

# Talking about time: the semantic overlap of the terms 'chronos' and 'kairos' in biblical usage

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William Dembski popularized the idea of 'kairological time' to try to explain how Adam's sin could have caused death and suffering millions of years before he existed. However, in doing so he imports the *specialized* meanings of the philosophical terms 'kairos' and 'chronos'<sup>1</sup> into the biblical context; this is unwarranted, as an examination of the usage of *kairos* and *chronos* in both the LXX and NT reveals. Furthermore, this examination also reveals that there is no clear dichotomy between the terms. In addition, neither the terms '*chronos*' nor '*kairos*' are used in the context of 'when God created', and 'kairological time' fails as an approach to theodicy.

In the Genesis account of creation and the Fall, death, disease, and carnivory are the consequences of Adam's sin. One of the biggest problems for those who wish to reconcile the Genesis account of origins with the belief that the earth is billions of years old is that the fossil record preserves a record of animal death, disease, and carnivory, which, when interpreted within the uniformitarian framework, precedes any possible date for Adam's sin.

Those who wish to maintain the billions-of-years timescale alongside a commitment to the authority of Scripture have come up with various attempts to solve the problem of death before the Fall. One of the more inventive suggestions is William Dembski's (figure 1) idea of 'kairological time'. Just as Christ's salvific work on the Cross was able to save people who had faith before He died, Dembski argues that Adam's sin had effects which extended both backward and forward in time, meaning that Adam's sin could have caused actions that preceded him by millions of years.

A key part of his argument is the distinction between the words '*chronos*' and '*kairos*':

"This distinction between the order of creation and natural history reflects a fundamental distinction in the nature of time. In English, we have just one word for time. But the Greek of the New Testament had two: *chronos* and *kairos*. According to Arndt and Gingrich's standard lexicon of New Testament Greek, *chronos* denotes mere duration whereas *kairos* denotes time with a purpose (especially a divine purpose)."<sup>2</sup>

Ignoring the objectively false statement that English has only one word for time (look in any thesaurus), BDAG's entries for both *chronos* and *kairos* are lengthy and do not say what Dembski claims AG (the ancestor of BDAG) says. Dembski asserts a clear distinction between the Greek

words '*kairos*' and '*chronos*'. But where does this distinction come from? In fact, an earlier paper by Dembski<sup>3</sup> included a nearly identical statement which also drew on a source that makes it clear that *chronos* and *kairos* are used as technical *English* philosophical terms, rather than as Greek words. Dembski cites:

"Chronos is the time of physics and kairos is an ordered but unmeasured kind of time outside space-time. Kairos is fundamental, and chronos is derivative."<sup>4</sup>

But he neglects to note the *very next sentence*:

"In spite of their origin in Greek, *chronos* and *kairos* are used in this paper as technical terms in English."<sup>4</sup>

So, for his argument about kairological time, Dembski uses the technical definition of philosophical terms in a language that did not yet exist when the New Testament was written to inform his exegesis of texts in Genesis, which were not written in Greek originally, without any attempt to link (the modern philosophical appropriation in English of) the Greek terms to any equivalent Hebrew idea. It is difficult to precisely enumerate the number of errors he is committing in this approach!

However, analysis of the use of *chronos* and *kairos* in the Septuagint (LXX) and the Greek New Testament does not support this generalization.

## Chronos and kairos in the LXX

The Old Testament documents were originally written in Hebrew, so Dembski's argument should have looked at how time was presented in terms of the Hebrew words, not Greek. However, the LXX uses the words '*kairos*' and '*chronos*' many times, enough to establish a clear semantic range for each term.

## Chronos

*Chronos*, being a generic word for time, is often used in combination with other terms to translate a wide range of Hebrew chronological terms.

The LXX most often uses *chronos* to translate the Hebrew word *yôm* when it is used in ways that make the literal translation, *hēmera*, less than ideal. When *chronos* and *hēmera* are used in the same context to translate the Hebrew *yôm*, this can be instructive. For instance, Joshua 4:14 LXX reads:

“ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ **ἡμέρᾳ** ἠύξησεν κύριος τὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐναντίον παντὸς τοῦ γένους Ἰσραὴλ, καὶ ἐφοβοῦντο αὐτὸν ὥσπερ Μωϋσῆν, ὅσον **χρόνον** ἔζη.”

[On that *day* the Lord exalted Iesous before the whole race of Israel, and they feared him, as they had Moyses, for as long *a time* as he lived.<sup>5</sup>]

Likewise, Isaiah 23:15 LXX reads:

“καὶ ἔσται ἐν τῇ **ἡμέρᾳ** ἐκείνῃ καταλειφθήσεται Τύρος ἑτὶ ἑβδομήκοντα ὡς **χρόνος** βασιλείως, ὡς χρόνος ἀνθρώπου· καὶ ἔσται μετὰ ἑβδομήκοντα ἔτη ἔσται Τύρος ὡς ἄσμα πόρνης”

[And it shall be on that *day* that Tyre will be abandoned for seventy years, like the *time* of a king, like the time of a man.<sup>6</sup> And it shall be that after seventy years Tyre will be like the song about a prostitute:]

So, we see that when *yôm* means ‘day’ in the context, the LXX translator chooses *hēmera* as the appropriate term, and when *yôm* is used more figuratively, *chronos* is chosen to encompass that meaning.

In a few places, *chronos* is ‘added’ to the translation of the Hebrew text to make clear the chronological implication of the ‘literal’ translation of the word.

Joshua 24:29 LXX (24:31 in English Bibles) says:

“καὶ ἐλάτεθesen Ἰσραὴλ τῷ κυρίῳ πάσας τὰς **ἡμέρας** Ἰησοῦ καὶ πάσας τὰς **ἡμέρας** τῶν πρεσβυτέρων, ὅσοι ἐφείλκυσαν τὸν **χρόνον** μετὰ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ὅσοι εἶδον πάντα τὰ ἔργα κυρίου, ὅσα ἐποίησεν τῷ Ἰσραὴλ.”

[And Israel served the Lord all the *days* of Iesous and all the *days* of the elders who drew out the *time* with Joshua and who knew all the works of the Lord that he did for Israel.]

In this verse, the underlying Hebrew has the literal meaning of ‘stretched out’ but in this context it means ‘outlived’. The translator thus used the word for ‘drawing or stretching out’ in Greek, but added *chronos* to make the chronological meaning clear. This is interesting, because *ἐπιζῶ* (*epizaō*) would have been a good choice for translating ‘outlive’ if the author had been following a ‘dynamic equivalence’ translation technique more concerned with communicating the *idea*, but in this case he was clearly following a ‘functional equivalence’ method, which sought to translate as literally as possible, even when that resulted in stilted Greek.

**Table 1.** The use of *chronos* in the LXX. Asterisk indicates Aramaic cognate in original.

English translation	Hebrew term	LXX reference
Day/days, always	<i>Yôm</i>	Gen. 26:1, 15; Deut. 12:19; 22:19, 29; Josh. 4:14, 24; 24:29; 2 Esd. 4:15*; Prov. 15:15; Job 10:20; 32:6, 7; Isa. 23:15; 38:5; 65:20; Jer. 45:28; Dan. 2:44*
End	<i>Āhārīt</i>	Deut. 32:29
Turn	<i>TōR</i>	Est. 2:15
Youth	<i>Ālūmīm</i>	Psa. 88:46
Interrogative / How long?	<i>Matāy</i>	Prov. 1:22
Now	<i>Pā’ām</i>	Prov. 7:12 (2x)
Prolong	<i>Arak</i>	Prov. 28:16
Appointed time	<i>Z<sup>e</sup>mān</i>	2 Esd. 20:35; 23:31; Eccl. 3:1; Dan. 2:16*, 21*; 7:12*
End	<i>Qeš</i>	Job 6:11
Aged	<i>Yašīš</i>	Job 12:12
Limit	<i>Hōq</i>	Job 14:5, 13
Forever	<i>Ōlām</i>	Isa. 9:6; 34:10, 17
Instant	<i>Rēgā</i>	Isa. 54:7
Time	<i>Ēt’</i>	Jer. 30:2; 37:7; 38:1

Interestingly, if one were to speak of events ‘from long ago’, the LXX word to use would be *chronos*, not *kairos*. Specifically, the construction ἀπὸ χρόνων αἰῶνος is used to designate timing of events that happened in past times without specifically identifying when. This construction is used in 2 Esdras 4:15.

## Kairos

*Kairos* is most often used to denote seasons, or events that recur at set times, like harvest time. The first usage is in Genesis 1:14 LXX:

“καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Γενηθήτωσαν φωστῆρες ἐν τῷ στερεώματι τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς φαῦσιν τῆς γῆς τοῦ διαχωρίζειν ἀνὰ μέσον τῆς ἡμέρας καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τῆς νυκτὸς καὶ ἔστωσαν εἰς σημεῖα καὶ εἰς **καιροὺς** *Haī* εἰς ἡμέρας καὶ εἰς ἐνιαυτοὺς”

[And God said, “Let luminaries come into being in the firmament of the sky for illumination of the earth, to separate between the day and between the night, and let them be for signs and for *seasons* and for days and for years”]

This is the only occurrence of *kairos* in Genesis 1, and it is clearly defining the purpose of the lights God placed in the sky on Day 4 of Creation Week, not marking the time passing in Genesis 1 itself.

In the LXX, *kairos* is vastly preferred in translation over *chronos*. Nevertheless, both terms occur often enough for us to observe that 1) both terms have a large semantic range, being used to translate many Hebrew chronological terms. Also 2) Many Hebrew words are translated with both *chronos* and *kairos*, indicating that the semantic ranges of the two Greek words have substantial overlap. The words translated with both *chronos* and *kairos* are *yôm*, *z'mân*, *tôr*, *pá'âm*, *qêš*, and *ē*.

Given the heavy influence of the LXX on the NT authors, one should look first to its usage of the terms in question, rather than Greek (or modern!) philosophy. And we will see that, like the LXX usage, *chronos* and *kairos* in the NT have wide, overlapping semantic ranges.

### Chronos and kairos in the same LXX context

When *chronos* and *kairos* appear in the same context, this can be useful to differentiate their meaning and to see any overlap in their semantic range.

2 Esdras 23:31 reads:

“καὶ τὸ δῶρον τῶν ξυλοφόρων ἐν **καιροῖς** ἀπὸ **χρόνων** καὶ ἐν τοῖς βακχουρίοις. μνήσθητί μου, ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν, εἰς ἀγαθωσύνην.”

[... and the gift of the wood carriers, in *seasons* of the *times* and in the bakchouria. Remember me, O our God, for goodness.]

Daniel 2:21 reads:

“καὶ αὐτὸς ἀλλοιοῖ **καιροὺς** καὶ **χρόνους**, μεθιστῶν βασιλεῖς καὶ καθιστῶν, διδοὺς σοφοῖς σοφίαν καὶ σύνεσιν τοῖς ἐν ἐπιστήμῃ οὖσιν.”

[And he changes *seasons* and *times*; deposing kings and setting up, giving to sages wisdom, and understanding to those who have knowledge.]

Daniel 7:12 reads:

“καὶ τοὺς κύκλω αὐτοῦ ἀπέστησε τῆς ἐξουσίας αὐτῶν, καὶ **χρόνος** ζωῆς ἐδόθη αὐτοῖς ἕως **χρόνου** καὶ **καιροῦ**.”

[And he removed those around him from their authority, and *time* of life was granted to them for a *season* and a *time*.]

In each instance, *chronos* and *kairos* are used together to indicate seasons and times. The

**Table 2.** The use of *kairos* in the LXX. Asterisk indicates Aramaic cognate.

English translation	Hebrew term	LXX reference
Season, time, appointed time	<i>Môed</i>	Gen. 1:14, 17:21; 18:14; 21:2 Exo. 13:10; 23:15; 34:18; Lev. 23:4; Num. 9:3, 7, 13; Deut. 16:6; 31:10; 2 Rgns. 20:5; 4 Rgns. 4:16, 17; Psa. 74:3; 101:14; 103:19; Hos. 2:11; Hab. 2:3; Jer. 8:7; Lam. 1:15; Dan. 8:19; 11:27, 29; 12:7
End	<i>Qêš</i>	Gen. 6:13; Jer. 27:26; Lam. 4:18; Dan. 8:17
Very (that very day)	<i>Ē'sēm</i>	Gen. 17:23, 26
Time, now, at that time, season	<i>Ēt</i>	Gen. 18:10; 21:22; 38:1; Lev. 15:25; 26:4; Num. 22:4; 23:23; Deut. 1:9, 16, 18; 2:34; 3:4, 8, 12, 18, 21, 23; 4:14; 5:5; 9:20; 10:1, 8; 28:12; 32:35; Josh. 5:2; 11:10, 21; Jdg. 3:29; 4:4; 10:14; 11:26; 12:6; 14:4; 21:14, 22, 24; 1 Rgns. 4:20, 9:16; 20:12; 2 Rgns. 11:1; 3 Rgns. 11:4, 29; 15:23; 4 Rgns. 8:22; 16:6; 18:16; 20:12; 24:10; 1 Chron. 9:25 (2x); 12:33; 21:28, 29; 29:30; 2 Chron. 7:8; 15:5; 16:7, 10; 21:10, 19; 25:27; 28:16; 30:3; 35:17; 2 Esd. 8:34; 10:13, 14; 14:16; 16:1; 19:27; 20:35; 23:21, 31; Est. 4:14; Psa. 1:3; 4:8; 9:26; 20:10; 30:16; 31:6; 33:2; 36:19, 39; 68:14; 70:9; 80:16; 101:14; 105:3; 118:20, 126; Prov. 5:19; 6:14; 8:30; 17:17; Eccl. 3:1–8, 11, 17; 7:17; 8:5, 6; 9:8, 11, 12; 10:17; Song 2:12; Job 5:26; 38:32; 39:1, 18; Amos 5:13 (2x); Micah 2:3; 3:4; 5:3 Joel 4:1; Zeph. 3:19, 20; Hag. 1:2, 4; Isa. 8:23; 18:7; 39:1; 49:8; 60:22; Jer. 2:27, 28; 3:17; 4:11; 5:24; 6:15; 8:1, 7, 15; 10:15; 11:12, 14; 14:8, 19; 15:11; 18:23; 26:21; 27:4, 16, 20, 27, 31; 28:6, 18; Eze. 4:10, 11; 7:4, 12; 12:27; 16:8; 21:30, 34; 35:5; Dan. 11:13, 14, 35; 12:4
Now, this time, X times	<i>Pā'ām</i>	Gen. 29:34; 30:20; Exo. 8:28; 9:14; 23:17; 34:23, 24; Deut. 9:19; 10:10; 16:16; 1 Chron. 11:11; 2 Chron. 8:13; Jer. 16:21
Every year	<i>Šanā</i>	Hab. 3:2
Time, occasion	<i>Rēgēl</i>	Exo. 23:14
In due time	<i>T<sup>e</sup>qūpāh</i>	1 Rgns. 1:20
Same time / appointed time	<i>Z'mān</i>	2 Esd. 5:3; Dan. 3:7*, 8*; 7:22*, 25*
In the future	<i>Āhārōn</i>	Isa. 30:8
Turn	<i>Tôr</i>	Est. 2:12
Day/days	<i>Yôm</i>	Zeph. 3:16; Isa. 38:1
Forever	<i>Ād</i>	Isa. 64:8
On behalf of	<i>Bā'ād</i>	Ezek. 22:30
Time	<i>Iddān</i>	Dan. 2:8*, 9*, 21*; 7:12*, 25* (4x)

UBS handbook says, “The two nouns in Hebrew<sup>17</sup> have a rather general meaning, and it is probably unnecessary to try to make a careful distinction between them. ... Rather the two are to be taken together.”<sup>18</sup> If the two can both be used as general terms that may be ‘taken together’, then the terms cannot be speaking about two radically different types of time, as Dembski’s argument requires.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 LXX reads:

“Τοῖς πᾶσιν χρόνος, καὶ καιρὸς τῷ παντὶ πράγματι ὑπὸ οὐρανόν.”

[For everything there is a *time*, and a *right time* for every matter under heaven.]

The Hebrew uses parallelism, as Hebrew poetry and wisdom literature commonly do. Regarding the underlying Hebrew and the LXX translation, Keil and Delitzsch state:

“The Greeks were guided by the right feeling when they rendered נתי by χρόνος, and נב by καιρός. Olympiodorus distinguishes too sharply when he understands the former of duration of time, and the latter of a point of time; while the state of the matter is this, that by χρόνος the idea comprehends the *termini a quo* and *ad quem*, while by καιρός it is limited to the *terminus a quo*.”<sup>19</sup>

So, we see that while there is distinction in the meaning of *kairos* and *chronos*, they are close enough in meaning that the two terms can be used to meaningfully translate Hebrew parallelism, which would, by definition, require an overlapping semantic range.

Another instance supporting the overlapping semantic range of *chronos* and *kairos* in the LXX: the girls’ ‘turn’ to go in to Artaxerxes is translated with *chronos* in Esther 2:12 LXX, but with *kairos* in Esther 2:15. The original Hebrew in both verses uses the word ‘*tor*’.

### Chronos and kairos in the New Testament

When we look at the usage of *chronos* and *kairos* in the New Testament, we see that while the two words can be generally distinguished from each other, there is still a substantial overlap in the semantic range. And, importantly, there is no hint of a special ‘God’s time’ that can subvert the order of cause and effect.

#### Chronos in the NT

As with many generic words, *chronos* has a wide semantic range when modified with other terms (these phrases are included in brackets in table 1). Luke/Acts has both the most uses of *chronos* and the widest range of meaning for *chronos*, perhaps indicating Luke’s particular emphasis on timing of events.

Some significant usages stand out that challenge the distinction between *chronos* and *kairos*. In Acts 7:17, Luke speaks of “the time of the promise” [*ho chronos tēs epangelias*]. If *kairos* were the exclusive word to speak of ‘God’s timing’, we might expect Luke to use *ho kairos tēs epangelias*.

If *chronos* were used in reference to the time of creation, we would expect something along the lines of *chronois aiōniois*; however, that would not be entirely appropriate, because it talks of long ages past (i.e. the ages before the coming of Christ) or before creation existed.

#### Kairos in the NT

Generally speaking, *kairos* is chosen when speaking about the *suitable* or *proper* time for something to happen. It can speak of seasons or harvest time, or the eschatological future time of Christ’s return and the judgment of the world. But this should not be taken to suggest that *kairos* is some otherworldly notion of ‘God’s time’. *Kairos* is a concept that has substantial overlap with *chronos*; it can be used to speak of the timing of a particular event without overt reference to its theological import. In Luke 1:20, “the day when these things take place” is equated with “fulfilled in their proper time [*kairos*]”. Hence, *kairos* can refer to a particular day in a human’s conception of time. Perhaps even more problematic for the interpretation that *kairos* must *always* refer to an opportune moment or ‘God’s timing’, it can be used to mean ‘at all times’, which would seem to be close to the categorical opposite.

Furthermore, *nowhere* is *kairos* used to mean ‘God’s time’. Both *chronos* and *kairos* refer to events happening on an earthly timeline, apart from, arguably, *chronos aiōnios*.

#### Chronos and kairos together in the NT

*Chronos* and *kairos* appear together in contexts that closely match their usage in the LXX. Acts 1:7 reads:

“εἶπεν δὲ πρὸς αὐτούς, Οὐχ ὑμῶν ἐστὶν γινῶσαι χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς οὓς ὁ πατὴρ ἔθετο ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ ἐξουσίᾳ,”

[He said to them, “It is not for you to know *times* or *seasons* that the Father has fixed by his own authority.”]

In a similar usage, 1 Thessalonians 5:1 reads

“Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν, ἀδελφοί, οὐ χρειάν ἔχετε ὑμῖν γράφεσθαι.”

[Now concerning *the times and the seasons*, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.]

While some attempt to differentiate the usage of the terms in this context, most commentators see that by this time the terms had come to be used together in a synonymous manner.<sup>12</sup> As such, it supports the overlap of semantic domain, rather than radical distinction between the two terms.

**Table 3.** The New Testament usage of *chronos*<sup>10</sup>

Usage	Reference
Denotes the timing of an event	Matt. 2:7, 16; Luke 1:57; Acts 1:6
Time, times	Acts 1:7; 3:21; 7:17; 15:33; 17:30; 18:23; 19:22; 1 Cor. 16:7; 1 Thes. 5:1; Heb. 5:12; 11:32; 1 Pet. 1:17; 4:2, 3; Rev. 2:21
A certain number of years	Acts 7:23; 13:18
A long time	Matt. 25:19; Luke 8:27; 20:9; 23:8, John 5:6; Acts 8:11; 14:3; 27:9
So long as	Mark 2:19; Rom. 7:1; 1 Cor. 7:39; Gal. 4:1
How long?	Mark 9:21
A moment of time	Luke 4:5
many times	Luke 8:29
“For a while”	Luke 18:4
A little while	John 7:33, 12:35; Rev. 6:11; 20:3
so long	John 14:9; Heb. 4:7
all the time / the whole time	Acts 1:21; 20:18
no little time	Acts 14:28
a longer period	Acts 18:20
long ages / eternity	Rom. 16:25; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2
fullness of time	Gal. 4:4
last time/s	1 Pet. 1:20; Jude 1:18
delay	Rev. 10:6

### “The fullness of time”

Perhaps one of the strongest indications that *kairos* does not have a special meaning of ‘God’s time’ is Paul’s use of the terms ‘*chronos*’ and ‘*kairos*’ in identical contexts. In Galatians 4:4 he uses *chronos* in his phrase “the fullness of time”:

“ὅτε δὲ ἦλθεν τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου, ἐξαπέστειλεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ, γενόμενον ἐκ γυναικός, γενόμενον ὑπὸ νόμον,”

[But when the *fullness of time* had come, God sent his son, born of woman, born under the law,]

But in Ephesians 1:10, the same Apostle writes:

“εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν, ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, τὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἐν αὐτῷ.”

[... as a plan for the *fullness of time*, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.]

Paul’s usage establishes that the semantic ranges of *chronos* and *kairos* overlap so much that either can be used in constructions in contexts speaking about the most important

**Table 4.** The New Testament usage of *kairos*<sup>11</sup>

Usage [phrase]	Reference
Denotes a point of time in the eschatological future / the time of the return of Christ	Matt. 8:29; Mark 13:33; Luke 21:8; 1 Cor. 4:5; 7:29; Rev. 1:3; 11:18; 22:10
The timing of a particular event	Matt. 11:25; 12:1; 14:1; Luke 13:1; Acts 7:20; 12:1; 19:23; Rom. 9:9
Harvest time	Matt. 13:30; 21:34; Mark 12:2; Luke 20:10
Time/s, a period of time	Matt. 16:3; Luke 8:13; 12:56; 18:30; 21:24; Acts 3:20; 13:11; 17:26; 24:25; Rom. 5:6; 13:11; 1 Cor. 7:5; 2 Cor. 6:2; Eph. 2:12; 5:16; 2 Thes. 2:6; 2 Tim. 3:1; 4:3, 6; Heb. 9:10; 11:11; 1 Pet. 1:11; 4:17; Rev. 12:14
Season	Matt. 21:41; Mark 11:13; Acts 14:17; Gal. 4:10
Proper time	Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:42; 1 Pet. 5:6
Denotes the time of Christ’s ministry or death	Matt. 26:18; Mark 1:15; Luke 19:44; John 7:6, 8
The present age	Mark 10:30
in their [proper] time	Luke 1:20
an opportune time	Luke 4:13
at all times	Luke 21:36; Eph. 6:18
Epoch	Acts 1:7; 1 Thes. 5:1
the present time	Rom. 3:26; 8:18; 11:5; 2 Cor. 8:14
in due time, proper time	Gal. 6:9; 1 Tim. 2:6; 6:15; Tit. 1:3
Opportunity	Gal. 6:10; Col. 4:5; Heb. 11:15
The fullness of time	Eph. 1:10
A short while	1 Thes. 2:17
Later times	1 Tim. 4:1
The present time	Heb. 9:9
The last time	1 Pet. 1:5
A short time	Rev. 12:12

soteriological events. But both refer to a point in *historical time*, not some type of ‘heavenly time’.

### When God created

Neither term is used in any creation passage, so what terms are used, and what can that tell us? Well, that neither *chronos* nor *kairos* is used tells us that ‘when God created’ is a special sort of time, the beginning of the timeline. In fact,

it's called "in the beginning". But it's a beginning *point*, not a beginning *age*. The word 'day' (*yom, hēmera*) indicates a quick progression in the creative activity. That these periods of activity are seen as definitional of what days are is a very good reason for concluding exegetically that the Creation Days were actual days—i.e. periods of roughly 24 hours characterized by a cycle of light and darkness.

### Failed theodicy

One of the proposed strengths of Dembski's argument is that it allows for Adam's sin to be the cause of death and suffering over long ages, hence preserving Christian orthodoxy while maintaining scientific orthodoxy. However, this suffers from some critical weaknesses.

The analogy is that Christ's death saved those who lived before His death. But Scripture explicitly teaches this, and does *not* teach that Adam's sin had preemptive effects on the creation. And Christ's death itself has a theodicy component—namely, how can a righteous God overlook the sins of the 'righteous' who died before Christ? Dembski's argument *introduces* rather than solves problems. How can Adam's sin *actually* affect the world before he sinned? This would seem to put the significance of a human's action on par with, or even greater than, the significance of Christ's redemptive work. And the teaching of Paul in Romans 5 is that Christ's work is infinitely *greater* than Adam's.

### Conclusion

Dembski's argument for kairological time is flawed in almost every possible way. His main source for the distinction between *chronos* and *kairos* is based not in study of the original language of the biblical documents, but in modern philosophy. The words *chronos* and *kairos* are not even in Hebrew, the language the Genesis creation narrative was originally written in. The translation of the Genesis creation narrative in the LXX does not use *chronos* or *kairos*, except for a single use of *kairos* on Day 4 to define the function of the luminaries; the terms are not used to mark the time of creation week.

Furthermore, the Greek terms *kairos* and *chronos* are not starkly different; their semantic ranges overlap considerably. *Chronos*, not *kairos*, is used in the construction *chronos aiwnos* to indicate events that happened 'long ago' without defining when. Additionally, *chronos* can be used to discuss the timing of theologically significant events. In fact, the two words can be used by Paul in *identical* constructions to speak about the timing of the coming of Christ.

If that weren't enough, *kairos* as a special sort of 'God's time' could not be more foreign to its usage in the NT text. While it refers to an 'appropriate' or 'suitable' time, or the timing of seasons, harvest time, and so on, all *kairos* events are located firmly on the earthly 'timeline'. The idea itself

of 'God's time' is not present in Scripture, precisely because God is *outside* of time.

Neither *kairos* or *chronos* is used for 'when God created', because as the event which stands at the *beginning* of the 'timeline', it is 'special'. It is beyond *pro chronōn aiōniōn* (2 Timothy 1:9), it is *en archē*. This specialness does not mean, however, that it stands *outside* of the chronology of Scripture; the language of Genesis 1 clearly establishes Creation Week as the beginning point for chronology.

Since the idea of 'kairological time' is so wrongheaded and contrary to the biblical evidence, why would anyone propose such a solution? Only to attempt a theodicy in light of a long-age hermeneutic. However, this theodicy fails, because *kairos* does not mean what Dembski needs it to mean, and it is not used to describe 'when God created'.

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### References

1. For clarity, the words *chronos* and *kairos* will appear in normal text when referring to their philosophical usage, and in italics when they are meant as transliterations of the Greek *χρόνος* and *καιρός*.
2. Dembski, W., *The End of Christianity*, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, TN, pp. 124–125, 2009.
3. Christian theodicy in light of Genesis and modern science, 20 April 2006, [billdembski.com](http://billdembski.com), last accessed 13 March 2017.
4. Stone, A.P., Time as *chronos* and *kairos*: physical and metaphysical time, accessed 6 December 2016. See ref. 3, p. 13.
5. All LXX translations are from Pietersma A. and Wright, B.G. (Eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Oxford University Press, 2007.
6. The phrase "like the time of a man" is not in the MT and so one cannot make an assertion about which Hebrew word the translator was conveying with *χρόνος*.
7. Dr Michael Hildenbrand pointed out in private correspondence that this appears to be an error in the UBS handbook, as this section of Daniel is in Aramaic.
8. Péter-Contesse, R. and Ellington, J., *A Handbook on the Book of Daniel*, United Bible Societies, New York, p. 46, 1994.
9. Keil, C.F. and Delitzsch, F., *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 6, p. 683, Hendrickson, Peabody, 1996.
10. Table constructed from list obtained from NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon entry, *chronos*, available at [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), accessed 26 October 2016.
11. Table constructed from list obtained from NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon entry, *kairos*, available at [biblestudytools.com](http://biblestudytools.com), accessed 26 October 2016.
12. See, for instance, Wanamaker, C.A., *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NIGTC, p. 178, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1990.

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