

A Critique of the "Day-Age" Theory

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Apologetics 500

by

Dr. Gary Habermas

Alan L. Schafer

Student ID: 152857

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Introduction

In this short paper I would like to examine the "Day-Age" theory (sometimes referred to as the Age-Day theory) as it pertains to the interpretation of Genesis chapter one. This theory has been articulated in many different ways, but because of the limited amount of space I have to work with in this critique, I will look only at one such formulation of this theory; that of Gleason Archer in his books *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, and *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.

Succinctly defined, the Day-Age theory attempts to harmonize the supposed "facts" of historical geography--that of interpreting the various rock strata as geological and evolutionary stages in the development of the earth--with the revealed record of Genesis 1, in which the earth is seen as being created in six solar days. In doing so, the Day-Age theory posits that the "days" of Genesis 1 are not to be interpreted as real twenty-four hour days, but as "epochal days". Thus Moses did not really mean the earth was created in six solar days, but in six distinct epochs each of which may have been comprised of many thousands or millions of years.

Why is this an issue in apologetics? A couple of reasons present themselves. First of all, this theory is a clear attempt to harmonize what appears to be a contradiction between the facts of science and the revealed Word of God. In this paper we will attempt to show that this contradiction is only apparent since there are alternate ways of explaining the geological strata. Secondly, this theory is the first step downward in the sense that it is a small step from here to theistic evolution--the theory which states that God created the primordial ooze and then used evolution over millions of years to produce what we see

today. Thirdly, the acceptance of this theory has far-reaching hermeneutical implications for the manner in which the rest of scripture is interpreted. Since we have removed the literal interpretation of the word "day", why not do the same for "Adam", "Eve", "serpent", and other words in the book of Genesis as well. Fourthly, and most importantly, the proponents of this theory "want their cake and want to eat it too". They are unwilling to deny the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of scripture and are equally unwilling to be called "unscientific" or "backwards" by those who man the bastion of scientific rationalism.

The way we will approach the Day-Age theory will be to give a point of the theory followed by a critique of the reasoning of those who espouse this theory. Again, because of space limitations we will only address one such formulation of this theory, that of Gleason L. Archer.

The Assumed Factualness of Historical Geology

The first point given in support of this theory by Gleason Archer is the assumed validity of the facts of historical geology. On page 58 of his book, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, Dr. Archer states:

But this conflict between Genesis 1 and the factual data of science (emphasis mine) (in contradistinction to the theories of some scientists who draw inferences

from their data that are capable of quite another interpretation by those equally proficient in geology) is only apparent, not real.¹

What is stated in this quotation, and determined from the context of the rest of the section in his book, is that Dr. Archer assumes that historical geology is based on undisputable facts of science. In other words, the earth has existed for millions of years and therefore could not have been created by God *ex nihilo* less than 10,000 years ago.

This is what I consider one of the most serious weaknesses of this theory. Its proponents have accepted the four billion year or so age of the earth and geological strata as proven facts that must be explained in light of the Genesis record. It is even more interesting that Dr. Archer quotes two geologists in support of this theory, both writing in the 1870's long before many new discoveries have invalidated most of their conclusions.²

One of the best books I have seen written on this very subject is *The Genesis Flood* by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris. The entire thesis of this book is that the geological strata, assumed by many to represent various evolutionary ages, can be better explained by the universal flood of Genesis 6. They show that the various rock strata, mountain chains, and surface features of the earth could not have been produced by the uniformitarian model of geology--which states that geological features are the result of slow processes over many millions of years. Instead, they show that the geological features we see today are easily explained in light of catastrophism, specifically the Noachian flood. Using the tools of science, they explain the deposition of the various rock layers as representing exactly what would have happened during a universal flood.

¹ Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), p. 58.

² Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), p. 192.

They even show that the fossils we see today appear exactly as they would if they were caused by a universal and catastrophic flood.³

Thus, the supposed "factualness" or "veracity" of the geological record is not proven to require of eons of time, but could just as easily have been the product of a global deluge. One is not stuck with an either-or. Dr. Archer somewhat implies that if one does not accept the Day-Age theory, then one is denying the facts of science. This is not so! The earth could have been created in six literal days.

The Meaning Of The Word "Day" In Genesis 1

The second major point in Dr. Archer's argument for the Day-Age theory is the argument that the word "day" (Hebrew *yom*) does not necessarily refer to a twenty-four hour period of time but may refer to an indefinite period as well.

Nevertheless, on the basis of internal evidence, it is the writer's conviction that *yom* in Genesis 1 could not have been intended by the Hebrew author to mean a literal twenty-four-hour day.

In the first place, *yom* is apparently used in Genesis 2:4 to refer to the whole creative process just described in Genesis 1 as taking up six days...⁴

³ See *The Genesis Flood* by John C. Whitcomb and Henry M. Morris (Chicago: Baker Book House, 1987), specifically pages 89-200. I highly recommend that this book be read, if for no other reason than to give one a realization that science and the Bible are not at odds with each other but in fact support one another.

⁴ Archer, *Survey of Old Testament*, p. 192.

Thus Dr. Archer arrives at the conclusion, based on the usage of the word *yom* in Genesis 2:4, that the creative process took place in six eons of time, not six literal days.

In response to this assertion, I would like to present several arguments to the contrary. It is true, as Dr. Archer asserts, that the word *yom* may refer to an indefinite period of time, but I believe it does not mean that in the creation account. These arguments are discussed in greater detail in *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* by Harry Rimmer.⁵

The first argument is that in the description of each of the six days we have the phrase "evening and morning". The actual Hebrew construction of this phrase is "And the evening took place, and the morning took place, day one".⁶ For argument's sake, let us assume that Moses originally intended that these days were not to be taken as twenty-four hour periods of time. Then the question is, why did he describe these days using "evening and morning". Geological ages have no "evenings and mornings". It seems to me that if Moses did not have twenty-four hour days in view, he would have helped clarify that by not using this phrase. He certainly had other words he could have used. Second, if we assert that God is omnipotent, something that even Dr. Archer would agree with, then why would God need eons of time to create the world? This would be like a man building a house by pounding in one nail a day for twenty years! I find it hard to believe that an omnipotent God, who created the entire angelic hosts as well as the heavens and the earth, in a single instant in time, would have resorted to evolution to finish the job. If God is omnipotent there is no reason we need to force Him to use eons of time to create what we see today.

⁵ Harry Rimmer, *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1937), pp. 16-22.

⁶ Archer, *Bible Difficulties*, p. 61.

Third, and this correlates to our previous arguments, the text of Genesis 1 implies instant creation.⁷ For example, for the first day the text says "Exist, light! and light existed."⁸

The construct of this sentence certainly does not seem to indicate that it took God millions of years to create light! How long does it take God to create light? Dr. Archer asserts that this refers to the creation of the sun and moon, however, the text clearly says "light". The sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day.

Fourth, we find that the plant kingdom was created on the third day while the sun was created on the fourth day. To adhere to the Day-Age theory would imply that the plant kingdom existed without the light of the sun for millions of years! This hardly seems tenable. However, if we have in view twenty-four hour days, then the lack of sunlight does not pose a problem for the plants at all. They just had an extra long night.

Fifth, it has been established that whenever a number is connected to the word *yom* in the Old Testament, it always refers to a twenty-four hour day.⁹ The evidence in support of this is overwhelming. I find it hard to understand why the Holy Spirit would use phrases that point to literal twenty-four hour days (such as "evening and morning" and numbers) if He intended to imply ages instead. In this case, I prefer to take the clear meaning of the text as opposed to a forced interpretation.

Sixthly, in Exodus 20:8-11, we read

⁷ There is much discussion over the differences in the Hebrew words *bara* and *asah* in the creation account. Some assert that *bara* refers to *ex nihilo* creation whereas *asah* refers to remaking existent material. For further discussions on this refer to *Modern Science and the Genesis Record* pages 23-31 and *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* page 91.

⁸ Rimmer, *Modern Science*, pg. 18.

⁹ *Ibid*, pg. 18.

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your manservant, nor your maidservant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. (NKJV)

It is undeniably clear that the first use of the term "six days" is to be taken as literal. Israel was not to work "six ages" then rest a seventh. God gives the reason for this, namely that He created the earth in six days and rested the seventh. It should be obvious that He did not mean "six ages", but instead meant "six literal days". It doesn't make sense to assert that God rested "an age". This is a hermeneutical example of where one needs to maintain consistency of terms within a given context, unless of course the context demands that one does not.

Seventh, if we accept the assertion that Adam was created in the sixth age, then he lived through the seventh age (the age of Sabbath rest), and was expelled from the Garden of Eden sometime in the eighth age. Just how long were these ages? The only way around this problem is to assume that each of the ages varied in length from millions of years to maybe only a few, or to assert that there are no ages at all involved but merely twenty-four hour days. In fact, we know from Genesis 5:5 that Adam lived 930 years total. This would, at best, indicated that the sixth "age" was only of a few years duration.

Lastly, there is no reason we must demand that creation took place in six ages of time. We have an infinite God who has unlimited power. We find in Revelation 21:1 that God creates a new heaven and a new earth. Does He take millions of years while we all hang around in the New Jerusalem? Does God take millions of years to dissolve the current creation or does He do it in an instant in time as we read in 2 Peter 3:10-13? Also, as we have seen in the previous section, the interpretation that the various rock strata represent geological ages is not a certainty. It is just as likely the rock strata were formed during a global deluge. If that was the case, and I believe it was, then we have no evidence for long periods of geological history, periods that require harmonization with Genesis 1.

The Supposed Antiquity of Man

The third major point in Dr. Archer's argument for the Day-Age theory is the supposed antiquity of man. He writes:

But however untrustworthy the dating methods may be that have led to such high estimates of the antiquity of the anthropoids, the fact remains that they can hardly be dated later than the creation of Adam and Eve referred to in Genesis 1-3.

However the statistics of Genesis 5 may be handled, they can hardly end up with a date for Adam much before 10,000 B.C. If these figures in Genesis are at all to be trusted, even granting the occurrence of occasional gaps in the genealogical chain, we are compelled to regard all these early anthropoids as pre-Adamic. In other words, all these species, from the Cro-Magnon back to the Zinjanthropus, must

have been advanced apes or anthropoids possessed of considerable intelligence and resourcefulness--but who completely died off before Adam and Eve were created.¹⁰

What Dr. Archer is actually describing is a modification of what is known as the "gap" theory. This theory states that Genesis 1:2 describes a long period of history in which dinosaurs and early anthropoids lived, and which suffered some kind of cataclysmic judgment supposedly due to the fall of Satan. Dr. Archer modifies this in that he relegates the fossils of men to the sixth "age" of creation.¹¹ He later goes on to state that it is unlikely that these pre-Adamic creatures even possessed a soul!¹² This makes the creation of Adam and Eve an afterthought of God during the sixth age of creation. However, I have some problems with the above theory. First of all, it assumes that the fossil remains of early anthropoids are in actuality early anthropoids.¹³ I do not believe they do since the evidence is at best scanty, and since it is possible to explain them as being the fossils of either apes or men without a great deal of difficulty. Secondly, the assertion that this "race" of men actually existed is pure speculation. It is again an attempt to wed a-priori "assumed facts" of evolutionary science with creation.

¹⁰ Archer, *Bible Difficulties*, pg. 64.

¹¹ It should be stated in defense of Dr. Archer that he does admit that the million-plus year time estimates of historical geology is a matter of debate. Refer to pages 63-65 of *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* for his analysis. However, he still holds to the belief that pre-Adamic creatures resembling man did exist and are the basis for the modern fossil finds.

¹² *Ibid*, pg. 64.

¹³ The debate over the authenticity of the fossils of early man is a hotly debated topic. A couple of texts which describe the issues can be found in *Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity* by Josh McDowell and Don Stewart (San Bernardino: Here's Live Publishers, 1981) pages 184-193 and *Why We Believe in Creation Not In Evolution* by Fred Meldau (Denver: Christian Victory Publishing Company, 1974) pages 309-326.

A minor issue at this point is the determination of the date of creation. Dr. Archer asserts, and I believe rightly so, that the date of 4004 B.C. arrived at by Bishop Ussher and assumed by C. I. Scofield is untenable. Dr. Archer analyzes the genealogical records of Genesis 5 and concludes that there are gaps in the records, gaps which may have be comprised of many generations.¹⁴ However, he uses the supposed antiquity of man to arrive at this conclusion. I assert that although Adam was probably created significantly prior to 4004 B.C., a date of hundreds of thousands of years is highly unlikely. The point of this is that we do not need an age to account for the fossil record and the supposed antiquity of the human race. All we need is a date of 10,000 B.C. and the assumption that the scanty fossils of early man are not what they appear to be in order to believe in the literal day interpretation of Genesis 1.

Summary and Conclusions

In summary, we have looked at the three major points of the Day-Age theory as presented by Dr. Archer. We have seen that the a-priori assumption that the geological strata as interpreted by modern geology is representative of millions of years of evolution is not valid. This same strata can be easily explained in the context of a universal flood, specifically, the Noachian deluge.

Secondly, we have looked at the issues involved in interpreting the Hebrew word for day, *yom*. Although it is possible to interpret this word to refer to a period of indefinite time, e.g. the day of the LORD, it is not necessary to do so in the context of Genesis 1. We saw that the word *yom*, when it is used with a number, always refers to a twenty-four

¹⁴ Archer, Survey of Old Testament, pp. 202-205.

hour period of time. Also, the establishment of the Sabbath rest, as found in Exodus 20:8-11, is based on the literalness of the six day creation. Additionally, the use of the phrase "evening and morning" lends credence to the fact that Moses had in mind twenty-four hour periods of time. We also said that if God is truly omnipotent as we believe he is, then the creation of the world in six days is no real problem for Him. He will create the new heaven and earth in a moment in time, why not the old heavens and the old earth? Lastly, to assert that Adam was created in the sixth age of creation would be to assume he lived during the seventh age and was expelled from the garden in the eighth age. This is highly improbable since Adam lived only 930 years total.

Lastly, we looked at the a-priori assumption that the fossil remains of supposed early man are in actuality what they appear to be. This is a highly debated topic in apologetics, but suffice it to say that there is no compelling evidence that these fossils are early evolutionary models of modern man.

It is my assertion that the Day-Age theory is an attempt to harmonize assumed scientific facts with scripture, scientific facts that are only accepted by faith, not proven by experiment.

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