-hour periods.

(13) The testimony of the church fathers.

It is sometimes claimed that the church fathers believed in long ages for the days in Genesis 1. That is a half truth. The only two who held to this view were Origen and Clement of Alexandria, and they were allegorizers who devised unusual interpretations for every part of Scripture. Their system of allegorizing led to the most unbelievable interpretations, which were bounded only by the limits of their fertile imaginations.

Other early commentators on Genesis 1 include the Epistle of Barnabas, Irenaeus, and Justin Martyr. Their remarks have frequently been misunderstood to mean that they believed in the day-age theory. That is not true. What they were doing was developing an eschatological framework which included a literal 1000-year reign of Christ on earth (the millennium). Their logic followed these lines:

- a. God worked for six days and rested on the seventh.
- b. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years (cf. 2 Peter 3:8).
- c. The six days of creation and one day of rest therefore typify the six thousand years of human history that will be concluded by the one thousand-year millennium, followed by eternity. Creation took place on 4000 B.C., therefore the millennium should commence on A.D. 2000, terminate on A.D. 3000, and usher in the timeless period of eternity.

Whether or not we agree with their reasoning and the resulting prophetic framework, we conclude that these early church fathers were not denying the literal six-day creation, but were affirming their faith in it.

The view of the Reformers (Luther, Calvin, etc.) is that of a six-day creation, of 24 hours apiece.

Thomas Scott's commentary of 1780 generally mentions varying interpretations where they exist, but says nothing about any possibility of the "days" being other than 24-hour periods.

It is only since the middle of the nineteenth century that commentators began talking about long periods of time within Genesis 1 itself. That is truly amazing! The Pentateuch was written by Moses in 1500 B.C. The day-age theory is not mentioned by any serious biblical scholar until the 1800's A.D. For 3,300 years this supposed secret lay hidden awaiting the craftiness of nineteenth-century scholarship to unlock its mysteries and reveal them to a waiting world! Something is wrong here. Either God does not know how to express Himself

very clearly, or three thousand years' worth of biblical scholars were blind for failing to see this obvious truth, or...the whole day-age theory is nothing more than a modern contrivance.

Is there some event in the mid 1800's that would tie in with this? Indeed there is. It was at this time that Darwin's *Origin of Species*, Lyell's *Principles of Geology*, and other evolutionary treatises were flooding the marketplace, resulting in a widespread popular acceptance of the major tenets of evolution. Instead of holding their ground and insisting on the authenticity of God's account of origins, many theologians made the evolutionary theory the criterion of truth and practically fell over each other in their wild scramble to compromise the biblical account of origins with the speculations of nineteenth-century atheists and agnostics. Where it comes to a contest between the Bible and the theories of men, it seems that there are always those who will lean over backwards to make sure the Bible gets the short end of the stick.

(14) The theological problem of sin and death.

According to theistic evolutionists, plant and animal life flourished and died at least 500 million years before man evolved. Their deaths have been recorded as the fossil remains embedded in the sedimentary rocks of the so-called *geologic column*.

Romans 5:12, however, does not agree: "Therefore as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, so death passed to all men, because all have sinned."

The passage then goes on to identify Adam as the *one man* referred to in verse 12. There is nothing ambiguous about the passage; it means exactly what it says: Adam was the first man, and there was no death prior to the Garden of Eden incident recorded in Genesis 3. Either theistic evolution and its day-age theory are wrong, or Romans 5:12 is in error. There is no harmonizing or fence-straddling here; one must make a choice between holding to theistic evolution or believing the plain statements in the Bible.

There is yet another lesson to be learned from this New Testament passage. There is a tendency among neo-evangelicals today to make a false dichotomy between the Bible's statements of *faith and practice* and statements pertaining to *science and history*. The former, we are told, are accurate; the latter are riddled with errors of fact. This view is also known as the *partial inspiration* or *limited inerrancy* view of inspiration.

Romans 5:12 shows that the above is untenable because the

passage bases a theological doctrine (man's sin) upon a historical event (Adam's fall). Likewise, 1 Cor. 15:45 bases the doctrine of the resurrection upon the historicity of Adam as the first man. Many other examples could be cited, but the lesson is clear: the theology ("faith and practice") of the Christian life is inseparably linked to and interwoven with the historicity and scientific validity of the narrative portions of Scripture. To deny one is to deny the other.

(15) The feasibility of the events of the sixth day.

One problem seems to be: *how could Adam have named all the animals in one day?* There are two factors to consider here.

First, only a limited number of animals are required. The purpose of parading this entourage of animals before Adam appears to have been to demonstrate to him that man was an entirely different order of creation than the animal kingdom and that none of them could ever serve as a physical and psychological companion to him. This obviously eliminates most of the organisms of the earth: insects, mice, lizards, and fish need not even apply for the position. Since God selected the animals here, He probably limited the number of candidates to those who would even conceivably be suitable. The text itself limits them to "all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Genesis 2:20).

Second, Adam must have had an extremely high intelligence. Because Adam was capable of using 100 percent of his pre-Fall brain, he would probably have had an IQ of 1500 or better. Furthermore, Adam did not have to learn his vocabulary: God programmed it into his brain at the moment of his creation, and he was created as a fully functioning person. It was therefore with the utmost facility that Adam named the animals that were brought before him.

The second problem is due to a misreading of the biblical text where it says in Genesis 2:18 that "it is not good that the man should be alone." Being alone is not the same as being lonely. The latter requires some time; the former does not.

Unless one is predisposed, because of outside assumptions (evolution), to find fault with the passage, there is nothing inherently unreasonable about the events occurring on one normal 24-hour day, as indicated.

Conclusion

Much could be said about the scientific fallacies of the

evolution model and the scientific superiority of the creation model ³ but that is beyond the scope of this essay. The emphasis here has been on the professing Christian who is attempting to unequally yoke together two entirely opposing scenarios (creation and evolution) and who is using an unscriptural methodology (the day-age theory) to accomplish this unholy matrimony.

Ecclesiastes 4:12 speaks about a three-fold cord being not easily broken. The essay has woven together a fifteen-fold cord that is not easily broken. The day-age theory, according to the above evidence, is not permitted by Scripture and is therefore false. Elijah said, "How long will you waver between two opinions..." (1 Kings 18:21). Each of us needs to decide where he stands on this vital issue.

FOOTNOTES

1 There are very few, if any, of these "exceptions" that actually require the meaning of a period of time other than a solar day.

2 Note that the order of the Bible is not the order required by evolution. See the writer's article "Significant Discrepancies Between Theistic Evolution and the Bible." (*Christian Heritage Courier*, August, 1979). Also see John C. Whitcomb's book *The Early Earth*, (1972), and Henry M. Morris' book *Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science* (1970)—both available from CLP Publishers, P.O. Box 15666, San Diego, CA 92115.

3 See Henry M. Morris, *Scientific Creationism* (San Diego: CLP Publishers, 1974).

"God provides us with civil government to protect our welfare and to insure the security of that other government, which is enthroned in his church. Civil government stands guard while the church informs it with moral principles. If either fails the way is left open to unrestrained wickedness, which imposes a tyranny over people as oppressive as the tyranny of some murderous king."

quoted from *God's Man*, a novel
on the life of John Calvin.
by Duncan Norton-Taylor