

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN

The Length of a Creation Day.

PROF. PAUL KRETZMANN, D. D., St. Louis, Mo.

Ever since the concept of evolution, poorly defined as it is and representing a theory only, as even its most ardent advocates are compelled to admit, has again challenged the attention of natural philosophers, it has placed itself at variance with revealed religion. The Darwinian and post-Darwinian controversies, breaking out from time to time, have often been carried on with a bitterness

which did not shrink back from personal vituperation. We need but be reminded of Huxley and Haeckel in order to recall some of the more unfortunate episodes in the warfare of science and religion. Needless to say, men of this type denied the Biblical account of the creation *in toto* and prided themselves on their blasphemy.

Strange as it may seem, however, this open and unqualified denial of the truth is not so dangerous as the defection which has been found in the Christian Church almost from the beginning, whether consciously affected by any theory of evolution or not. Ever since Augustine and other teachers of the early Church made concessions to reason in explaining the origin of the universe, there have been such as have defended theistic evolution to a smaller or greater degree. Well-meaning as many of these people are, and readily as we concede to them that they may still be true believers, yet we cannot yield to their theories, particularly in their contention that the creation of the world took place in six time-periods, or eras, the length of which agreed in general with the periods commonly accepted by the majority of modern geologists.

Over against this theory we maintain with great emphasis that *the length of a day during creation week was twenty-four hours*. This is evident

1. *From the word itself.*

The characteristic statement in the account of the creation, as given in Gen. 1, is: "And the evening and the morning were the — day," literally, "And it was evening, and it was morning, the — day." Now, it is a fundamental rule of exposition that the ordinary, the normal meaning of a word must be assumed, unless there are clear and cogent reasons appearing from the context which render this assumption impossible. But the first and ordinary meaning of the Hebrew word יום, as used in Gen. 1, 5 and subsequently, is that of the *dies civilis*, consisting, according to the modern way of reckoning, of twenty-four hours. An old *Clavis* states that it is *tempus, quod tum die, tum nocte constat, seu dies naturalis*. This fact is furthermore substantiated

2. *From the context.*

The text of Gen. 1 clearly states: "And it was evening, and it was morning, the — day." This defines the word יום more exactly by restricting it to the combined length of evening and morning, as introducing, respectively, that part of the natural day which is called night, and that part which is characterized by the

presence of daylight. This fact is, therefore, recognized and accepted by honest commentators and scholars everywhere. Tuch (*Kommentar ueber die Genesis*) writes: "Finsternis und Helle sind nun geschieden und auf bestimmte Zeitraeume beschaenkt. Gott benennt V. 5 diese Zeitraeume Tag und Nacht. . . . Wie sich das Licht erst dem chaotischen Dunkel entwand, so geht auch hier עֶרֶב dem בֹּקֶר voran, entsprechend der buergerlichen Einrichtung der Hebraeer, den Tag mit Sonnenuntergang zu beginnen. . . . Aus dem stets wiederkehrenden 'Es ward Abend, und es ward Morgen' ist uebrigens klar, dass hier in der Schoepfungswoche keine andern Zeitabschnitte als Tage gemeint sein koennen. יוֹם אֶחָד, ἡμέρα μία, wie die griechischen Uebersetzer richtig beibehalten, nicht רֵאשִׁית." Keil, in his commentary on Genesis, writes: "Wenn aber die einzelnen Schoepfungstage durch den wiederkehrenden Wechsel von Licht und Finsternis begruetet, nach dem Abend- und Morgenwerden bestimmt und gezaehlt werden, so haben wir sie fuer einfache Erdentage zu halten, nicht fuer Zeitraeume von unberechenbarer Dauer, fuer Perioden von Jahren oder Jahrtausenden." In a similar way, Jamieson and also Daehsel accept and defend the first and obvious meaning of the word, as defined by its context, while both Lange and Strack, to mention only two of the more liberal theologians, waste a lot of energy in trying to show that the first meaning of the word "day" is in this case not acceptable.

It is interesting to note in this connection what one of the defenders of evolution, H. H. Lane, says in his recent book *Evolution and Christian Faith*. He writes: "The word for 'day' (*yom* in the Hebrew) is used in the Hebrew way for a period of twenty-four hours, as seen in the expression, 'The evening and the morning were the first day,' etc. It is a well-known fact that the Hebrews counted the day as beginning at sunset and continuing until the succeeding sunset. To obviate this difficulty, some have attempted to interpret the 'evening' as referring to the 'chaos' and the 'morning' as the 'order' which emerged from it! However, the same word for day (*yom*) is used in Gen. 2, 2. 3, where reference is made to the setting aside of the seventh day as a holy day because on that day the Lord rested from all His labors. Is it not likely that the force of the Sabbath-day injunction would be more impressive if *yom* were taken in a literal sense than if in the first six cases it was used to signify an indefinite, but very long period of time?" (p. 180.) This man, who makes a very serious attempt to bring

the theory of evolution into agreement with the Bible, is compelled by honesty to concede the ordinary meaning of "day" for the word used in the story of the creation.

Another reason for holding that the length of a day in creation week was twenty-four hours is based on

3. *The parallel passages.*

Lane is right in pointing to Gen. 2, 2. 3 in substantiation of his assertion that the word *yom* in Gen. 1 means an ordinary day of twenty-four hours. The text compels this conclusion, for we read: "And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all the work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made." Now, if the length of the creation days were even approximately that which is claimed by the defenders of the geological era idea, then this seventh day would even now hardly have begun. But the passage certainly speaks in the past tense, and we are once more compelled to accept the word in its ordinary meaning. Again, in Ex. 20, 11, where the Lord gives the reason for the division of the week into six days of labor and one day of rest, we read: "For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath-day and hallowed it." If language is subject to any rules at all, then we are obliged to conclude that the meaning of *yom* in this connection is that of a day as the Jews knew it at the time of the wilderness journey, and it is hardly to be conceived that they considered it to be an indefinite period of time.

To sum up, however, we hold that the length of a creation day was twenty-four hours

4. *Because other passages from Scripture and the concept of creation itself substantiate this understanding.*

If one reads Pss. 19 and 104, for example, the entire tenor of the passages gives such an impression of God's creative power that one is prepared, without further argument, to accept the account of the six days' creation. The same impression is gained from Amos 4, 13, from Neh. 9, 6, and from numerous other passages in both the Old and the New Testament. We gain the impression of the creative power of God as being unlimited by any such considerations as govern the ideas of finite human minds, the concepts of time and space in creation, for example, not existing so far as

God is concerned. If creation is a fact, then there is no reason for not assuming it a fact, without the strict acceptance of the Scripture account, namely, that God, in six days of twenty-four hours, made the world substantially as we have it before our eyes to-day.

By taking the stand as herewith outlined, we are not following the line of least resistance, to be sure, as far as human reason is concerned. But neither do we violate our reason as governed by the great facts of Bible doctrine. It is simply that we follow the injunction of St. Paul: "Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10, 5. That is the basis of a Christian teacher's stand: *αἰχμαλωτίζοντες πᾶν νόημα εἰς τὴν ὑπακοὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ*, that is, instead of permitting reason to usurp authority and to master the Word of God, the intellect, the reason of man, must in all things be guided by the revealed truth of the Lord.

The conclusions of geology are quoted against the fact of a creation in six ordinary days, and commentators have, for that reason, tried to make concessions as noted above. But Lane very aptly remarks: "The attempt to correlate the 'days' of Genesis with the 'periods' of geological time cannot succeed. In the first place, the Biblical account limits the creation to *six* days. It is not possible to limit the geological periods to six unless by combining some equally as distinct from each other as from those not included in such a 'day.' In the second place, the order of the appearance of plants and animals, not to speak of the sun and moon, cannot, by any process of combination or elimination, be made to accord with the geological record." (*Loc. cit.*, 181.) In addition to this, Professor Price, in his book *The New Geology*, shows very clearly that the so-called results of modern geology, which a few years ago, in fact, since Le Conte's days, were accepted without question, are by no means established, but that the entire fabric is still in the stage of a rather uncertain theory. But even if it were possible to show that the strata of the earth's surface show successive life cycles, the extravagant claims of many geologists concerning the age of the earth are lacking in proof, for they either force all their discoveries in the Procrustean bed of their own preconceived notions, or they ignore the effect of some of the most common cataclysms, or they overlook the changes in the original contour of the earth produced by the Deluge. Above all, they are ignorant of the fact that God, the supreme Ruler of the

universe, makes the laws of nature to conform to His sovereign will, and that it is an easy matter for Him to have animate and inanimate things go through processes which now consume years and centuries of time in only a day or a fraction of a day.

The objections of modern religious philosophy are even more absurd because they are based on the theory of evolution as applied to the field of religion. The strangeness of the situation is increased if one considers that the science of anthropology has brought forward ample, convincing evidence showing that practically all heathen religions bear the earmarks of an original monotheistic belief, and that one can trace retrogression and decay in the history of the various national forms of belief. If, in addition, we examine the claims of the evolutionists and find them reared on such a flimsy foundation, and furthermore, if we, as did Doctor Herget in his recent book, ask questions regarding the origin of life, the origin of conscious life, the origin of specific forms of life, and the origin of self-conscious life, questions which, as he rightly says, evolution does not answer and cannot answer, then we are bound to regard the claims of modern religious philosophy as all the more absurd. If there were no revealed religion, one might concede the right of religious philosophy to a hearing, but with the origin of the world and of life set forth in the inspired account of the Bible, all excuses are really nothing but accusations in the mouths of unbelievers.

One of the flimsiest of all objections to the Biblical account of the creation of the world in six ordinary days of twenty-four hours each is that brought forward by people who sanctimoniously point to Ps. 90, 4: "For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night," and to 2 Pet. 3, 8: "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day," their conclusion from these passages being that we may well regard the days of creation as including a thousand years. But these passages do not permit us to substitute millenniums for days at our convenience. What they evidently speak of is the eternity of God, the fact that, as far as His essence is concerned, there is no time, and that He cannot be measured in terms of human time, nothing more.

Our conclusion in the whole matter, then, is this: If the fact of creation is true, then a six-day creation is not unreasonable. In fact, as Lane points out, the decision is between the acceptance of the theory of evolution and belief in the inspired Word. To a Lutheran Christian, whose faith rests upon the plenary inspira-

tion of the Bible, the choice is easy; for he says with Luther: "To me it seems that a single word of Scripture makes the world too small for me." It is only in this spirit that we shall be able to withstand the assaults of unbelief and to hold our own until the end.
