

**Lesson 4**

**Time Theories**

Genesis 1:1-31

**I. INTRODUCTION**

- A. There are many evangelical scholars, who are not evolutionists, who want to see in Genesis 1 long periods of time. Their cosmogony is affected by what appear to be scientific facts.
- B. The question is how does Genesis 1 fit in relation to geological (involving rocks), paleontological (fossils), and anthropological (man) studies? These viewpoints all try to harmonize the apparent facts of science with the creation account in the Bible.
- C. In this lesson, we will deal with two theories, not well accepted in evangelical circles, which believe in creation but almost completely capitulate to science.

**II. MODIFIED GAP THEORY**

- A. Definition. This theory places a judgment and a long period of time before Genesis 1:1. Thus Genesis 1:1-2:3 simply states a refashioning of the earth after this judgment. Merrill F. Unger says,

Thus Genesis 1:1-2 evidently described not the primeval creation ex nihilo, celebrated by the angels (Job 38:7; Isa. 45:18), but the much later refashioning of a judgment-ridden earth in preparation for a new order of creation--man. The Genesis account, accordingly, deals only with God's creative activity as it concerns the human race in its origin, fall and redemption. There is no valid reason why the context of the phrase "in the beginning" Gen. 1:1) should refer to any other time. There is nothing in the original language to suggest otherwise. The spirit of God in the Genesis narrative is simply giving the facts of creation as they immediately affect man, who is a comparative late-comer in God's creative program (Merrill F. Unger, "Rethinking The Genesis Account of Creation," Bibliotheca Snare, p. 28).

**B. Support**

1. The Genesis account evidently opens in a much later context and, like the Mesopotamian creation stories, begins with chaos,
2. If Genesis 1:1 refers to the original creation of the universe out of nothing, Genesis 1:2 must be construed to be the original chaotic state in which the earth was created. But why would God create an original imperfect and chaotic earth? Thus "in the beginning" must refer to a new beginning after a previous judgment.

3. The Hebrew word *bara* does not always mean to create out of nothing. It often bears the meaning of “shaping, forming or fashioning” (Gen. 1:27; 5:1-2 Isa. 65:17). thus Genesis 1:1 could be translated, “In the beginning God fashioned the heaven and the earth.”

4. The days of creation are 24-hour days, describing how God refashioned the earth to make it livable for men.

### C. Objections

1. It is strange that Genesis, the book of beginnings, would have nothing to say about the beginning of God’s original creation.

2. It is pure conjecture to place a gap before Genesis 1:1.

3. The Bible nowhere refers to a judgment or time period before Genesis 1:1. It is strange that this judgment is passed over in silence.

4. This view seems to be willing to turn the whole creation account over to the findings of uniformitarian geology.

5. This is a relatively new view and held by only one prominent scholar.

## III. PICTORIAL OR REVELATORY DAY THEORY

A. Definition. This view holds to a normal 24-hour day, but sees the days as days of revelation and not days of the creating process. Thus God revealed or depicted to Moses, in six 24-hour days, His previous creative activity in six ages. These ages (stages), do not necessarily represent strictly chronological sequence, for they are part chronological and part topical. That is to say, various stages or phases of creation are introduced in a logical order, as they bear upon the human observer on earth. It is more logical to describe first the earth’s surface upon which the observer must stand before introducing the sun and moon which are to shine upon the earth and regulate the seasons. NOTE: This view is held by P. J. Wiseman in the book *Creation Revealed In Six Days*.

### B. Support

1. This view can accept the obvious meaning of “day” in Genesis 1, and still accept the findings of uniformitarian geology.

2. This view can harmonize science and scripture.

### C. Objections

1. There is nothing in the text of Genesis 1 that would suggest that a mere vision is being described.

2. If Genesis 1 was really only a vision (representing, of course, the actual events of primeval history), then almost any other apparently historical account in Scripture could be interpreted as a vision, especially if it relates to transactions not naturally observable to a human investigator or historian.

3. In cutting the Genesis 1 account loose from reality, it allows science to have a free rein and anything that science would propose could be put into or behind the creation account.

#### IV. THE LITERARY FRAMEWORK VIEW

A. Definition. The days of Genesis 1 are not intended to give a chronological sequence of events, but are rather a literary framework (poetic-like structure), which the author uses to teach us about God's creative activity. Therefore, Genesis 1 is a prose form of an old hymn celebrating the order of the cosmos as it presently stands but gives no chronology.

The arrangement of six "days" is a literary device the author uses to teach that God created everything. The six "days" which are neither twenty-four hour days or long periods of time, give us six different "pictures" of creation, telling us that God made all aspects of the creation, that the pinnacle of His creative activity was man, and that over all creation is God Himself, who rested on the seventh day and who calls man therefore to worship Him on the Sabbath day as well (Ronald Youngblood, *How It All Began*).

#### B. Disadvantages

1. The literary framework view is a modified pictorial or revelatory day theory.
2. As hard as those who believe in the literary framework view try to do away with chronology in Genesis 1, it still seems to be there.
3. The literary framework view is very new and has no historical support. We should be wary of any new views.
4. The literary framework view does harmonize with science and a very old earth, and there just may be too much desire to do this to get away from the knotty problems of harmonizing literal creation days with modern science.
5. Exodus 20:8-11 STATES CLEARLY THAT God rested on the seventh day from creative activity. If God did not create the earth by working for six days and resting on the seventh, then the command to imitate Him would be misleading or make no sense.