

## Creation

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### **Is the doctrine of creation a litmus test of a church's attitude toward the Bible?**

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

**Many Evangelicals wonder why — or if — the meaning of the word "day" in Genesis chapter one should be a matter of such deep controversy. Aren't there far more vital issues at stake? Can't we overlook this one to keep the peace? The fact is that God's Word tells us plainly that we cannot, because doing so cuts the ground from beneath our entire system of doctrine, including the Gospel itself.**

In recent years, the controversy over the doctrine of creation has focused attention on the attitudes of churches, seminaries, pastors, and theologians toward grammatical-historical interpretation of Scripture. (See our [previous article](#) for a discussion of this Bible-sanctioned method of interpreting Scripture.) Many have abandoned these principles for interpreting the Bible, and the result is that they often interpret the words of Scripture according to their own preferences rather than their actual God-given meaning.

It is true that the current dismissive attitude of many Evangelicals toward grammatical-historical interpretation of the Bible endangers much more than the doctrine of creation. It endangers the proclamation of the Gospel itself, as well as many other doctrines — in fact, the entire system of doctrine. It is also true that it is not necessary to believe in creation of the heavens and the Earth in six contiguous 24-hour days in order to be a Christian. But it is also true that the doctrine of creation is a key test case revealing the attitudes of theologians, pastors, elders, and church

members toward the authority of Scripture and the proper approach to its interpretation.

In a series of articles addressing this issue, we are going to explore these points that lead us to conclude that the doctrine of creation is a test of the church's loyalty to God's Word:

- What is the meaning of "day" in the Genesis creation account?
- What is the attitude of most of the post-Darwinian church toward the Genesis account?
- Why is the doctrine of creation a litmus test of one's attitude toward the Bible?
- What needs to change in our day?

Creation is a litmus test. As we shall see, compromise on the doctrine of creation is a surrender to the presuppositions of the evolutionary mindset. It cuts the ground from beneath any attempt by such people and churches to proclaim the Bible as the Word of God, and Christ as the only Savior from sin.

### **Six Literal Days**

We begin with our first point: What is the meaning of "day" in the Genesis creation account? Analysis of the text of the Bible using grammatical-historical methods leads to the unmistakable conclusion that the creation days are literal days. The Hebrew word *yom*, translated "day" in Genesis one, can have a range of meanings. These include an ordinary day, a specific point in time, a period of light contrasted with a period of darkness, or even a year. But in Genesis one, the range of meaning of *yom* is limited to a literal day by the use of the word in context.

In the creation account, *yom* is used with an ordinal number (first day, second day, third day, etc.) and is coupled with the descriptive phrase "evening and morning" in verses 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, and 31. Outside of Genesis one, *yom* is used over 400 times

in the Old Testament with an ordinal number, and each time without exception it means a literal day. Also, outside of Genesis one *yom* is used with reference to "evening" or "morning" 23 times, and each time it means a literal day.

Other Hebrew words that can mean "day", such as *olam* (e.g., Deuteronomy 32:7) and *qedem* (e.g., 2 Kings 19:25, Psalm 44:1), are used elsewhere in the Old Testament. They are always either translated "day," or they are used with *yom* to mean long or indefinite periods of time, or ancient times. But these other words and formulations for "day" are not the word used in the creation account. *Yom* is used with ordinals and descriptors that define it as a literal day.

And clearly, the reference to the creation account in Exodus 20:8-11 is a reference to a literal day. Any other meaning would make nonsense of the Sabbath commandment.

### **Six Contiguous Days**

The creation days are contiguous days. The text of Scripture also bears this out. There is no indication of any time gaps between the creation days. God's use of the creation week as the model for man's weekly pattern of work (six days) and rest (one day) in Exodus 20:8-11 confirms this, and would not make sense otherwise.

### **An Eyewitness Account**

The Genesis account of the creation of the universe and mankind is an eyewitness record given to us by God Himself. Since God is infallible, it is a record we can trust. It is also the only account that makes sense of the world and mankind as they are.

**Next — Seeking praise in the wrong places: A look at the attitude of the post-Darwinian church toward the Genesis account.**

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