

Seventeen Reasons for Taking the Word *Day* in Its Normal Sense¹

1. In 2,225 occurrences, the word *day* is never used in the Old Testament to mean a long period of time.
2. If eons or long periods of time had been intended, the writer could have and probably would have used the Hebrew word for time extended into the distant past or future, *'olam*.
3. When the word *day* is used with a specific number, it always, always, always means a twenty-four-hour day.
4. When used in a number series, *day* always means a twenty-four-hour day, whether in the 119 instances in the Pentateuch or in the 357 instances outside the Pentateuch. In noting that the seventh day is unanimously taken as the last day in the sequence, Joseph Pipa astutely comments, "The question remains why 'first' through 'sixth' do not teach sequence while, according to all non-literal proponents, 'seventh' does communicate the last in the sequence."
5. Whenever the word *day* is used in the plural, which happens 858 times, it always means a twenty-four hour day. This is its clear meaning in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17, which is built upon the text of Genesis 1. Humans are to work as God worked, six days because God worked six days.
6. Whenever the word *day* is used in the singular and not in a compound grammatical construction, it means a twenty-four-hour day.
7. The mention of "evening and morning" for the six days of creation is a reference to the daily interchange of light and darkness. In nineteen instances outside of Genesis 1 where the words *evening* and *morning* are combined with the Hebrew word for day, the reference is always to a twenty-four-hour day. The same is true in another thirty-eight passages with *evening* and *morning* when the word *day* is not mentioned. Furthermore, the words *evening* and *morning* are never used figuratively in the Old Testament.
8. The clustering of the individual numerals, the sequence of numbers, and the phrase "evening and morning" provide strong, cumulative evidence for taking *day* as a twenty-four-hour day. This is an important part of the contextual argument, which points out what the word *day* means in this context. In other

¹ Joel Heck, *In the Beginning, God: Creation from God's Perspective* (CPH: 2014), 35-39.

words, with all of these clear indicators pointing to twenty-four hours, and with no clear indicators pointing to long ages, the word day must mean twenty-four hours.

9. Genesis 1:14 speaks of the purpose of the lights, that is, to separate day from night and to serve as signs to mark seasons, days, and years. There is no hint of any other meaning than the twenty-four-hour day, and the lining up of days next to seasons and years confirms the normal meaning of the word *day*. The author could not mean that the lights are to “serve as signs to make seasons and eons and years.” The juxtaposition of *days* next to seasons and years makes this clear. And if *days* mean twenty-four-hour days here, then they mean twenty-four-hour days in the rest of the chapter. Or, at the very least, the author should and would distinguish this use of *day* from a figurative use of *day*.
10. Genesis 1:16 also uses *day* in its normal sense. The sun rules over the day, not over eons or millions of years. These uses of day in several places, other than the summary statement at the end of each creative day, confirms the normal meaning of the word day. “Besides the six summary uses of the word day at the end of each day, the Hebrew word for day appears another eight times in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and, including those summary uses, a total of eleven times in chapter 1.
11. Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 make little sense unless the days of creation are twenty-four-hour days; these passages make it clear that the days of Genesis 1 are not to be understood as a literary convention. No corresponding passage appears in the Bible that gives such clarity to a figurative use of the word *day*.
12. Consistency in the interpretation of time references in the rest of Genesis, such as the great ages of the patriarchs, requires us to understand the days of Genesis 1 as twenty-four-hour days.
13. The successive use of the Hebrew word for account or generation (2:4) throughout Genesis parallels the successive use of the word day in chapter 1, both understood in their normal meaning.
14. There is no good reason to assume that light could not have existed before the creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars. God is the source of light. Therefore, the creation of light before the creation of the sun is not a reason for taking day figuratively.

15. Critical Old Testament scholars, no longer needing to work out a compromise between creation and evolution (because they don't think much of Genesis is historical), admit that the word means a twenty-four-hour day. James Barr, former Old Testament professor at Oriel College, Oxford University, while not believing the straightforward message of Genesis, once wrote, "So far as I know, there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that ... "creation took place in a series of six days which were the same as the days of twenty-four hours we now experience." Gerhard von Rad wrote, "The seven days are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and as a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world." Marcus Dods wrote, "If, for example, the word 'day' in these chapters does not mean a period of twenty-four hours, the interpretation of Scripture is hopeless." Likewise, evangelical scholar John Walton, though not holding to a young earth or a six-day creation, writes, "These are seven twenty-four-hour days. This has always been the best reading of the Hebrew text."

16. The sheer number of time markers in this chapter overwhelmingly argues for the normal meaning of day because "evening" and "morning" have clear meaning (six times), as do the separation of the light from the darkness by God directly (v. 4), the separation of the light from the darkness by the created lights (v. 14), "seasons and days and years" (v. 14), the governing of the day by the sun and the night by the moon (v. 16), the use of the Hebrew verb to convey sequential narrative (46 times), and, of course, the enumeration of the seven days for a total of sixty-three such markers.

17. Robert Reymond offers an insight based on Numbers 12:6–8, where God says that when He speaks to Moses, He speaks "clearly and not in riddles." He argues, therefore, that we must take Genesis 1 in its ordinary sense and not assume some hidden meaning behind the text.

"Given these reasons, one wonders if there is any way that Moses could have more clearly and precisely communicated the idea of a six twenty-four-hour day week than what we have in Genesis 1? An old saying suggests that if it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, then, it's a duck! In Genesis 1, if it begins like a day, is described like a day, operates like a day, and ends like a day, then, it's a day! A twenty-four hour day. Although he does not hold to a young earth, James Barr admits, "the only natural exegesis is a literal one."