

# THE DAYS OF CREATION: AN HISTORICAL SURVEY OF INTERPRETATION

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## I. THE BIBLE

"Day," used variously in Genesis 1-2 for the period of light (Gen 1:5, 18), a period of evening and morning (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), and in an idiom that means "in the time when" (2:4), passed into the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, the Vg and the English versions with the same sort of variety. The literary pattern of six days followed by a seventh is attested in the ancient Middle East and in the Akkadian *Enuma Elish* (5:16-17) and *Gilgamesh* (11:142-146, 215-218) epics. It is also frequent in Ugaritic epics.<sup>1</sup>

The hallowing of the seventh day (Gen 2:1-2) presupposes the literal character of the six days. Primarily interested in declaring the power of God, the writer of Genesis would have known nothing of the millennia now assumed by geologists and paleontologists. Creation in six days with cessation on the seventh is noted in the law of Moses as the basis of the Sabbath (Exod 20:11; 31:17; Deut 5:12).<sup>2</sup> Otherwise no further notice is taken of the days of creation in the canonical books of the OT.

Pseudepigraphic surveys in which past history is revealed to a seer (*Jub.* 2:1-33; 2 *Enoch* 28:1-33:2) include surveys of the seven days.<sup>3</sup> A vision giving a survey of the days of creation is found in 4 Ezra 6:38-54 and a survey without mention of days in *Sib. Or.* 1:5-37. R. H. Charles claims that the later creation accounts of Anastasius<sup>4</sup> and of Isadore of Seville<sup>5</sup> are dependent upon Jubilees.<sup>6</sup> If the days are considered other than ordinary days, no notice is taken of the fact.

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<sup>1</sup> *Keret* 1:95-98, 219-221; *Aqhat* A.1:7-13; *Baal* II.AB vi:24-32. A survey of earlier materials on the seven-day week is given by H. and J. Lewy, "The Origin of the Week and the Oldest West Asiatic Calendar," *HUCA* 17 (1942-43) 3-4.

<sup>2</sup> The preposition "in," not present in Hebrew or Greek of Exod 20:11 but supplied in Greek in Exod 31:17, is supplied by English translators.

<sup>3</sup> L. Gry, "La creation en sept jours d'après les Apocryphes de l'Ancien Testament," *RSPT* 2 (1908) 277-293.

<sup>4</sup> PG, 89. 940.

<sup>5</sup> PL, 82. 595.

<sup>6</sup> R. H. Charles, *The Book of Jubilees* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1902) 18.

In the NT John 5:16-18 and Heb 4:4 allude to the Sabbath rest, but otherwise the first week is unnoticed.

## II. EARLY JEWISH INTERPRETERS

According to Eusebius, Aristobulus of Paneas (second century B.C.) argued that Homer, Hesiod and Linus in their allusions to a seventh day had borrowed from Moses. After declaring that the law of Moses said that God rested on the seventh day he affirms:

For it points out that in six days He [God] made the heaven and earth and all things that are therein, to distinguish the times, and predict the order in which one thing comes before another: for after arranging their order, He keeps them so, and makes no change. He has also plainly declared that the seventh day is ordained for us by the Law, to be a sign of that which is our seventh faculty, namely reason, whereby we have knowledge of things human and divine.<sup>7</sup>

Near the end of the first century Josephus,<sup>8</sup> apparently taking the six days literally, includes a survey of the days of creation as coming from Moses. He promises an examination of the expression "one day" of Genesis<sup>9</sup> that he seems not to have fulfilled.<sup>10</sup>

With Philo of Alexandria, earlier in the first century than Josephus and referred to by him, the questions that have puzzled exegetes through the centuries begin to surface. He says that "beginning" is not to be taken as a chronological beginning but means "He made the heaven first."<sup>11</sup> He affirms that there was not time before there was a world.<sup>12</sup> Philo also notices the tension between the concept of instantaneous creation and that of creation in six days. Whereas modern scholars would consider "in the day" of Gen 2:4 as merely a Hebrew idiom for "at the time when" (cf. Num 3:1; 8:87; 2 Sam 22:1; Ps 18:1), earlier writers understood it to affirm instantaneous creation of the whole. Combining this statement with that of Ps 33(32):9, "For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth" (RSV; MT *wayya'āmōd*), which last words the LXX rendered *ektisthēsan* and the Latin *et creata sunt* (both of which are plural forms), the opinion was made firm.

This exegesis made interpreters wrestle with how the whole could have been instantaneous and at the same time stretched over six days. Philo, known for his allegorical interpretation, says:

It is quite foolish to think that the world was created in six days or in a space of time at all. Why? Because every period of time is a series of days

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius *Praep. Ev.* 13.12.

<sup>8</sup> Josephus *Ant.* 1.1 (27-33).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 1.1 (29).

<sup>10</sup> H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus with an English Translation* (LCL; London: William Heinemann, 1957), 4. 13 n. b.

<sup>11</sup> Philo *Opif.* 20-28 (LCL; London: William Heinemann, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 26.

and nights, and these can only be made such by the movement of the sun as it goes over and under the earth: but the sun is a part of heaven, so that time is confessedly more recent than the world. It would therefore be correct to say that the world was not made in time, but that time was formed by means of the world, for it was heaven's movement that was the index of the nature of time.<sup>13</sup>

Philo also declares that there were not six days because God required a length of time for his work: "We must think of God as doing all things simultaneously."<sup>14</sup>

From the LXX's (cf. Samaritan Pentateuch, OL, Syriac) "God finished (*synetelesen*) on the sixth day" (Gen 2:2; MT and Vg have "seventh day"), Philo would not understand Moses to be deducing a quantity of days but rather a perfect number. Mortal things are parallel with six and blessed and heavenly things with seven.<sup>15</sup> He develops the theme of the symbolic power in numbers. Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was need of order. He finds six to be a perfect number suitable to the perfection of the world.<sup>16</sup>

Another problem in the text is that Gen 1:5 says "one day" (MT *yôm ʿehād*, LXX *hēmera mia*, Vg *dies unus*) instead of "first day" although ordinal numbers are otherwise used for the successive days. Philo explains this feature by an affirmation that time was not before the world but was either after it or simultaneous with it. In Philo's survey of the steps of creation the heavenly bodies were created to furnish measures of time. Here he wrestles with the problem that there was evening and morning but the heavenly bodies did not appear until the fourth day. Philo also struggles with number symbolism: "For out of one day came 'one,' out of two 'two,' out of three 'three,' and out of a month 'thirty.'"<sup>17</sup> Having expounded the completion of the world in keeping with the properties of six, a perfect number, Philo notes that the Father invests the seventh day with dignity, pronouncing it to be holy. For this number also he expounds special mystical properties.<sup>18</sup> Like the LXX of Exod 31:17, which supplies the preposition, Philo reads that the world was made "in six days." He connects the ongoing Sabbath observance with creation days.<sup>19</sup>

### III. EARLY CHRISTIAN INTERPRETERS

Comments on the days of Genesis are sparse in Christian writings of the second century. A marked tendency to allegorize the days is obvious. Likely borrowing from an idea earlier found in *Jub.* 4:29-30 to explain

<sup>13</sup> Philo *LA* 1.2.

<sup>14</sup> Philo *Opif.* 13.

<sup>15</sup> Philo *LA* 1.2-4.

<sup>16</sup> Philo *Opif.* 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 12-13, 26, 60; cf. *Spec.* 2.58, 260.

<sup>18</sup> Philo *Opif.* 89-128.

<sup>19</sup> Philo *Decal.* 96-101.

how Adam could live to the age of 930 years and yet die "in the day" he ate of the fruit, the epistle of Barnabas, expounding Gen 2:2, calls on Ps 90:4; 2 Pet 3:8 to derive the idea that from the six days of creation the world is to stand for six thousand years. Barnabas in successive verses has the Lord finishing on the sixth day and on the seventh day. The seventh day's rest is when the Lord comes again.<sup>20</sup> An eighth day of new creation follows the millennial period.<sup>21</sup> Origen understands the Sabbath as signifying eternal life.<sup>22</sup> The impact of this concept in the Church is to dampen the expectation of the Lord's immediate return by projecting it far into the future.<sup>23</sup> The idea that a day is a thousand years becomes common.<sup>24</sup> (On Barnabas and the six thousand years see J. Danielou.<sup>25</sup>)

The heretical movements of the second century made use of the days of creation for their own purposes. Irenaeus points out that the Marcosian heretics pervert passages from Moses to support their doctrine of the ogdoad. They affirm that man was formed on the eighth day but sometimes have him made on the sixth. They sometimes have his earthly part made on the sixth day but his fleshly part made on the eighth, with the two parts distinguished by them.<sup>26</sup> Danielou points out that according to Hippolytus<sup>27</sup> the Sethians (a gnostic group) claimed that the three days before the sun and moon are the three words that constitute all reality.<sup>28</sup> The text of the *Great Apophasis* attributed to Simon noted that when the Simonians affirm

that there are three days begotten before the sun and moon "they speak enigmatically of Mind and Intelligence, that is, Heaven and Earth, and of the seventh power, (I mean) the indefinite one, for these Three Powers are produced antecedent to all the rest."<sup>29</sup>

On Hippolytus see Jerome,<sup>30</sup> who asserts that Ambrose in appropriating Origen's *Six Days' Work* did it in a way that made it express the views of Hippolytus and Basil rather than of Origen.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>20</sup> *Barn.* 15:3-4.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. 2 *Enoch* 33; Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 6(16).141 (ANF, 2. 512-514); *Sib. Or.* 7:140.

<sup>22</sup> Origen *Hom. Num.* 23.3 (J. Danielou, *The Theology of Jewish Christianity* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd; Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1964] 397).

<sup>23</sup> J. Lawson, *A Theological and Historical Introduction to the Apostolic Fathers* (New York: Macmillan, 1961) 214.

<sup>24</sup> Justin *Dial.* 81.4; Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 5.30.4; Hippolytus *Chronicle*; Lactantius *Div. Inst.* 7.14 (ANF, 7. 211); Victorinus of Pettau *De fabrici mundi* 6 (ANF, 7. 342) at the end of the third century (Danielou, *Theology*, 400; "La typologie millenariste de la semaine dans la christianisme primitif," *VC* 2 [1948] 1-16); Methodius of Olympus *Fragment* (ANF, 6. 310); *Qur'an* 22:46; 32:4.

<sup>25</sup> Danielou, *Theology* 114.

<sup>26</sup> Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 1.18.2 (ANF, 1. 343).

<sup>27</sup> Hippolytus *Ref.* 5.15 (ANF, 5. 67).

<sup>28</sup> Danielou, *Theology* 111 n. 77.

<sup>29</sup> Hippolytus *Ref.* 6.9 (ANF, 5. 77) (Danielou, *Theology* 112, n. 77).

<sup>30</sup> Jerome *Ep. ad Pamm. et Oec.* 7 (NPNF, 6. 179).

<sup>31</sup> F. E. Robbins, *The Hexaemeral Literature: A Study of the Greek and Latin Commentaries on Genesis* (dissertation; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1912) 39.

More orthodox writers expounded the days literally while using them for their own purpose. Theophilus of Antioch interprets "in the beginning" to refer to creation by the *Logos* who is called "beginning,"<sup>32</sup> an idea often repeated by others. Theophilus notices that it was God who gave the name "day" to the light,<sup>33</sup> and he then proceeds to discuss the creative works of the fourth, fifth and sixth days, giving as the reason for the lights appearing on the fourth day that the philosophers could not attribute plants to them instead of to God, a reason that Philo gave earlier. Theophilus makes the three days before the luminaries a type of the Trinity (*triados*) of God.<sup>34</sup> Theophilus also notices God's rest on the seventh day.<sup>35</sup>

Irenaeus, expounding his recapitulation doctrine in which Christ undoes what Adam did, cites Gen 1:5; 3:4, arguing that Adam and Eve died on the same day they ate the fruit. But Irenaeus identifies that day with the one preceding the Sabbath on which the Lord died, as well as with the sixth day on which man was created. He knows those who identify one day with a thousand years, and he feels that if indeed Adam died within a thousand-year period God is still true to his statement concerning his dying in the day of eating.<sup>36</sup>

Eusebius claims to have seen comments of writers on the six days:

Many works of the virtuous zeal of the ancient members of the church at that time [c. A.D. 193] have still been widely preserved until now, and we have read them ourselves . . . the works of Candidus on the Hexaemeron, and of Apion on the same subject.<sup>37</sup>

Candidus lived about A.D. 196, but these works are lost and we know nothing of their nature.

#### IV. ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 150-215) in his lost work *Hypotyposeis* is said to have treated Genesis, but the details are lost. In his extant works Clement follows the pattern earlier set by Philo in insisting that the six days of creation were not to be understood as literal days. They express in an allegory the differing dignity of things recorded to have been created on each day in succession.<sup>38</sup> Clement, in the midst of an exposition of the symbolism of numbers, says that

the resting [of God] is, therefore, the ordering that the order of created things should be preserved inviolate, and that each of the creatures should cease from the ancient disorder. For the creations on the different days

<sup>32</sup> Theophilus *Ad Auto.* 2.10 (ANF, 2. 98).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 2.13 (ANF, 2. 100).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 2.15 (ANF, 2. 101).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 2.19 (ANF, 2. 102).

<sup>36</sup> Irenaeus *Adv. Haer.* 5.23.2 (ANF, 1. 551).

<sup>37</sup> Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.27.1; Jerome *De Vir. Ill.* 48 (NPNF, 3. 372).

<sup>38</sup> C. Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1913) 107.

followed in a most important succession; so that all things brought into existence might have honour from priority, created together in thought, but not being of equal worth. Nor was the creation of each signified by the voice, inasmuch as the creative work is said to have made them at once. For something must needs have been named first. Wherefore those things were announced first, from which came those that were second, all things originated together from one essence by one power. For the will of God was one, in one identity. And how could creation take place in time, seeing time was born along with things which exist?<sup>39</sup>

Origen found a triple sense in Scripture: the literal, the moral, and the spiritual. Difficulties in Scripture suggested to him that one should seek a spiritual meaning, and he felt such a difficulty in the idea of six days of creation. Origen projects a series of creations so that our world is neither the first one, nor will it be the last the Lord creates.<sup>40</sup> Genesis 1 deals with both an invisible world of ideas and a material creation.

Origen understands the "let us" of Genesis to be addressed to the *Logos*, and he applies "He spoke and they were made, he commanded and they were created" (Ps 33[32]:9; cf. 148:5) to describe the process.<sup>41</sup> Origen says, "Scripture is not speaking here of any temporal beginning, but it says that the heaven and the earth and all things which were made were made 'in the beginning,' that is, 'in the Savior'" who is called "beginning" in John 1:1. Here Origen shows similarity to Philo<sup>42</sup> who also rejected temporal meaning in Gen 1:1, but Origen differs in injecting the Savior. Origen made a distinction between "the letter" of Scripture, which he regularly gives first in his homily, and its "spiritual meaning." "One day" is used in Genesis because there was not yet time before the world existed. Time begins to exist with the following days, which are called second, third, and so forth.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere Origen affirms that, whatever spiritual meaning the creation account may have, the language indicates that all visible things were created at a definite time.<sup>44</sup>

Origen's opponent Celsus raises questions about the six days of creation in his "True Discourse":

Silly as that may be, sillier still is the way the world is supposed to have come about. They allot certain days to creation, before days existed. For when heaven had not been made, or the earth fixed or the sun set in the heavens, how could days exist? Isn't it absurd to think that the greatest God pieced out his work like a bricklayer, saying, "Today I shall do this, tomorrow that," and so on, so that he did this on the third, that on the fourth, and something else on the fifth and sixth days! We are thus not surprised to find, that like a common workman, this God wears himself down and so needs a holiday after six days. Need I comment that a god who

<sup>39</sup> Clement *Strom.* 6.16 (ANF, 2. 513).

<sup>40</sup> Origen *de Princ.* 2.3.1-7; 3.5.3.

<sup>41</sup> Origen *c. Cels.* 2.9; *Lit. Gen.* 4:41 (ACW, 41. 141).

<sup>42</sup> Philo *On the Creation* 26-28.

<sup>43</sup> Origen *Hom. on Gen.* 1.1 (FC, 71. 47-48).

<sup>44</sup> Origen *de Princ.* 3.5.1.

gets tired, works with his hands, and gives orders like a foreman is not acting very much like a god?<sup>45</sup>

Origen in his *Dialogue* declines at that time to enter into an explanation of the subject of sensible and intelligible beings and of "the manner in which different kinds of days were allotted to both sorts," for which he felt he needed a whole treatise. He insists that he had treated it before in the discussion with Celsus,<sup>46</sup> who had argued: "By far the most silly thing is the distribution of the creation of the world over certain days, before days existed." He asked how there could be days before the sun. Origen replies that he had dealt with this question in his notes on Genesis.<sup>47</sup> His *Commentary on Genesis* had been written about eighteen years before *Against Celsus*.<sup>48</sup>

The problem of how there could be simultaneous creation and yet there be creation in six days is wrestled with by Origen,<sup>49</sup> as well as by Athanasius<sup>50</sup> and Augustine.<sup>51</sup>

Elsewhere Origen asks whether anyone possessed of understanding will consider the first, second and third days of Genesis as literal:

I do not suppose that anyone doubts that these things figuratively indicate certain mysteries, the history having taken place in appearance, not literally.

He considers that these, like other things in Scripture that are difficult, cannot be admitted historically but may be accepted in a spiritual significance.<sup>52</sup>

Origen calls the three divine Persons "the three days eternally subsisting together."<sup>53</sup> "He also made an express reference to the paschal triduum, but behind all things, he probably wished to suggest the three primordial days."<sup>54</sup> There are six days because six is a perfect number.<sup>55</sup>

Origen is conscious of the problem of a day without the sun:

Now what man of intelligence will believe that the first, and the second, and the third day, and the evening and the morning existed without the sun, moon, and stars?<sup>56</sup>

He argues against those who think the last judgment takes place in time, saying that they have not understood the speed of God's power. The God

<sup>45</sup> Celsus *On the True Doctrine* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1987) 103.

<sup>46</sup> Origen *c. Cels.* 6.50-51 (ANF, 4. 596).

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* 6.60 (ANF, 4. 600-601).

<sup>48</sup> Origen *c. Cels.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1953) 367 n. 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 6.49, 50, 60; *de Princ.* 4.3.1.

<sup>50</sup> Athanasius *Orat.* 2.48-49 (NPNF, 4. 374-375).

<sup>51</sup> Augustine *de Genesi ad Litterum*.

<sup>52</sup> Origen *de Princ.* 4.1.16 (ANF, 4. 365).

<sup>53</sup> Origen *Comm. in Mt.* 12.20.

<sup>54</sup> Danielou, *Theology* 112 n. 77.

<sup>55</sup> Origen *de Princ.* 4.2.5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 4.3.1.

who made the world did not need time to make the mighty creation of heaven and earth and all that is in them. "For, though He may seem to have made these things in six days, there is need of understanding to comprehend in what sense the words 'in six days' are said, on account of this, 'This is the book. . .'"<sup>57</sup> Origen makes the six days a figure of the time that men work on earth, and he makes the seventh day to be that in which they feast with God in contemplation of God and with the assembly of the righteous.<sup>58</sup>

The days of creation were the occasion of number speculation in Christian writers. Jerome advances the idea that the reason why God did not pronounce the work of the second day to be good is that there is something essentially evil in the number two. Augustine has God finish all his works in six days because six is a perfect number.<sup>59</sup>

With Augustine (A.D. 354-420) also there are multiple meanings in Scripture.<sup>60</sup> The idea of creation intrigued him, and he kept coming back to it in *The Confessions* (A.D. 397-401), *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (401-415), and *The City of God* (413-426). By the literal meaning Augustine means that which happened as contrasted with the allegorical meaning, which tells what that event foreshadows. He does not deny that deeds and words narrated can have an allegorical meaning also. By his literal meaning he was attempting to explain what he thought the author was trying to say about God and the world.<sup>61</sup>

For Augustine, time is a creature that began with creation and not before creation.<sup>62</sup> Before creation time did not exist. Creation was not in time but was "in the beginning"—that is, by the Son who is the beginning.<sup>63</sup> He understood Gen 2:4 to read: "When day was made, God made (*in die quo fecit*) heaven and earth and every green thing of the field."<sup>64</sup> That day that Scripture reckons as "one day" was different from ordinary days, and Augustine was seeking to discover its true nature.<sup>65</sup> By his understanding of Gen 2:4 he deduced a simultaneous creation of all things, which was confirmed to his mind by his understanding of Sir 18:1 (which he repeatedly cited). The RSV renders the passage "He who lives forever created the whole universe." But the Greek, which Augustine read only poorly, has *ektisen ta panta koinē*, and Augustine read it in Latin as *creavit omni simul* ("created all simultaneously"). For him, creation had no temporal duration:

<sup>57</sup> Gen 2:4; Origen *Comm. in Mt.* 14.9 (ANF, 10. 500).

<sup>58</sup> Origen c. *Cels.* 6.61.

<sup>59</sup> A. D. White, *A History of the Warfare of Science with Theology* (New York: D. Appleton, 1897), 1. 6-7.

<sup>60</sup> Augustine *Christ. Doc.* 3.27(38); *Conf.* 12.31(42).

<sup>61</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* (ACW, 41; New York: Newman, 1982) 9-12.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 5.12 (ACW, 41. 154).

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 1.9 (ACW, 41. 23); cf. John 8:25.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 5.3 (ACW, 41. 147); cf. 6.1 (ACW, 41. 177).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* 5.4 (ACW, 41. 148).



Without any interval of time Thou didst form its formlessness. . . . The form of the world Thou hast formed of formless matter; both however at the same time, so that the form should follow the matter with no interval of delay.<sup>66</sup>

There existed no interval of time between the various days.

Augustine asks whether everything was created simultaneously or was created at different times on appointed days. Believing that there is no contradiction in Scripture he has everything created simultaneously,<sup>67</sup> but only potentially, not in their present or proper substances. All things were not created in the same way, however. Some things, such as matter and the human soul, God created in themselves; others he created virtually in invisible germs, almost as "the seed of seeds." It is on these that the progressive development of the universe depends.<sup>68</sup> Given proper conditions of earth and moisture, that which was created produces the living creatures intended by God. In their final form they are not a new creation<sup>69</sup> but are controlled by the providence of God. They were made before they appeared above the earth and before they sprang forth on earth.

Augustine rejects the idea that things were created in seed to spring forth as seeds ordinarily do because the text says, "Let the earth bring forth." All the plants and trees had already been made in the first creation. God then ceased creating but, working still, he moved and governed that which he created. The first work was done without any intervals of time intervening, but this last work is written in the course of time.<sup>70</sup> Time begins in the Genesis narrative at this point (Gen 2:6): "A spring (*RSV* mist) rose out of the earth and watered all the face of the earth."<sup>71</sup> Augustine's doctrine of development left him open to be claimed as a predecessor in thought of evolutionary systems.<sup>72</sup>

Augustine, however, is explicit that if we consider that God now makes a creature without having implanted its kind in his original creation, we contradict Scripture. It is in accordance with those kinds of creatures that God first made that he makes new things. "We cannot believe that he establishes a new kind, since He finished all His works on the sixth day."<sup>73</sup> Augustine is explicit that God creates no new creatures.<sup>74</sup>

Augustine says of the six days: "What kind of days these were it is extremely difficult or perhaps impossible for us to conceive, and how much more to say!"<sup>75</sup> He contends that they are to be understood in some

<sup>66</sup> Augustine *Conf.* 12.48 (NPNF, 1. 206).

<sup>67</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 4.34; 5.35; 6.4, 11 (ACW, 41. 125, 168, 180, 185).

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 5.22, 40-45 (ACW, 41. 159, 171-175); 6.6, 10, 18, 29 (ACW, 41. 181, 184, 190, 199); *de Trin.* 3.8, 13-19 (NPNF, 3. 60-63).

<sup>69</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 5.41 (ACW, 41. 171).

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.* 5.27 (ACW, 41. 162).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* 5.27 (ACW, 41. 163).

<sup>72</sup> See the bibliographical note in Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 220-221.

<sup>73</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 5.40 (ACW, 41. 171).

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 5.45 (ACW, 41. 176).

<sup>75</sup> Augustine *City of God* 11.6.

other way than as literal days defined by the circuit of the sun.<sup>76</sup> He knows that the framework of six days might seem to imply intervals of time,<sup>77</sup> but he rejects this interpretation:

The first day created knew the whole array of creatures arranged in hierarchical order. Through this knowledge creation was revealed to it as if in six steps called days, and thus was unfolded all that was created; but in reality there was only one day. That day knew creation first in the Creator and then in the creatures themselves; yet it remained not in them, but directing this latter knowledge to the love of God, it brought about in all the works of creation an evening, a morning, and a midday, not involving any intervals of time but rather an order in creation.<sup>78</sup>

The days are not to be taken as succeeding one another in time. The contrast is not between solar days of twenty-four hours and unlimited aeons or ages. Time is not involved at all. He repeatedly states that we should not think of the days as solar days.<sup>79</sup> The things made are not disposed in an order based on intervals of time but on causal connections. Their perfection is shown by the sixfold repetition of "day" in the creation narrative.

Augustine understands the creation of heavens in Gen 1:1 to describe the formation of angels in formless condition and the statement "Let there be light" to describe their enlightenment.<sup>80</sup> The heavenly bodies were made before they appeared above the earth and before they sprang forth on earth.<sup>81</sup>

In Genesis, after the presentation of the creation as a whole, the parts are described in order according to the mystical number of the days.<sup>82</sup> Augustine plays with the number six, finding it to be a perfect number because it is two times three. "God perfected his works in six days because six is a perfect number."<sup>83</sup> Augustine speculates that the six days, rather than being like days we now know, "occurred in a form unfamiliar to us as intrinsic principles within things created." The first three days are recorded and numbered before the creation of the heavenly bodies.<sup>84</sup>

"Day" is different from an ordinary day and is not to be taken in the sense of our day in its ordinary meaning. Augustine reasons that day must have the same sense in the sixth and seventh days that it has in the first three.<sup>85</sup> Our days only recall the days of creation without being in any reality similar to them.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 4.43 (ACW, 41. 134).

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 5.19 (ACW, 41. 157).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 5.5 (ACW, 41. 155).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 5.12 (ACW, 41. 154).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* (ACW, 41. 256 n. 23); see 1.15.17 (ACW, 41. 27-29).

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.* 5.12 (ACW, 41. 154).

<sup>82</sup> Augustine *City of God* 11.33.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 4.14 (ACW, 41. 111).

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* 4.33 (ACW, 41. 125).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* 4.43 (ACW, 41. 134).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.* 4.44 (ACW, 41. 135).

The six days are parts of the whole creation revealed to the angels. They represent progressive revelation of creative activity to the angelic nature.<sup>87</sup> The angelic nature that Augustine calls "day" is the first creation produced,<sup>88</sup> and the second is the firmament with which the world began.<sup>89</sup>

Augustine argues that all things were created simultaneously but contends at the same time that God simultaneously created one day that was seven times repeated.<sup>90</sup> The reason for the six days is "that those who cannot understand the meaning of the text 'He created all things together' [Sir 18:1] cannot arrive at the meaning of Scripture unless the narrative proceeds slowly step by step."<sup>91</sup> Augustine affirms that both statements are true.<sup>92</sup> It happened all at once and yet in sequence.

The sixfold or sevenfold repetition of that "one day" took place, however, without lapse of time. Augustine says that the one who could not understand the nature of the days he is describing (of whom I admit that I am one) should leave the matter for the consideration of those who can.<sup>93</sup>

He contends that day, evening and morning at creation took place in the spiritual power of the minds of angels.<sup>94</sup> He notices the problem of having evening and morning for three days before the appearance of the heavenly bodies and states:

What kind of light that was, and by what periodic movement it was made evening and morning, is beyond the reach of our senses; neither can we understand how it was, and yet must unhesitatingly believe it.<sup>95</sup>

He proceeds to allegorize the return of morning into a return to praise and love of the Creator. In the allegory each of the days, then, becomes a state of knowledge.

The day, according to Augustine's interpretation, is the society of angelic spirits, whose minds are illuminated to see creatures before their creation.<sup>96</sup> Light is understood to be the angels to whom God gave a knowledge of other creatures.

From the fact that the seventh day does not mention evening and morning as the other days have, Augustine allegorizes that the Lord has sanctified the seventh day to an everlasting continuance. In this feature Genesis announced the rest in the Sabbath of eternal life.<sup>97</sup>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid. 5.5 n. 15 (ACW, 41. 155, 256).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. (ACW 41. 152).

<sup>89</sup> C. J. O'Toole, *The Philosophy of Creation in the Writings of St. Augustine* (Washington: Catholic University, 1944) 50; W. A. Christian, "The Creation of the World," *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine* (ed. R. Battenhouse; New York: Oxford University, 1955) 318-319.

<sup>90</sup> Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 5.2 (ACW, 41. 142).

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 4.52 (ACW, 41. 142).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 5.5 (ACW, 41. 150).

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 4.49 (ACW, 41. 139).

<sup>95</sup> Augustine *City of God* 11.7.

<sup>96</sup> See Augustine *Lit. Gen.* 4.22, 39 (ACW, 41. 129-130), and note to 5.36 n. 58 (ACW, 41. 169).

<sup>97</sup> Augustine *Conf.* 13.51.

According to F. E. Robbins, Augustine found disciples in Angelomus, a monk of Luxeuil (c. A.D. 855),<sup>98</sup> and still later in Arnoldus of Chartres (c. 1160), who explains the days as the order in which the world was unfolded to Adam.<sup>99</sup>

## V. LITERAL INTERPRETATION

While the allegorists were stringing out their multiple meanings of Scripture, the school of Antioch was contending for literal interpretation. That spirit reflects itself in the treatment of creation that comes from many areas.

The Syrian fathers, as reflected in a Syriac manuscript in the Mingana collection,<sup>100</sup> considering evening and morning (Gen 1:5) true measures of time though the luminaries had not been created, deduced that darkness was created first and lasted twelve hours and that then light was created, lasted twelve hours and was called day. Scripture says "one day" rather than "first day" in order "that it should not be thought that just as we know the days now, even so they were formed in the first instance." At that time there was no other of which this one was to be the first.<sup>101</sup>

Ephrem (A.D. 303-373) follows in his commentaries a literal-historical exegetical method similar to that of the school of Antioch, but he is allegorical and mystical in his hymns and sermons.<sup>102</sup> Opposing the Arians and using a totally Christological interpretation, Ephrem expounds the work of Christ in creation who, according to him, is addressed in the "let us" of Genesis. The six days that were created give testimony to the six sides of the universe. The Son, addressed in "let it bring forth," laid out and planted the earth. The hymn *De Nativitate* surveys the days of creation as the seven days are called upon one by one to praise the Son who is Creator and Savior. The fourth day supplies the two lights "that fools worship." Creation of light is the beginning of victory over darkness:

On the first day of the creative week the light won its victory and was exalted in illustration of the Son. The six days, one after the other, drew night unto it and crowned it.

In Ephrem's analogy the three days are compared to the three years the true light (Jesus) served. The fourth day on which the sun was created is compared to the four gospels where "our Sun" shone forth. The first day of the week in which light overcame darkness is compared to the Savior and his victory.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>98</sup> Robbins, *Hexaemeral* 93.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 94.

<sup>100</sup> A. Levene, *The Early Syrian Fathers on Genesis* (London: Taylor's Foreign, 1951).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 73, 131-132.

<sup>102</sup> F. Cayre, *A Manual of Patrology and History of Theology* (Paris: Desclee, 1935), 1. 380.

<sup>103</sup> T. Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1-11 in the Genuine Hymns of Ephrem the Syrian* (Lund: Gleerup, 1978) 39-43.

In Ephrem's *Hymns on the Nativity* 19<sup>104</sup> he makes the days of the celebration of the nativity to be after the types of the days of creation.

*The Cave of Treasures*, an apocryphal book in Syriac attributed to Ephrem, is thought not to be earlier than the sixth century in its present form. The book contains a day-by-day survey of the seven days of creation.<sup>105</sup>

Ishō Bar Nūn (b. A.D. 743) in his selected questions on the Pentateuch assigns the creation of some things to the day and some to the night over the time of the six days. Man is created at the beginning of the daytime of the sixth day. Darkness was created first to refute the heresy of those who would say that light was created first. At the beginning of the first day God created a diffused light, but at the beginning of the night of the fourth day of the week he commanded that the luminaries come into existence.<sup>106</sup> Eusebius Emessenus (d. c. 360) is said to have written on the Hexaemeron (six days of creation) "to the letter," without allegory.<sup>107</sup>

According to Eusebius, Rhodo, a disciple of Tatian in the second century, wrote *On the Hexaemeron* against Marcion<sup>108</sup> in a work no longer extant. Eusebius also mentions works of Candidus and of Apion.<sup>109</sup> Hippolytus of Rome also wrote on this same topic.<sup>110</sup> The fragments of Hippolytus that survive have him comment on the expression "one day" in which he took "day" to refer to the name of light and "one" to show "that it returns on its orbit, and, while it remains one, makes up the week."<sup>111</sup> The idea is similar to that already expressed by Philo of Alexandria. On the first day God made what he made out of nothing, but on the other days he molded what he had made on the first day.

Victorinus of Pettau (d. A.D. 304), the first exegete to write in Latin, asserts in his treatise *On the Creation of the World* that the light of creation was divided from the night "in the exact measure of twelve hours." It brought a rest for man's labors but then tempered that rest by the return of the day. Labor and rest alternate with each other. Victorinus assembles lists of four items in explaining mystically why the great lights came on the fourth day, connecting that day with the custom of fasting. He also has the Lord attribute to each of the seven days a thousand years, with Christ and his saints reigning in the seventh thousand. He finds mystical significance in the accumulated list of seven items as well as in other numbers.<sup>112</sup>

<sup>104</sup> NPNF, 13. 261-262.

<sup>105</sup> E. A. W. Budge, *The Book of the Cave of Treasures* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1927) 43-55.

<sup>106</sup> *The Selected Questions of Isho Bar Nun on the Pentateuch* (ed. E. G. Clarke; Leiden: Brill, 1962) 19-21.

<sup>107</sup> Robbins, *Hexaemeral* 97.

<sup>108</sup> Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.13.8; Jerome *De Vir. Ill.* 37 (NPNF, 3. 371).

<sup>109</sup> Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 5.27.1; Jerome *De Vir. Ill.* 48 (NPNF, 3. 372).

<sup>110</sup> Eusebius *Hist. eccl.* 6.22; Jerome *De Vir. Ill.* 61 (NPNF, 3. 375).

<sup>111</sup> ANF, 5. 163.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 7. 341-343.

Works on the six days became a type of literature of its own in the Church. Eustathius of Antioch, who spoke at the Council of Nicaea in 325, rejects Origen's allegorical exegesis because it deprives Scripture of its historical character. Some Syriac fragments of his homilies remain, but his *Commentarius in Hexaemeron* is not authentic.<sup>113</sup> The Hexaemeron theme stimulated homilies of Basil (c. A.D. 370<sup>114</sup>), a work by Gregory of Nyssa (*In Hexaemeron*<sup>115</sup>), one of Ambrose<sup>116</sup> and one of Severian of Gabala (d. c. 408<sup>117</sup>). Severian did six homilies on the Hexaemeron that came down under Chrysostom's name.<sup>118</sup> He applies a literal interpretation to the OT. Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) in his *Commentary on Genesis* covers Genesis 1-3 and avoids the use of allegorical interpretation as much as possible.<sup>119</sup>

Basil (A.D. 329-379) makes clear that he is not interested in the allegorical interpretation of Genesis. He says, "When I hear the word grass, I understand that grass is meant. . . . I take it all in a literal sense. . . . Therefore, let it be understood as it has been written."<sup>120</sup> About the allegorization of water in Genesis 1 he says, "Dismissing such explanations as dream interpretations and old wives' tales, let us consider water as water."<sup>121</sup> In his homilies on the six days he calls the condition of the world before the creation darkness rather than night. Time began at the moment the heavens and earth were laid down. The world came into existence instantaneously.<sup>122</sup>

Basil rejects the explanation that contends that the making of the firmament, etc., is a mere elaboration of the creating of the heavens and earth of Gen 1:1.<sup>123</sup> The making of the firmament is different from the heavens made at the beginning. He affirms: "Day and night were created once for all, and from that time even to the present moment they have not ceased succeeding each other and dividing the time into two equal parts."<sup>124</sup>

The light was not at first according to the solar motion, but the first created light was diffused and again drawn in according to the measure of God that day came and night succeeded. "Evening and morning" means the space of a day and a night. Basil then launches into a consideration of why the text says "one day" instead of "the first day." Twenty-four hours fill up the interval of one day without regard to how much is day and how

<sup>113</sup> J. Quasten, *Patrology: The Golden Age of Greek Literature* (Westminster: Spectrum, 1960), 3. 303-304.

<sup>114</sup> FC, 46.

<sup>115</sup> PG, 44. 62-124.

<sup>116</sup> FC, 42. 3-283.

<sup>117</sup> PG, 56. 429-500.

<sup>118</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 3. 485.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 3. 403; see also R. Devreese, "Anciens commentateurs grecs de l'Octateuque," *RB* 45 (1936) 364-384; *ST* 141 (1948) 5-25; *DBSup*, 1. 1102-1105.

<sup>120</sup> Basil *Hom. on Hex.* 9.1 (FC, 46. 135-136) (Quasten, *Patrology*, 3. 217).

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 3.9 (FC, 46. 52).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid. 1.6 (FC, 46. 10-11).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid. 3.13 (FC, 46. 41-42).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 4.2 (FC, 46. 57).

much is night. One day recurring seven times completes a week, returning to its starting place. Eternity always turns back to itself and is never brought to an end, and so "one day" is used that it might have kinship with eternity. Basil finds the eighth day outside the seven as a day without end, which points our thoughts to a future life because it lies outside this week of time. "One day" is an image of eternal life.<sup>125</sup>

Basil comments that the sun and moon are not for making days but for ruling the days. Day and night are earlier than the generation of the luminaries.<sup>126</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa completed the homilies of his brother Basil on his study *On the Creation of Man* (*De opificio hominis*). In the beginning of the treatise he summarizes briefly the work of the days of creation prior to Gen 1:26, which is his main center of interest.<sup>127</sup> Gregory also wrote *Explicatio apologetica in Hexaemeron*<sup>128</sup> in which he asserts that he never distorted the literal sense of the Bible into figurative allegory. According to Quasten, however, he delights in seeking and finding an allegorical meaning beneath every word.<sup>129</sup>

Influenced by Basil, Ambrose after A.D. 388 in discussing the six days of creation includes the time of both day and night in the word "day," having Scripture to call it day because day is the more important element of the two. Also noting the unusual form "one day," Ambrose speaks of a day of twenty-four hours in length. "God created day and night at the same time. Since that time, day and night continue their daily succession and renewal."<sup>130</sup> When there is one revolution of time there is one day. He also knows of seven times turning back on itself. The everlasting day of eternal reward is to be one in which there is no intermission of day and night.<sup>131</sup> It is "one day" rather than "the first day" because on it the foundation of things was laid, and it is not to be compared to the others.<sup>132</sup> Ambrose makes the light of day (Gen 1:4-5) one thing and that of the sun and moon another. The sun adds brilliance to the light of day.<sup>133</sup> The great lights are to fix the days and years.<sup>134</sup> He rejects the idea that Gen 1:1 is a summary of the acts that follow.<sup>135</sup> He accepts the allegorical interpretation as "a single adornment" to the treatise but does not see it absurd to take "water" as water.<sup>136</sup>

Chrysostom (A.D. 347-407) in his *Homilies on Genesis* explains that the creation of the sun on the fourth day rather than earlier was so that

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 2.8 (FC, 46. 33-35).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid. 6.8 (FC, 46. 97).

<sup>127</sup> NPNF, 5. 387-427.

<sup>128</sup> PG, 44. 61-124.

<sup>129</sup> Quasten, *Patrology*, 3. 263-264.

<sup>130</sup> Ambrose *Hexameron* 3.8 (FC, 42. 72).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid. 1.36-38 (FC, 42. 41-43).

<sup>132</sup> Ibid. 2.2 (FC, 42. 46).

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. 4.8 (FC, 42. 132).

<sup>134</sup> Ibid. 4.24 (FC, 42. 148).

<sup>135</sup> Ibid. 2.8 (FC, 42. 51-52).

<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 2.17 (FC, 42. 62).

one would not think the sun is the cause of the day. There were three days before the sun and three nights before the moon so that the pagans would not think the sun and moon created day and night.<sup>137</sup> Elsewhere he asks: "Did you see the whole of creation made in those five days merely by word and command?"<sup>138</sup> Commenting on Gen 1:5 he remarks:

Everyone in his right mind can understand this, how from that time till this the light has not surpassed its limits, nor has darkness exceeded its due order, resulting in confusion and disruption. . . . Then, when he had assigned to each its own name, he linked the two together in the words, "Evening came, and morning came, one day." He made a point of speaking of the end of the day and of the end of the night as one, so as to grasp a certain order and sequence in visible things and avoid any impression of confusion.<sup>139</sup>

Athanasius (296–373), like others of his day, believed that the world was created instantaneously and at the same time had extended through six days.<sup>140</sup>

According to White, Hilary of Poitiers (d. 367) offered as a solution to the problem of instantaneous creation and creation in six days the following:

For, although according to Moses there is an appearance of regular order in the fixing of the firmament, the laying bare of the dry land, the gathering together of the waters, the formation of the heavenly bodies, and the arising of living things from land and water, yet the creation of the heavens, earth, and other elements is seen to be the work of a single moment.<sup>141</sup>

Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in the last of the fifth century explains that the light of the sun was without form during the first three days and that afterwards, on the fourth day, it received its form.<sup>142</sup>

Venerable Bede in England (A.D. 673–735) influenced much later thought. He turned his back on the allegory of Augustine. Bede did a work on the *Hexaemeron*<sup>143</sup> in which he gives the literal and moral meanings of each verse separately.<sup>144</sup> Spurious commentaries on the works of six days are printed in PL 93:207–263.<sup>145</sup>

Martin of Brada (d. 579) in his treatise *De correctione rusticorum*, which has the form of a letter to Bishop Polemius, gives a survey of world history from the creation. He surveys the seven days of creation: "The single light, which was made first in the works of God, revolved seven times to distinguish the works of God and was called the week."<sup>146</sup> He argues that the separation of light from darkness came at the equinox of March 25 where the two have the same number of hours.

<sup>137</sup> Chrysostom *Hom. on Gen.* 6.14 (FC, 74. 85).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* 8.4 (FC, 74. 107).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.* 3.10–11 (FC, 74. 44).

<sup>140</sup> Athanasius *Orat.* 2.48–49 (NPNF, 4. 374–375) (White, *History*, 1. 6).

<sup>141</sup> Hilary *de Trin.* 12.40 (White, *History*, 1. 7).

<sup>142</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius *de Div. Nom.* 4.4 (PG, 3. 700).

<sup>143</sup> PL, 91. 14–40, 189–202.

<sup>144</sup> Cayre, *Manual*, 2. 275.

<sup>145</sup> Robbins, *Hexaemeral* 95.

<sup>146</sup> Martin of Brada *de correctione rusticorum* chap. 9 (FC, 62. 75–76).



The point of instantaneous creation and creation in six days continued to be discussed into the twelfth century, and Peter Lombard<sup>147</sup> and Hugh of St. Victor<sup>148</sup> give support to the idea that creation was instantaneous but still was in six days, each of which was made up of evening and morning.<sup>149</sup> Thomas Aquinas taught that God created the substance of things in a moment but gave six days to the work of separating, shaping and adorning this creation.<sup>150</sup> Luther believed in six days but then tried to show that by a great miracle the whole creation was also instantaneous.<sup>151</sup> Melancthon saw it in a mysterious way created both in an instant and in six days, citing "He spoke and they were made."<sup>152</sup>

## VI. RABBINIC INTERPRETATION

Rather than reflecting one uniform opinion, rabbinic literature is the record of continuing differences of views in which the contentions of individual scholars are recorded. Judaism never demanded a uniform belief as to the manner of creation.<sup>153</sup> Various homilies, often touched off by unusual forms in the text, are spun out on the details of the creation narrative with various things assigned to various days. Some rabbis like R. Judah b. R. Simon, stressing the expression "there was evening and morning," contend that time, though a created thing, is older than the world.<sup>154</sup> R. Abahu deduces from the "one day" (Gen 1:5) that God created worlds and destroyed them before the present world. Others have time among the things created on the first day.

In the Amoraic period R. Judah transmits in the name of Rab the opinion that ten things, including light and darkness and the measure of day and night, were created on the "one day."<sup>155</sup> Earlier in the Tannaitic period R. Judah had said, "The world was created in six days, for in the account of each day it is written, 'and it was so.'"<sup>156</sup>

The rabbis had God create a primeval light not dependent on the sun that came into existence at God's command but was later withdrawn and stored up for the righteous in the messianic future.<sup>157</sup> Linguistically they compare the "one day" of Genesis, starting at night, with the prohibition of killing a cow and her young on "one day" (Lev 22:[28]27).<sup>158</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Peter Lombard *Sententia* 2.15.5.

<sup>148</sup> Hugh of St. Victor *de Sacramentis* 1.1.

<sup>149</sup> White, *History*, 1. 7.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 1. 7-8; Aquinas *Summa Theologica* q. 84, arts. 1-2.

<sup>151</sup> White, *History*, 1. 8.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> H. Halperin, *Rashi and the Christian Scholars* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1963) 43.

<sup>154</sup> *Gen. Rab.* 3:7; *Qoh. Rab.* 3:11.

<sup>155</sup> *b. Haq.* 12a.

<sup>156</sup> E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1975), 1. 192.

<sup>157</sup> *b. Haq.* 12a; *Gen. Rab.* 3:6; 42:3.

<sup>158</sup> *b. Hul.* 83a.

According to R. Tanhum "one day" was the day in which the unique things heaven, earth and light were created.<sup>159</sup> R. Samuel b. Ammi, however, rejects the temporal implication of the expression in favor of its suggesting the Lord's desire to be harmonious ("one") with mankind.<sup>160</sup>

In explaining the sequence of numbers of the days R. Nehemiah says, "They were like those who gather figs, when each appears in its own time"—that is, the generations were created with the heavens and the earth but each was completed only on the day assigned to it. The sun and moon were created the first day but were not fixed in their places until the fourth. Instead of there being seven days there were really only three, since the luminaries were only created on the fourth day.<sup>161</sup> R. Simeon b. R. Abba says in Johanan's name that what was created in the first six days of creation needs further preparation to be fit for use.<sup>162</sup>

From the fact that the definite article is used with the numeral "sixth" (Gen 1:31) in the Hebrew text but is not used with the previous numbers R. Simon deduces: "There came a weakening of the Creation: hitherto world time was counted, but henceforth we count it by a different reckoning."<sup>163</sup> It was deduced that each day was provided with a force peculiar to itself.<sup>164</sup>

Commenting on Exod 20:11, "for six days (*kî šeššet yāmîm*) the Lord made the heaven," R. Bahya says that it is reasonable to infer that the Lord made the six days and they were included in the creation, thus indicating that time was created.<sup>165</sup> The English text of Exod 20:11 follows the LXX (*en gar hex hēmerais*; cf. *Vg sex enim diebus*) which has supplied the preposition "in" (*en*).

A lady asked R. Jose b. Halafta in how many days the Holy One created his world and was told "six." To her question of what the Lord was doing since that time, he replied that the Lord matches pairs in marriage and enriches some and impoverishes others.<sup>166</sup> Another midrash has the Sabbath given to Israel to commemorate the Lord's making heaven and earth in six days.<sup>167</sup>

## VII. THE MIDDLE AGES

The Jewish commentator Rashi (A.D. 1040-1105) has everything created on the first day, which is named "one day" to show that the Almighty was one in his world and the angels were not created until the

<sup>159</sup> *Gen. Rab.* 3:8.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.* 3:9.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.* 3:6.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.* 42:3.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 9:14.

<sup>164</sup> M. M. Kasher, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* (New York: American Biblical Encyclopedia Society, 1953), 9. 172.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* 9. 201.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.* 9. 172.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*

second day (1:5). Having been created on the first day, each created thing came upon its fixed place on the day God appointed it (1:14). In other words, on the fourth day God ordered the sun and moon to be suspended in the heavens (1:14). Each served twelve hours and together covered the whole day. Rashi understands Gen 2:4 to teach that all were created on the first day.

Maimonides (A.D. 1135-1204) rejects the idea that time existed before creation<sup>168</sup> and accepts that time was created.<sup>169</sup> Accepting the contention of those sages who argued that the direct-object sign *’et* of Gen 1:1, used with both heaven and earth, means “together with,” he accepts the idea that all things were created together but were separated from each other successively. The simultaneous creation was also implied in “I call unto them, they stand up together,” which seems to be a free quotation from Ps 148:4-6. The lights created on the first day were fixed in their places only on the fourth.<sup>170</sup> The statement that the work of the second day was good is missing in Genesis because the nature of the firmament of that day is hidden. The firmament was not a primary object in the organization of the universe.<sup>171</sup> One of the reasons for Sabbath observance is the rest of God after the six days of creation as stated in Exod 20:11. It confirms the theory of creation.<sup>172</sup>

The question of simultaneous creation and creation in six days continued to be discussed and to perplex people through the Middle Ages. Augustine had allegorized the days to have no temporal significance, but Bede had interpreted them as six literal days. Hugh of St. Victor had the typical compromise in which God created all things together but afterward in the six days distinguished them in form. For God to work in stages was in no sense unworthy of his omnipotence. *Simul* (Sir 18:1) means only that the visible and invisible worlds were created together at the same instant.<sup>173</sup>

Andrew of St. Victor (c. 1147), disciple of Hugh, rejects the whole argument by evaluating Genesis as ranking in first place as a source of information on the topic. A later authority like the anonymous author of Ecclesiasticus (called “Wisdom” by Andrew) with his *simul* cannot call Genesis into question.<sup>174</sup>

Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1225-1274) in the *Summa Theologica*,<sup>175</sup> a part of which is the “Treatise on the Work of the Six Days,” considers many philosophical questions connected with creation. Nothing absolutely new was made by God after the six days but was in some sense included in the work of the six days. “The words ‘one day’ are used when the day is first

<sup>168</sup> *Guide* 2:30.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 2:13.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.* 2:30.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* 2:31.

<sup>173</sup> B. Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1952) 133.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* 133-134.

<sup>175</sup> T. Aquinas, *Basic Writings* (2 vols.; ed. A. G. Pegis; New York: Random House, 1945).

established, to denote that one day is made up of twenty-four hours. Hence, by mentioning 'one,' the measure of a natural day is fixed."<sup>176</sup> There is a succession both of time and in things produced. They are seven distinct days and not one only.<sup>177</sup>

The general division of time into day and night took place on the first day, as regards the diurnal movement, which is common to the whole heavens and may be understood to have begun on that first day. But the particular distinctions of days and seasons and years, according as one day is hotter than another, one season than another, and one year than another, are due to certain peculiar movements of the stars; and these movements may have had their beginning on the fourth day.<sup>178</sup>

Aquinas agrees with Pseudo-Dionysius<sup>179</sup>

that the light of the first day was the sun's light, formless as yet, being already solar substance, and possessing illuminative power in a general way to which was afterwards added the special and determinative power required to produce determinative effects.<sup>180</sup>

Aquinas contends:

We hold, then, that the movement of the heavens is twofold. Of those movements, one is common to the entire heaven, and is the cause of day and night. This, as it seems, had its beginning on the first day. The other varies in proportion as it affects various bodies, and by its variations is the cause of the succession of days, months, and years. Thus it is that in the account of the first day the distinction between day and night alone is mentioned; for this distinction was brought about by the common movement of the heavens. The further distinction into successive days, seasons, and years recorded as begun on the fourth day, in the words "let them be for seasons, and days and years," is due to particular movement.<sup>181</sup>

### VIII. THE REFORMATION

Martin Luther in commenting on Genesis finds Moses, in the term "evening and morning," speaking of the natural day that consists of twenty-four hours, "during which the *primum mobile* revolves from east to west."<sup>182</sup> In comparable literalness John Calvin comments:

Here the error of those is manifestly refuted, who maintain that the world was made in a moment. For it is too violent a cavil to contend that Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction. Let us rather conclude that God himself

<sup>176</sup> Aquinas *Summa Theologica* q. 74, art. 3.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. q. 74, art. 2.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid. q. 70, art. 2.

<sup>179</sup> Pseudo-Dionysius *de Div. nom.* 4.4 (PG, 3. 700).

<sup>180</sup> Aquinas *Summa Theologica* q. 67, art. 4.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> M. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1-5* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1. 48.

took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.<sup>183</sup>

He further states:

With the same view Moses relates that the work of creation was accomplished not in one moment, but in six days. By this statement we are drawn away from fiction to the one God who thus divided his work into six days, that we may have no reluctance to devote our whole lives to the contemplation of it.<sup>184</sup>

Guillaume Salluste DuBartas (b. 1544) wrote a book entitled *Premiere semaine* in which he held to a literal interpretation of creation.<sup>185</sup> Francisco Suarez (1548-1617), in *Tractatus de opere sex dierum, seu de universi creatione, etc.*, believed that the six days were natural days and that living things and vegetables were created in their species at first.<sup>186</sup>

Early creedal statements of belief affirm faith in God the maker of heaven and earth without reference to days of creation. The Irish Articles of Religion, however, in 1615 states: "In the beginning of time, when no creature had any being, God, by his word alone, in the space of six days, created all things."<sup>187</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) asserts:

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness, in the beginning, to create or make of nothing [*ex nihilo*] the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible, in the space of six days [*intra sex dierum spatium*], and all very good.<sup>188</sup>

## IX. THE MODERN PERIOD

With the rise of the natural sciences, people began to yield to the millions of years that some conjectured. R. Obadiah, about 1698, from Ps 90:4 deduced that a day of creation might be a thousand years.<sup>189</sup> According to Davis' *Dictionary of the Bible*, Thomas Chalmers in 1804 declared that "the writings of Moses do not fit the antiquity of the globe," and in 1813 in his *Evidences of Christianity* projected that many ages elapsed between Gen 1:1 and the others commencing at Gen 1:2.<sup>190</sup> This "gap theory" had earlier been advocated by Episcopius (1586-1643) but was later taken up by G. W. Pember (1876) and was designed to harmonize Genesis and the claims of geology. Among common people in the English-speaking world this theory was popularized by the notes of the *Scofield*

<sup>183</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint ed.), 1. 78.

<sup>184</sup> J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (London: James Clark, 1951), 1. 142.

<sup>185</sup> Robbins, *Hexaemeral* 96.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* 102-103.

<sup>187</sup> P. Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1919), 3. 529.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.* 3. 611.

<sup>189</sup> Kasher, *Encyclopedia*, 1. 204a.

<sup>190</sup> J. D. Davis, "Creation," in *A Dictionary of the Bible* (4th rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1960) 152-153.

*Reference Bible* and by Harry Rimmer (*Modern Science and the Genesis Record*, 1937).

The gap theory postulates that Gen 1:1 describes an original creation, to which the fossils belong, carried out at an undatable time. This creation then was destroyed in some catastrophe, and Gen 1:2-2:4 describes the re-creation in six literal days. The *New Scofield Bible*, while still suggesting the theory in a note to Isa 45:18, is considerably less dogmatic in notes to Genesis about the theory's solving all problems of the science-Bible conflict than was the older *Scofield Reference Bible*. Perhaps the secret is revealed in comments of E. Schuyler English, chairman of the editorial committee:

The days of creation might have been days of twenty-four hours each or they could have been aeons in duration. (Among earnest Christians both views are held.)<sup>191</sup>

The editorial board did not want to alienate either side.

Searching critiques of the gap theory are to be found in the writings of O. T. Allis, P. J. Wiseman and B. Ramm.<sup>192</sup>

In 1856 Hugh Miller in *Testimony of the Rocks* interpreted the six days (as Georges Cuvier of Paris had already done in 1798 in the preliminary discourse to his *Ossements Fossiles*) as being six geological ages. O. Zöckler points out that the day-age equivalence was first made by some of the antideistic apologists of the latter eighteenth century and then was taken up by Cuvier, the founder of modern paleontology. He was followed by a large number of both theologians and scientists, among others J. D. Dana, F. de Rougemont, G. P. Pianciani, Delitzsch, Gultler, Secohi and Pesnel.<sup>193</sup> This theory attempts to supply both the time and the sequence of development needed to harmonize Scripture with the claims of geology.<sup>194</sup> The question at issue in the discussion may be no better summarized than in the words used by John Skinner:

The interpretation of *yom* as *aeon* . . . is opposed to the plain sense of the passage, and has no warrant in Hebrew usage (not even in Ps. 90:4). . . . If the writer had had aeons in his mind, he would hardly have missed the opportunity of stating how many millenniums each embraced.<sup>195</sup>

Yet another nonliteral way of dealing with the six days is that of the revelation-day or pictorial-day theory, which argues that the creation was

<sup>191</sup> E. S. English, *A Companion to the New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University, 1972) 50.

<sup>192</sup> O. T. Allis, *God Spoke by Moses* (London/Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1951) 153-159; P. J. Wiseman, *Creation Revealed in Six Days* (London/Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1948) 23-27; B. Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 195-210.

<sup>193</sup> O. Zöckler, "Creation," in *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (ed. S. M. Jackson; Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint 1952), 3. 303.

<sup>194</sup> An examination and critique is in Wiseman, *Creation* 19-23; Ramm, *Christian View* 211-218.

<sup>195</sup> J. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (ICC; 2d ed.; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1930) 21.

not done in six days but was revealed in six days.<sup>196</sup> The revelation-day theory arises out of a conviction that the purpose of the creation narrative is to teach not science but theology. Its advocates contend that one should not seek scientific data from Genesis. The narrative shows the work, wisdom and power of God, affirming that the universe had its origin in God. The idea is sometimes expressed in the slogan that the purpose of the Bible is to teach not how the heavens go but how to go to heaven. The creation story refutes any sort of pantheism and idolatry and shows the divine wisdom, works and power. One learns about God from the Bible but about time, the earth and earth processes from the sciences. The advocates of the theory, convinced of the truth of the claims of geology and astronomy, have rejected the literal interpretation of Genesis but are also convinced that neither the gap theory nor the day-age theory is defensible. They seek a way to accept modern scientific theory while at the same time holding to a reasonable interpretation of Genesis. As they see it, the purpose of the days of Genesis is to communicate to man that God is creator of all; Genesis does that pictorially, not chronologically.

Not based on any linguistic evidence, this method of interpretation demands a prior commitment to a parabolic view of Biblical revelation. The text itself does not suggest such a view, but one is brought to it by harmonizing interests. Its adherents encounter difficulties in defining objectively and consistently the limits of such interpretation. Exod 20:11 talks about an earth "made," not of one "revealed," in six days.

#### X. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has been to give an historical survey of interpretation of the six days rather than to propose a definitive solution. The excesses of the allegorists of past history caution against acceptance of their methods.

Our survey shows that Bible readers have never been of one mind concerning the nature of the days of Genesis. The interpretation given has never been in isolation from the general approach to Scripture of the individual interpreter. As with many other parts of the Bible, eisegesis has been as common as exegesis.

<sup>196</sup> This theory is advocated by Wiseman, *Creation*; Ramm, *Christian View* 218-229.