

Are the days in Genesis, chapter one literal 24-hour days?

Q: Tuesday night in my seminary Bible class this came up. There are evangelical textual critics that maintain that there is not textual support for the word "day" in Hebrew to mean a 24 hour period. I thought this was strictly a liberal point of view but apparently some real conservative scholars have this view as well. What are your thoughts and opinions. A: The word "day" (yom in Hebrew) is used the same way that our word "day" is used. It has a very specific meaning of 24 hours, but then is also used in a figurative sense of Bill Clinton's day, day of the Nazis, to indicate a period of time. Phrases in the Bible that use this sense are "day of the Lord," " King Solomon's day," etc.

The argument for Genesis 1 meaning a literal day is that:

1. It is the most natural and common meaning of the word "day."
2. The phrase "and there was evening and morning, one day" certainly shows a literal day is intended. (The Jewish day was marked as beginning with sundown.)
3. Adam's age given in Genesis 5:3,5. The age of Adam is given from when he was first created. If day six (when he was created) and day seven (when God rested) were geological ages or long periods of time then the math is way off.
4. Exodus 20:8-11 where God interprets the days of the creation week as being normal 24 hour days.
5. The nature of the Genesis passage which is given as straight history, not poetry (compare with Jesus' reference to Genesis 1 & 2 which shows he viewed it as historical ? Matthew 19:4-5 and Mark 10:6-8). If Genesis 1 was in Hebrew poetic style then we would have reason to view the "days" as symbol or poetic, but Genesis is straight history throughout.

You can be a person who believes in the Bible as God's Word and believes that Genesis is historical and believe that the days in Genesis 1 are geological ages, not 24-hour days. There are many conservative scholars who hold to a non-24 hour day view of Genesis 1. We have many Christians in our church body who believe this way. I don't think this is the most natural meaning of the text and I suspect that in most cases this is an attempt to mesh Genesis 1 with the present scientific view.

But even before Darwin there were theologians that held a non-24 hour day. Augustine was one of them. These scholars were rare, however. I believe a non-24 hour day view is against most of the historic church confessions, such as the Westminster Confession (WCF I:9; IV:1; XXI:7; L.C. 15; L.C. 116; L.C. 120; S.C. 9;

S.C. 58,59). Of course, the most important thing is whether or not it has an exegetical basis in Scripture.