

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK

Lesson 6 w/Answers

Is a Day a Thousand Years?

We continue our study, which I've titled "Challenging Questions People Ask," and I want us to give some thought to a question that I have been asked many times: "Did God create the earth in seven literal days, or is it true, as Peter the Apostle wrote, that to God, a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day?"

Much has been studied and written regarding the origins of man—everything from Creation Science to the Science of Evolution and even Theistic Evolution and Intelligent Design—all trying to explain how we got here and perhaps even where we are headed. While we won't be studying these various forms of "science" in this lesson, let me be clear from the onset that I do not believe that any of them are actually a "science." Regarding the core issue of this subject, I believe that God created everything, including the spiritual beings. Everything else is man's attempt at trying to explain the unexplainable.

In all of the attempts at evolutionary science, no one has ever been able to explain how it all began, where the first particle or primordial ooze came from, nor how it came about. Even more importantly, the purpose of mankind—and creation as a whole—can only be truly understood through the belief that God created all of it, including us; and that the universe in which we live is not here by accident, but rather is part of a grand plan of which we have a part.

Rather than using this lesson to debate evolution, intelligent design, the big bang theory, theistic evolution and so on, we will instead focus on something more specific to those who do believe that God created everything—that question being: Was it actually accomplished over seven literal days, or are there other reasonable explanations? For example, are the seven days figurative representations of seven eras or epochs in which God created each piece of the creation in stages?

The real answer is that since none of us were present the day God began creating, we can only rely on two things: (1) what God tells us in the Bible, and (2) what we can physically see or test of the physical world in which we now live. This is important for me because I believe that we are to take the scriptures as God's Holy and inspired Word, while augmenting them with the use of proper hermeneutics—a fancy word for examining and translating documents by first considering the associated context, historical setting, and grammatical structure. (For example, a poem in a foreign language would be interpreted differently than a land contract, and both would need the background context in which they were written in order to make a proper translation.)

I also believe that how you interpret the description of the creation days affects your view and understanding of God and His word. This implies that the question of literal versus symbolic days will affect how you look at much of scripture.

So let's use what we have available to us—God's Word and the physical sciences—to see if we can arrive at a reasonable and defensible answer.

1. Write down brief definitions of Carbon Dating and Radiometric Dating:

a. Carbon Dating

- i. ANSWER: Carbon Dating dates objects by calculating, in reverse, the amount of Carbon 14 decay going back 5,700 years (i.e., the half-life of Carbon 14) and applying a formula to determine, based on the current amount of Carbon 14, what the age of the object or fossil is.

b. Radiometric Dating

- i. ANSWER: Radiometric Dating attempts to measure the age of the layers rock above and below the area actually being dated. For example, dinosaur bones are dated based on the age brackets of the two layers that the fossils are sandwiched between.

2. Why is either of these important to determining whether God created the earth in seven literal days or seven eras?
 - a. ANSWER: In terms of their relevance to God's creation of the heavens and the earth, they are not important. However, often drawn into the argument about creation is the "young earth" versus "old earth" argument, one supported by the Genesis record and the other by various forms of dating approaches.
3. What are the shortcomings of these measurements?
 - a. ANSWER: Primarily the assumptions that they are based on. For example, Carbon 14 Dating assumes that an equal amount of C-12 and C-14 are and have always been present; when, in fact, science has proven that not to be the case. The magnetic field of the earth has not always been constant, but is indeed getting weaker, thus letting in greater amounts of cosmic rays and generating more C-14 than would have existed even 10,000 years ago. Dr. Libby, developer of the process even acknowledged a shortcoming in his assumption: specifically, that it should take only 30,000 years to achieve equilibrium, or steady state, for C-14. Yet today, a steady state has still not been achieved, while Carbon Dating attests that thousands, and even millions, of years have passed since the earth was created. How can this be true if we evidently haven't even amassed the 30,000 years to achieve equilibrium? The bottom line is that all radiometric dating approaches are based on assumptions about events that may, or may not, have actually happened in the past.
4. Is measuring the erosion of rock and earth by running water helping to age places like the Grand Canyon, which is said to have been carved by the Colorado River and took tens of millions of years? What do places like Mount St. Helens and Burlingame Canyon tell us?
 - a. ANSWER: While it is a popular notion that large gorges and canyons came about as the result of long periods of erosion by rushing waters, as evidenced by the many layers of rock and strata seen on the exposed canyon walls; it turns out that canyons can be created in six days and even less. For example, the many strata of geological material often pointed to as "millions of years old" were formed in a single day by the violent eruption of Mount St. Helens. In another example, the Burlingame Canyon was formed in about six days as the result of massive flooding.
5. Read 2 Peter 3:8. What is Peter telling us in this verse?
 - a. ANSWER: That a day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years are like a day.
6. Now read 2 Peter 3:7-9. What is Peter telling us?
 - a. ANSWER: That God is extremely long-suffering and does not want anyone to perish, so He is very patient with all of us, not wanting any of us to fall under the coming Judgment.
7. Where else in the Bible does it tell us about a day equaling one thousand years? Write down the verses here.
 - a. ANSWER: Actually, there is no where else in the Bible other than 2 Peter 3:7-9 that references this topic, where Peter is talking about God's patience and using the thousand-year simile to illustrate how great God's patience is towards us.
8. Read the following and briefly describe what happens in each one:
 - a. Exodus 4:3-5
 - i. ANSWER: Moses' staff is turned into a snake in an instant.
 - b. Exodus 16:1-16
 - i. ANSWER: Food comes down from heaven for forty years, including meat.
 - c. 1 Kings 17:7-16
 - i. ANSWER: The widow's jar of oil and jug of flour never go empty, yet no one has put anything into them.
 - d. Exodus 20:11
 - i. ANSWER: The Lord rested on the Sabbath "Day," and He commands us to do the same. It is a day—a 24-hour time period—not an era or time frame; it is a literal day.
 - e. John 2:8-10
 - i. ANSWER: Jesus turns water into fine wine in an instant, not over a long period of time.
9. If God can create anything and everything that is physical in an instant, as though it was either full grown, or mature, or harvested fresh; doesn't that indicate something regarding His ability to create all of this from nothing in an instant? Still not convinced? How about all of the miracles, hundreds—maybe even thousands—done by Him and by Jesus? Instant recovery of sight, the lame healed, the dead raised, the Red Sea split, and so on, miracle after miracle. The impossible becomes the possible with God. Can you think of some things that God did take a thousand or more years to do?
 - a. ANSWER: God's plan of salvation for man encompassed the period from before the earth was created to the resurrection of Christ, again displaying God's great love and compassion for us—and His great patience.

I believe a credible argument can be made that when it comes to God's plan of salvation for mankind, His patience is immeasurable. This is witnessed by the fact that before we were created, Christ knew that he would need to come down as man, suffer and die, and be raised again—a plan that has taken thousands of years to unfold. As Peter tells us, we are not to reckon this as slowness on God's part; but rather, we are to see it as God's great patience and His desire that no one fall into judgment and perish. He desires that all mankind be saved in order for them to spend an eternity with Him in heaven.

In looking at all of the miracles in the Bibles and in looking at other texts within the Bible related to time, including the route word used for "day" in Genesis, I believe that the seven days are all literal. I believe God created man and woman as grown, mature, human beings—not as amoebas that eventually mutated or grew into humans. I also believe that He created all things in the day indicated in the Genesis account, and that on the seventh day He rested (just as He commands us to do). Finally, I believe that if God is capable of all of that, then He is more than capable of saving you and I and preparing for all of us a new heaven and new earth that will last an eternity!

Have a great week everyone and thanks for studying with us.

In Christ,

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