

How Short an Evening and Morning?

RESPONSE 1 — DAVID G. SHACKELFORD

Dr Helweg's article published by **Reasons To Believe** reflects the bias typical of those predisposed to modify the plain sense of the Biblical language in favour of an 'enlightened' scientific approach. The 'Reasons to Believe' are actually reasons **not** to believe the Bible as the Word of God. In his article, Helweg actually does that which he denies is appropriate; that is, he uses liberal hermeneutical approaches to undermine Biblical authority.

He mentions that God brought the Israelites 'out of Egypt into spiritual "neutral" territory to set the record straight as to His identity and exclusive "worthiness"'.¹

Helweg continues:

*'To the Hebrews in the desert, God gave the reverberating creation account. It obliterates each of the Egypt gods. Osiris did not create the heavens, God did. Ra does not rule the sun, God does. The narrative's purpose had much less to do with how God created all things and much more to do with declaring who created all things.'*²

Again Helweg is gravely mistaken. Both the **how** and the **who** are important because God has given both. But given Helweg's assumption that the **who** is the most critical issue, the fact remains that the **how** is still revealed by God. If God did not mean what He said, why didn't He say what He meant? Why would God use deceptive language — especially if He wanted to 'set the record straight' as Helweg suggests? Helweg's empty platitude that the writer's 'broad strokes' made the text 'meaningful and authoritative across all boundaries of culture and time — and scientific advancement' has the distinctive hollow ring of liberalism. If the **how** that God has given is not trustworthy, then by what stretch of the imagination can one ever be assured of the authoritative nature of the purpose? It follows that if the **how** is not trustworthy, then the **who** is equally untrustworthy, for God was the One who gave the revelation to begin with. Helweg has succumbed to the temptation of seeking to retain the facade of an authoritative science at the expense of an authoritative Bible.

It is interesting that Helweg quotes Augustine as saying that we should not give interpretations of Scripture 'that are farfetched or opposed to science'. The twentieth century is far removed from the days of Augustine. Augustine would never have supported a science that was hostile to the

Biblical revelation. Neither would he have supported a hermeneutic that sought to modify the plain sense of Scripture to fit a science that is subjective at its foundations. In the words of a friend, 'if the Scriptures make plain sense, seek no other sense, lest it be nonsense'. The benchmark of hermeneutical method for Augustine was Biblical exegesis, not scientific discovery.

Of some significance is the fact that the basis of our six-day work week plus one day of rest is based on the Biblical pattern of a 24-hour creation day. The parallel and justification for the seventh day of rest that God gives in Exodus 20:9-11 and elsewhere is destroyed completely if *yôm* refers to anything other than a 24-hour period.

In Exodus 23:10-12, God told the people to till the land six years, let the land rest the seventh year, and to work six days and rest the seventh. It seems that this also is based on the days of creation as in Exodus 20:9. But what is absolutely clear is that when God says 'years' He means 'years'; when God says 'days', He means 'days'. To reinterpret 'days' as millions of years because of the guesses of modern science is to accuse God of not saying what He meant. Again, why would God use deceptive language?

If God's creative activity had spanned vast stretches of time, God would have said so as He had plenty of words to do so³⁴ — and we would have believed Him, because orthodox Christendom has always believed what God says. Now we are expected to believe that God meant something other than what He said because 'science' has made certain 'discoveries'. Further, it would not be paradoxical to the logical mind to believe that God took millions of years to create the world **if He had so stated**. Yet, He said 'days'. Why is it paradoxical to the logical mind that God created the world in days? After all, God is God.

Finally, as to Helweg's ostentatious use of Daniel 8:26, he commits the unpardonable sin of Biblical hermeneutics — violating the context.⁵ It has been well said that any text without a context is but a pretext.

The immediate context of the Daniel passage is clear. Daniel had just received a vision, which as we all know, would usually require a non-literal interpretation. In fact, the basic content of the vision does just that. However, verse 14 of Daniel 8 says specifically that the vision is that

of '2,300 evenings and mornings'. Verse 26 simply refers to this vision as the vision of morning and evening. The phrase in verse 26 is simply the title given to the vision by the angel and is essentially synonymous with verse 14, where the singulars are still used but obviously refer to 2,300 of them (so whether singular or plural is a moot point at best).

Of more significance is their interpretation. The context of the vision has to do with the duration of the time during which the temple would stand desecrated. In verse 14 the angel said 'unto 2,300 days' (literally the Hebrew says, 'morning evening' - both are singular and the co-ordinating conjunction *waw* is absent). It should be obvious to all except Helweg that the angel is speaking of literal days, **not ages!** The angel mentions the exact number of days. Gleason Archer, a noted evangelical, observes that the period of time

*'has been understood by interpreters in two different ways, either as 2,300 twenty-four-hour days . . . or as 1,150 days composed of 1,150 evenings and 1,150 mornings.'*⁶

He continues:

*'In other words, the interval would either be 6 years and 111 days, or else half of that time: 3 years and 55 days. Both views have persuasive advocates, but the preponderance of evidence seems to favour the latter interpretation.'*⁷

Archer explains why:

*'The context speaks of the suspension of the tamid ("sacrifice"), a reference to the . . . ("continual burnt offering") that was offered regularly each morning and evening (or, as the Hebrews would reckon it, each evening, when the new day began, and each morning). Surely there could have been no other reason for the compound expression ereb boqer than the reference to the two sacrifices that marked each day in temple worship.'*⁸

Please note that both interpretations of the 'morning evening' phrase are in **literal time**; it is only the matter of how the literal days are counted.

This simply means that Helweg is also incorrect when he says that "'evening and morning" is an idiomatic expression in Semitic languages. Like all idioms, its meaning is non-literal. . . .' Non-literal? Not in Daniel 8.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

How unfortunate that many who claim orthodoxy feel compelled to submit their interpretations to science so-called for its approval. It is intriguing that these 'modifications' to orthodox Christian interpretations were never given credibility until Darwinism and the Age of Reason — the same time in which the Bible began to **lose** its prestige as the infallible Word of God. There seems to be something about the prideful heart of man that seeks to force reconciliation between the Bible and science —

particularly when science is wrong.⁹

ADDENDUM

Another objection to the 24-hour day is not mentioned in Helweg's article, but is added here for the sake of the discussion. I mention it because I just came across it recently. Gleason Archer, mentioned above, admits that

*'From a superficial reading of Genesis, the impression would seem to be that the entire creative process took place in six twenty-four hour days.'*¹⁰

However, he subsequently brings to bear a great deal of scientific 'data' to argue for a day-age theory.¹¹ As we know, scientific evidence is always subject to the interpretation of the scientist. All the different types of data Archer mentioned are dealt with in the various materials distributed by the Creation Science Foundation, Answers in Genesis, the Institute for Creation Research and other creationist organisations and ministries. However, there is one argument that pleads for a response. He argues that one of the evidences that *yôm* denotes a geologic 'age' instead of a literal 24-hour day is the fact that on day six several events took place that could not have happened within 24 hours:

*'Gen. 1:27 states that after creating all the land animals on the sixth day, God created man, both male and female. Then, in the more detailed treatment of Gen. 2, we are told that God created Adam first, gave him the responsibility of tending the Garden of Eden for some time until He observed him to be lonely. He then granted him the fellowship of all the beasts and animals of earth, with opportunity to bestow names upon them all. Some undetermined period after that, God observed that Adam was still lonely and finally fashioned a human wife for him by means of a rib removed from him during a "deep sleep". Then at last he brought Eve before Adam and presented her to him as his new life partner. Who can imagine that all of these transactions could possibly have taken place in 120 minutes of the sixth day (or even within twenty-four hours, for that matter)? And yet Gen. 1:27 states that both Adam and Eve were created at the very end of the final day of creation. Obviously the "days of chapter 1 are intended to represent stages of unspecified length, not literal twenty-four hour days.'*¹²

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At first glance his arguments seem most logical and almost insurmountable. However, his approach is a totally rationalistic one. While a detailed response is beyond the scope of this essay, one might well ask, 'Why is it impossible for these things to have happened if God was involved in the process?' We have only a very limited account to aid our understanding of what life was like prior to the Fall. The events described as part of day six only seem 'impossible' if one is required to provide a naturalistic explanation. But why such a requirement if God is as involved in the creation days as Scripture indicates? How long does it take for God to make an 'observation' that

Adam was lonely? How long does it take for God to put Adam to sleep and perform 'surgery'? If He created the universe by His omnipotent command (*ex nihilo*), and upholds it all the same way (that is, 'the word of His power' — Hebrews 1:3), I would be more inclined to ask why God needed the 24-hours at all. Furthermore, to object that Adam could not have named the animals in 24 hours requires that one object to Peter walking on the water. After all, God was involved. God worked the supernatural to bring the animals to Adam in the first place. Is God unable to work the supernatural that Adam name them all in 24 hours? Not only that, but who requires that there be as many 'species' then as there are now and that 'kind' corresponds to today's species rather than genus or family?¹³

The bottom line is that those opting for any version of day-age or day-revelation, etc. do so at the expense of, and in opposition to, the **clear** statements of Scripture.

REFERENCES

1. Helweg, O., 1995. How long an evening and morning? **Facts and Faith**, 9(3):8-9
2. Helweg, Ref. 1.
3. Grigg, R. M., 1996. How long were the days in Genesis 1? What did God intend us to understand from the words He used? **Creation Ex Nihilo**, 19(1):23-25.
4. Stambaugh, J., 1991. The days of creation: a semantic approach. **CEN**

5. Tech.J.,5(1):7Q-76.
6. It should be mentioned that Helweg stresses the importance of context at the outset of his article. How unfortunate that he didn't take his own advice.
7. Archer, G., 1985. Daniel. **The Expositor's Bible Commentary**, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Vol. 7, pp. 102-103.
8. Archer, Ref. 6, p. 103.
9. Archer, Ref. 6, p. 103.
10. Though I do not know, I would guess that Helweg rejects verbal inspiration in favour of dynamic inspiration. This probably accounts for his placing the **purpose** God has above the words God used.
11. Archer, Ref. 6.
12. Kaiser, W., 1964, reprinted 1994. **A Survey of Old Testament Introduction**, Moody Press, Chicago, 196ff.
13. Kaiser, Ref. 11, p. 201.
14. Grigg, R. M., 1996. Naming all the animals: all in a day's work for Adam. **Creation Ex Nihilo**, 18(4):48-49.

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RESPONSE 2 — DAVID M. FOUTS

I recently read with interest the article 'How long an evening and morning?' by Otto J. Helweg.¹ Inasmuch as I hold an earned doctorate in Old Testament Studies with concentration in Biblical Hebrew, I had thought it might be of interest to the readership of **Facts and Faith** to observe a slightly different perspective on a few topics considered in the article. However, they declined to publish my findings, ostensibly because they disagree with those of Helweg.

The first concern is the designation Dr Helweg gave to Genesis 1 as poetry.² I would concur that from the standpoint of the non-Hebrew mind, the repetition of command, then fulfilment, and then 'evening and morning' would appear to be poetry. However, repetition is not a necessary component of Biblical Hebrew poetry. Repetition is actually more of a characteristic of Biblical Hebrew prose. Biblical Hebrew poetry is characterised on the other hand by:

- (a) parallelism of juxtaposed lines,
- (b) metrical characteristics, and
- (c) figures of speech.

With the possible exception of Genesis 1:1 (which may reflect the figure of speech called a merism — two words combined into a single concept, so 'heavens and earth' mean 'the entire creation'), none of these features are present in

Genesis 1. Genesis 1 therefore should not be considered poetry. Historical support of this is seen in the fact that no edition of the Hebrew text of which I am aware ever indented the passage in a poetical format (though I understand the NIV could be interpreted as doing so).

The second concern has to do with Dr Helweg's comments (p. 8) concerning the Hebrew word for 'day' (*yom* — יום). He correctly mentions that this word is polysemantic and does not always refer to a 24-hour day. He then cites as an example Genesis 2:4 ('in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens') as a near reference to Genesis 1 where one 'day' refers to all six days of creation (Augustine's view, by the way). This is not a typical meaning of the term 'day' however. The use of *yom* with the *bet* (2) preposition (*b^eyom* — ביום) is in construct with the infinitive *'āśōt* (עָשָׂה), a syntactical construction which often is simply translated idiomatically as 'when'. So Genesis 2:4 may be safely translated 'when the Lord God made' without any mention of 'day' at all. Similar constructions are found in Genesis 2:17, 3:5, 5:1,5:2,21:8,35:3 and Exodus 10:28 to name a few. English versions will vary between 'in the day' and 'when' in these instances. To negate the meaning of *yom* as a 24 hour day in chapter 1 using *b^eyom* in Genesis 2:4 is at best an imprecise argument.