

How Long are Genesis Days?

Creation Research recently received the following question:

Since the Bible never mentions the seventh day ending, surely that makes it possible that the days in Genesis were not 24 hours? Can you help me?

This article by Simon Turpin explains how we know the length of the days in Genesis.

What is a Day?

When it comes to understanding the length of the days in Genesis 1, one of the first questions we need to ask is how do we determine when a day is twenty-four hours long?

The Hebrew word for day, *yom*, is used in the singular and plural form 2301 times in the Old Testament, and outside of Genesis there is always agreement as to when the word means a day of twenty-four hours:

- Whenever the word *day* is used with a number it always means an ordinary day with no exceptions (410 occasions).
- The term *evening and morning* used together without *day* outside of Genesis 1 always means an ordinary day (38 occasions).
- When the words *evening* or *morning* are used together with the word *day* outside of Genesis 1 it always means an ordinary day (23 occasions).
- When the word *night* is used with the word *day* outside of Genesis 1 it always means an ordinary day (52 occasions).

It is clear then that the word *day* outside of Genesis 1 means a day of twenty-four hours when it is used with a number, with the phrase “evening and morning”, when the words “evening” or “morning” occur with “day”, and when the term “night” occurs with “day”.

It is the context of the word “day” that will determine its meaning, and when the context of Genesis 1 is examined you will find that the word *day* on each of the days is accompanied by either: “evening and morning”; a number; or by the word “night”. Therefore, the context reveals that the meaning of “day” on each of the six days is a day of twenty-four hours.

The Seventh Day

The seventh day is described in Genesis as follows:

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. By the seventh day God completed His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Genesis 2:1-3

Is the Seventh Day Unending?

It is clear that day seven is a literal historical day of twenty-four hours as it is numbered like the previous days. The seventh day is mentioned three times in these verses, but it is not a day of creation but a day of rest. The verbs “completed,” “rested,” and “blessed” indicate its uniqueness, each being associated with the work of God.

Why then is there no mention of “evening and morning” on day seven? Does this mean that the seventh day did not end?

First of all, it should be noted that God’s created work did not cease on the seventh day, but that it was finished “by the seventh day.” Thus God had completed (*kal*) all His work, and all their hosts (*tsaba*), referring to everything in heaven and earth. The words of Genesis 2:1 introduce the completion of God’s creation.

Secondly, Dr. Robert McCabe¹ shows that there is a five-fold framework apparent in the first six days which is absent in day seven. This framework is used in Genesis 1:1–2:3 to shape each of the days:

- “God said . . .”
- “let there be . . .”
- Fulfilment: “there was”
- Evaluation: “God saw that it was good”
- Conclusion: “there was evening and morning”

The evening and morning formula that is used with the other days is no longer needed on day seven as it has a rhetorical function to mark the transition from the concluding day to the following day. The Creation Week is now complete and, therefore, it is not necessary to use the formula “evening and morning.”

Moreover, it is not only “evening and morning” that are missing from the seventh day. In fact, none of the other parts of this framework are used on the seventh day. The framework is used to represent accurately God’s work involved in His creative activity. The reason this framework is not used on the seventh day is to show that God had ceased creating. Therefore, the reason ‘evening and morning’ are not used is related to the other parts of the framework.

Furthermore, no terminator is needed for the seventh day as with the others as the terminator to this day is the *toledoth* (“this is the account/generation of” - Genesis 2:4) where the next section of the narrative is about to begin.

¹ McCabe, R. V. 2009. A critique of the framework interpretation of the Creation Week. In *Coming to grips with Genesis: Biblical authority and the age of the earth*, ed. T. Mortenson and T. H. Ury. Green Forest, Arkansas: Master Books. 225-242.

Finally, in every passage where the seventh day occurs it is mentioned as the foundation of the theocratic Sabbath, and is regarded as an ordinary day.

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.
Exodus 20:11

It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.
Exodus 31:17

New Testament

There are several verses in the New Testament which people try to use in order to show that the seventh day is unending. John 5:17 says, ‘But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working still, and I am working.”’ However, it is clear from the context that Jesus is referring to God’s providential and redemptive work and not to His creative work.

Is the seventh day unending according to Hebrews 4?

No, Hebrews 4:3 refers to the spiritual rest that all believers enter. Hebrews 4 quotes Genesis 2:2 and Psalm 95:7–11, and it is used by the author as an argument to warn of the danger of unbelief. Furthermore, if the seventh day is unending then this surely raises some theological problems of God cursing the earth while at the same time blessing and sanctifying it.

Conclusion

There is no textual reason to view the seventh day as unending. There is a purpose to the absence of the refrain “evening and morning” as it is part of a fivefold framework and, therefore, unnecessary on this occasion. The seventh day is also numbered as with other days demonstrating it to be a day of twenty-four hours.