History of the Discussion

Let’s look at an early view. Philo (20 BC- AD 45)

“He [Moses] says that in six days the world was created, not that its Maker required a length of time for His work, for we must not think of God as doing all things simultaneously, remembering that all includes with the commands which He issues the thought behind them. Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was need of order.” (De Opificio Mundi)

“It is quite foolish to think that the world was created in six days or in a space of time at all. Why? Because every period of time is a series of days and nights, and these can only be made such by the movement of the sun as it goes over and under the earth; but the sun is a part of heaven, so that time is confessedly more recent than the world. It would therefore be correct to say that the world was not made in time, but that time was formed by means of the world, for it was heavens movement that was the index of the nature of time. When, then, Moses says, He finished His work on the sixth day, we must understand him to be adducing not a quantity of days, but a perfect number, namely six.”

(Legum Allegoria)

Earliest Church Fathers

Justin Martyr (c AD 100-166) and Irenaeus (c AD 130-200) used Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 to support their view that the creation days were each a thousand years long.

“Thus, then, in the day they did eat, in the same did they die.... For it is said, There was made in the evening, and there was made in the morning, one day. Now in this same day that they did eat, in that also did they die.... On one and the same day on which they ate they also died (for it is one day of creation) ... He [Adam] did not overstep the thousand years, but died within their limit.... for since a day of the Lord is as a thousand years, he did not overstep the thousand years, but died within them.”

(Irenaeus, Against Heresies)

Third Century Christian Scholars

Hippolytus, Clement saw the creation days as not literal 24 hour periods.

Origen saw problems with the interpretation of the creation days as 24 hours:

“The text said that ‘there was evening and there was morning,’ it did not say: the first day but said one day. It is because there was not yet time before the world existed. But time begins to exist with the following days.” (Homilies on Genesis and Exodus)

“Now what man of intelligence will believe that the first and the second, and the third day, and the evening and the morning existed without the sun, moon and stars?” (Origen on First Principles)
Augustine (AD 354-430)

“As for these days, it is difficult, perhaps impossible to think-let alone explain in words-what they mean.” (City of God, Book XI, Chapter 6)

“Seven days by our reckoning after the model of the days of creation, make up a week. By the passage of such weeks time rolls on, and in these weeks one day is constituted by the course of the sun from its rising to its setting; but we must bear in mind that these days indeed recall the days of creation, but without in any way being really similar to them.” (Italics mine) (The Literal Meaning of Genesis)

Ambrose of Milan (AD 340-397) is the most quoted early scholar as supporting 24 hour days. He does so only implicitly, but quickly equivocates on the meaning of the Hebrew word yôm.

“Scripture established a law that twenty-four hours, including both day and night, should be given the name of day only, as if one were to say the length of one day is twenty-four hours in extent...

There are many who call even a week one day [Gen 2:4], because it returns to itself, just as one day does, and one might say seven times revolves back on itself.”

(Saint Ambrose: Hexameron)

They were also distinguishing themselves from some lines of Greek thought that held to an eternal cosmos.

Not much discussion in the middle ages. Next major events are the work of Lightfoot and Usher in 1642-1650 working out their chronology of the Bible. (Creation was in 4004 BC) (Also note the Westminster assembly was in 1647)

• Now several sources of tension arise

• Jean Astruc’s commentary on Genesis (1700’s) noting the “different” creation accounts

• Geological work in the 1790’s noticing that sedimentation layers implied an age of more than 1/4 billion years.

• Rise of Enlightenment and Rationalism

• Eichorn and higher criticism (based on conflict between geology and Usher)

• Some responses

• Gosse (1857): Saw conflict between Usher and geology, decided on appearance of age solution (My interpretation of Bible right, therefore Science wrong)

• Darwin (1859) Saw conflict between Usher and geology, decided on Science being right because my interpretation of the Bible must be correct.
• Wiblerforce-Huxley Debate (1860) shows the polarization between the two sides.

• Usher’s chronology seen as a defense against Darwin (B.B. Warfield)


• Backlash by the Science Establishment

• An example of the rhetoric:
  • Henry Morris blames evolutionary thought for “the vast complex of godless movements”
  • Evolutionist Thomas Jukes accuses young-earth proponents of using “terrorist tactics”.
  • Both sides accuse the other of distortion, deceit and bad science.

**Biblical basis for long time scales?**

• yôm has a range of meaning

• But what about ordinal use?

• Hosea 6:2
  • Arguments on syntax and structure of Hebrew
  • But why should we know this??
  • Case of the Kosher kitchen...

• No end to the 7th day.

• Timeframe for the events of the 6th day.

• Issue of God deceiving? Or revealer of truth in both spheres?

• If 8 day Feast of Booths is to mimic the 40 year wandering of Israel, why then do we equate 1 to 1 correspondence between the week being a symbol of creation?

• The issue of Death (Romans 5:12)

• Are carnivorous animals a result of the fall?

• Is Entropy a result of the fall?

• But you open the door to (gasp!) Evolution!