

Biblical Reasons to Believe that the Creation Days were 24-Hour Periods

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When [Justin Taylor released a blog entry](#) last Wednesday defending a non-literal use of days in [Genesis 1](#), and thus suggesting at least the possibility that the universe is quite ancient, both [Ben Edwards](#) and I sat down, without consulting, to write responses. While identical in ideology, our approaches were different enough, I think to merit posting both. Below, then, is a point-by-point answer to Taylor's major arguments followed by my own counterargument in favor of 24-hour days.

Taylor's article begins with five alleged premises/presuppositions (appearing below in bold font style) of young-earth creationists (YECs). These I will address briefly:

- **[Genesis 1:1](#) is not the actual act of creation but rather a summary of or title over [Genesis 1:2–2:3](#).** Mostly False. While some YECs see [Genesis 1:1](#) as a summary for the whole chapter, most do not. Instead, we see [Genesis 1:1](#) as a description of the very first “actual event of creation,” *ex nihilo*, of the original raw materials of the universe. This event happened, we argue **on Day 1**, with [vv. 3ff](#) functioning as a detail of God's manipulation of those materials. Indeed, a quick summary of YEC materials will divulge that the summary/titular view of [Genesis 1:1–2](#) is held in contempt by a great many YECs because of its association with the old Gap Theory.
- **The creation week of [Genesis 1:2–2:3](#) is referring to the act of creation itself.** True. But it seems to me that the burden of proof here rests with those who say that the creation week of [Genesis 1:2–2:3](#) is *not* “referring to the act of creation itself.”
- **Each “day” (Heb. *yom*) of the creation week is referring to a 24-hour period of time (reinforced by the statement in [Exodus 20:11](#)).** True, and see below for a defense of this claim. Each of the ten uses of *yom* in [Genesis 1](#) (though not each use of *yom* in the OT) fits the qualifications detailed below for a literal day.
- **An old-earth geology would necessarily entail macroevolution, hominids, and animal death before the Fall—each of which contradicts what [Scripture](#) tells us.** Mostly true. In theory one could hold to geological evolution without biological or human evolution, but this is rare. The critical concerns for the YEC are (1) that any old-earth geology model that *uses evolutionary explanations of the fossil record contained in the geological strata to suggest animal death before the fall* contradicts what Scripture tells

us ([Gen 1:31](#); [Rom 8:18–22](#)); and (2) that any suggestion of hominid death before the fall is not merely troubling, but *catastrophic* to the Christian faith ([Rom 5](#)).

- **The approximate age of the earth can be reconstructed backward from the genealogical time-markers in Genesis.** True. And I appreciate the qualifier “approximate,” because it is very important to a lot of us.

The article then turns to Taylor’s five reasons (again in bold) why the days of Genesis 1 are not necessarily literal. I will now address these in order.

- **[Genesis 1:1](#) Describes the Actual Act of Creation Out of Nothing and Is Not a Title or a Summary.**

Agreed. As a YEC, I like this statement very much. But I would add an important qualification: [Genesis 1:1](#) tells us that this actual act of creation occurred *in the opening moments of Day 1 of the creation week* and *out of nothing*. [Verse two](#) (commencing with an explanatory *waw*) then details the original appearance of those materials, and the rest of the chapter (with nearly every verse introduced by a *waw* consecutive, the standard marker of narrative sequence) detailing the divine manipulation of those raw materials into the universe as we know it.

Which brings me then to several objections to Taylor’s fuller explanation:

(1) That the verb “created” in [Genesis 1:1](#) is in the perfect tense is very true. That “when a perfect verb is used at the beginning of a unit in Hebrew narrative, it usually functions to describe an event that *precedes* the main storyline” is less defensible. The perfect tense is by far the most common tense used in Hebrew and as such carries very little exegetical freight (think the aorist in Greek). Having said this, the likeliest explanation of the verb is that it details an event that is *actually part of the biblical story line*, not an undefined precedent to the storyline that stands temporally outside of it. See below.

(2) I also disagree that [Genesis 1:3–2:3](#) represents a “highly patterned structure of forming and filling” (informed readers will recognize here the language of the highly inventive “framework theory” popular today). Instead, this chapter is, in terms of its linguistic features, a very mundane and simply structured piece of Hebrew narrative not unlike most of the rest of the book. All the syntactical and rhetorical features of this chapter point routinely to a narrative sequence of consecutive days—days that must necessarily occur in *immediate succession* for the very survival of the unfolding universe.

- **The Earth, Darkness, and Water Are Created Before “The First Day.”**

Building on his assumption, above, that [Genesis 1:1–2](#) details the *background* to the creative week, Taylor’s article now clearly asserts that light, darkness, earth, and water existed before the creation week (and apparently a long time before, in order to accommodate the assured

results of science). However, if, as I have argued in point (1), [Genesis 1:1–2](#) details the actual creation of the unformed and unfilled materials **that occurred on Day 1**, this argument fails.

Who is right? Well, [Exodus 20:11](#) gives us a very clear answer: “In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them.” There could be no plainer rebuttal of Taylor’s affirmation: the heavens and the earth and the seas were not created “before the first day,” but rather **on** one of those six days, viz., the first.

Taylor’s arguments that (1) light existed before the celestial beings and (2) reached earth immediately are thorny ones for which YECs do not have a unified answer, but few see these as serious problems. In answer to the first problem some YECs argue a temporary light source or light sourced in God himself. Ultimately the debate is incidental. After all, God hears without ears and sees without eyes, so it is not hard for us to extrapolate light without a sun. In answer to the second problem some suggest that God created with apparent age and others that the speed of light has slowed since the creation week. Again, however, this is an intramural and incidental debate. God is a supernatural God who makes bread appear instantly without growing the grain, milling it, or baking it; likewise, making mature light is not difficult for our supernatural and omnipotent God.

- **The Seventh Day Is Not 24 Hours Long**

Sure it is. Miles Van Pelt’s comments aside, it would appear that the argument from [Exodus 20:11](#) is unassailable. The Israelites were to work six ordinary days and rest for one ordinary day, just as God created in six ordinary days and rested for one ordinary day—one that started at evening Friday and ended the same time on the following day. That the original Sabbath, by analogy, points to a greater rest for the people of God ([Heb 10](#) etc.) in no way suggests that the Sabbath template itself was itself a “greater day.” Admittedly, there is no “evening-morning” clause used of the seventh day in [Genesis 2](#), but there is no syntactical reason forthcoming to believe that it was anything other than an ordinary day.

- **The “Day” of [Genesis 2:4](#) Cannot Be 24 Hours Long.**

True. And you’ll not find a YEC who affirms otherwise. Some will be astonished by this, no doubt, but we young-earth creations really have noticed [Genesis 2:4](#) before today, and our answer is long-standing and well developed—if only our detractors cared to read rather than assume our arguments. The YEC argument is not an unqualified affirmation that the word *yom* always refers to a 24-hour day. If one of us were to make such an argument, then our old-earth brothers would have good reason to snicker. But we don’t say this. And so I beg the old-earth community to have the integrity to stop rehearsing this silly strawman as though it were a legitimate argument.

The qualified argument that YECs use is instead this: The Hebrew word *yom*, when cast in the singular and as a non-compound grammatical structure (as it does hundreds of times in the Hebrew OT), has uniform reference to a 24-hour day.

We fully appreciate the fact that the semantic range of *yom* exceeds literal 24-hour days, and that [Genesis 2:4](#) offers syntactical features that point to a broader use of *yom*. This in no way threatens the young-earth argument.

- **The Explanation of [Genesis 2:5–7](#) More Than an Ordinary Calendar Day**

[Genesis 2:5–7](#) is a difficult passage with many options for interpretation, as all versed in the discussion will admit. However, the unabated series of *waw* consecutives in a *Toledot* genre seems to cast some doubt on Futado’s understanding of this pericope as a “topical” reenactment of [Genesis 1](#). Instead, a very good case can (and has) been made that these [verses](#) offer a narrative detailing the establishment specifically of the Garden of Eden, and not of the earth generally (see [McCabe](#)).

This brings me, finally, to five positive arguments why we ought to think of the days of [Genesis 1](#) as literal, several of them distilled from the material above:

1. The days of [Genesis 1](#) are literal, 24-hour days because when one examines the many other singular uses of *yom* in a non-compound grammatical structure throughout the OT, the idea of a literal day is nearly universal.
2. The days of [Genesis 1](#) are literal, 24-hour days because they are accompanied by ordinals (first, second, third, etc.). Of the more than 150 uses of *yom* with an ordinal in the rest of the Hebrew OT, just one ([Hos 6:2](#)) refers to something other than a literal day.
3. The days of [Genesis 1](#) are literal, 24-hour days because of the use of the qualifier “evening and morning” throughout [Genesis 1](#). It seems to go without saying that while literal days have mornings and evenings, figurative days do not.
4. The days of [Genesis 1](#) are literal, 24-hour days because anything other than literal days renders the comparison with [Exodus 20:11](#) a matter of equivocation. Israel worked six literal days and rested for one literal day. God created for six literal days and rested for one literal day. The idea of God creating via a six-point framework and then resting eternally does not seem to offer much of a precedent for Israel’s seven-day workweek.
5. Finally, and more historical/theological than exegetical in nature, the days of [Genesis 1](#) are literal, 24-hour days because this has been the overwhelmingly majority plain reading of the text throughout church history—at least until it came into conflict with the “assured results of modern science.” The old-earth idea of non-literal days is without serious doubt a product not of grammatical-historical exegesis, but of the

accommodation of the Bible to the assured results of modern science as independent, norming factors in biblical interpretation. Old-earth creationism is at its heart a blunt denial, I would argue, of the Bible as the *norma Normans non normata*.

Of course, we must deal with one last objection. There are noble figures in church history that expressed doubt about the literal nature of the [Genesis 1](#) days (though, interestingly, Taylor cited just one who lived prior to the modern period). Augustine is Taylor's lone exception, and while others might admittedly be cited, Augustine remains a favorite go-to source for old-earth creationists. I'd like to challenge this, not because I doubt the old-earth account of what Augustine believed, but because his argument is fueled neither by exegesis nor modernist principles, but by theology. Specifically, he doubted that that an infinite God would ever need to work for six days to accomplish anything (much less rest), and suggested that these were instances of anthropomorphic condescension: God created his universe instantaneously, but cast the event in the anthropomorphic language of the passage of time for the understanding of finite humans. In other words, while Augustine and Machen both doubted that the days [Genesis 1](#) were to be understood as literal, the basis of their respective arguments is worlds apart, diminishing their value as parallel sources.

Finally, I would like to point our readers to two very competent defenses of this position with considerably greater detail, one by [Bob McCabe](#) and another by [Gerhard Hasel](#).