

Foundations

Introduction to Foundational Insights

There are some foundational insights that are crucial to understanding the harmony between the Bible and science.

1. The breadth of possible meanings of the Hebrew word "yôm", which is usually translated in English using the word "day".
2. The point of view that is used for describing the events in Genesis 1. It is most reasonable to assume that the point of view comes from Genesis 1:2, describing when the Spirit of God "moved upon the face of the waters".
3. Some descriptions in Genesis 1 may utilize metaphor, similar to how prophecies, dreams, and parables in the Bible sometimes use metaphorical language. Such passages would be open to scientific examination only in a metaphorical way.
4. Some descriptions in Genesis 1 may be somewhat direct descriptions of the Creator. Such passages would not be open to a scientific examination.

These foundational insights are explained in more detail below.

1. The Hebrew Word Yôm



The Hebrew word yôm is used in many places throughout the Old Testament, including in Genesis 1. Vines Complete Expository Dictionary on page 55 has this to say about the word yôm.

Yôm has several meanings. The word represents the period of "daylight" as contrasted with nighttime: "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). The word denotes a period of twenty-four hours: "And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day . . ." (Gen. 39:10). Yôm can also signify a period of time of unspecified duration: "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work

which God created and made" (Gen. 2:3). In this verse, "day" refers to the entire period of God's resting from creating this universe. This "day" began after He completed the creative acts of the seventh day and extends at least to the return of Christ. Compare Gen. 2:4: "These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day [b'êyôm] that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. . . ." Here "day" refers to the entire period envisioned in the first six days of creation. Another nuance appears in Gen. 2:17, where the word represents a "point of time" or "a moment": "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day [b'êyôm] that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

and later in Vine's description of *yôm*, we have the following.

*The first biblical occurrence of *yôm* is found in Gen. 1:5: "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day." The second use introduces one of the most debated occurrences of the word, which is the duration of the days of creation. Perhaps the most frequently heard explanations are that these "days" are 24 hours long, indefinitely long (i.e., eras of time), or logical rather than temporal categories (i.e., they depict theological categories rather than periods of time)*

As scholarship continues concerning the meaning of *yôm*, several interesting points have been made that would support *yôm* being used for periods of time in Genesis 1.

In Daniel 8:26, most major translations (ESV, ASV, NASB, CEV, TNIV) translate the Hebrew word *הָעֶרֶב* (*ereb*) as evenings (note the plural) (Strongs 6153) and *וּבֹקֶר* (*boqer*) as mornings (note the plural) (Strongs 1242). These are the same word roots (see Strongs numbers) that are used in describing the evenings and mornings in Genesis 1. The fact that the words can be used for evenings and mornings (versus evening and morning) would support the interpretation of many evenings and mornings for each period of *yôm*. Another place where morning and evening are used figuratively is in Psalm 30:5. A passage where time is declared to be different in God's eyes versus man's understanding is Psalm 90:4-6. Note the mention of both years and evenings and mornings in the same context. This sentiment of Psalm 90 is echoed in 2 Peter 3:8 where with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. There are of course, a diversity of opinions on how *yôm* in Genesis 1 is to be interpreted. But we can see from these examples that a valid interpretation of *yôm* is a period of time and not just a 24 hour day.

2. The Point of View for Genesis 1

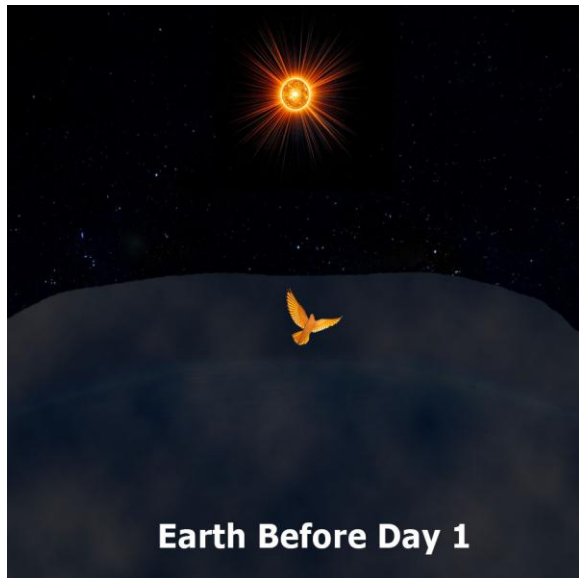


Another foundational aspect of seeing the parallel between Genesis 1 and science is to consider the point of view. The Point of View (POV) is a key concept for understanding either literature, science, or art. In science, the POV is often called a "frame of reference", which emphasizes measurable physical aspects like location, speed, or acceleration. The POV is the perspective from which the story is being told, measured, or viewed.

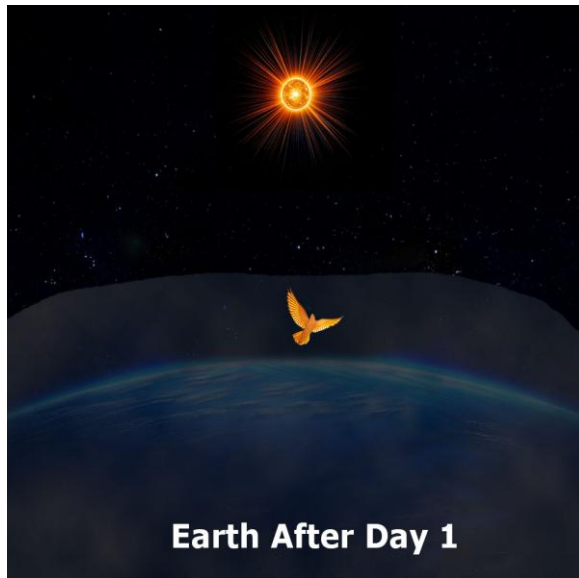
In literature, there are several standard POVs.

When a person is telling their own story, it is usually called a first person POV. "I did this" or "I saw that" would be examples of the first person POV. Examples of the second person POV are "You may think this" or "You must be feeling sad". This is less common for long narratives. The third person POV tells the story of someone or something else besides the narrator. It has subdivisions of "omniscient", "neutral", and "limited" perspectives. Examples of a third person POV are "John was a member of the Rotary Club" or "She could tell that James was eager to start the test". It helps to take the POV into account in order to have a good understanding of a story. It would certainly make sense that the Creator would use a consistent POV when telling the story of the creation of this vast and beautiful universe.

From a literary standpoint, a logical assumption would be that the story of Genesis 1 is told from a third person omniscient POV since the Spirit of God who is telling this story is omniscient. However, if we consider that Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit of God was moving over the waters of the earth, then we are given a hint that the Spirit of God is limiting itself to locations in space. This would then suggest that the narrative of Genesis 1 is being told from this limited POV of moving over the earth and telling the story of the events of creation as would be seen from near the surface of the earth. As humans we cannot have an omniscient POV and the Bible was written for humankind. So, the Creator narrating the story as it would be seen from the earth is not only consistent with Genesis 1:2 but it is also a location that would be relevant to the humans on the earth who would be reading this account.



Earth Before Day 1



Earth After Day 1



Earth After Day 4

From the Point of View near the Surface of the Earth, then the Spirit of God (Symbolized as a Dove) Would See the Sky Differently Because of Cloud Cover

It turns out that using this point of view or frame of reference of the surface of the earth is quite important for making sense of the rest of the descriptions in Genesis 1 from an Old Earth Creationism perspective. With this POV, we can avoid the common confusing approach of interpreting light to be initially created on Day/Yôm 1 or the sun, moon, and stars to be initially created on Day/Yôm 4. From the POV given in Genesis 1:2, the Spirit is witnessing the **light coming through an initially dark cloud cover on Day/Yôm 1** and the **visibility of the sun, moon, and stars through an atmosphere that is finally clear on Day/Yôm 4**. This interpretation is in harmony with our English Bible translations.

In describing the greater and lesser lights (sun and moon) and the stars of Day/Yôm 4, Genesis 1:14 uses the phrase "Let there be" in the ESV, KJV, and NIV translations and "Let lights appear" in the GNT and NLT translations. These phrases do not necessarily mean that the creation of these lights was taking place. These phrases could just as well mean that the lights *were just appearing* where they had not yet appeared. This would then correspond exactly to the sequence of events as described by science (which will be described in greater detail in the following sections). If we use a POV outside the earth (as many have done in the past) then the natural interpretation would be that the light and the sun, moon, and stars "appearing" would mean that they had just been created. But knowing that Day/Yôm 2 and Day/Yôm 3 describe events on the earth, then this would then imply that the earth was created before the stars, sun, and moon were created on Day/Yôm 4. That obviously creates some serious difficulties with the scientific and common sense viewpoint that has been accepted for centuries that the sun and stars were created before the earth. Therefore, understanding that the descriptions of the days in Genesis 1 can be seen from this POV from Genesis 1:2 of the Spirit moving over the earth is a key point in harmonizing science (and common sense) with the Bible.

3. Use of Metaphor in Genesis 1

Some passages in Genesis 1 have clear parallels to discoveries in science, such as the description in Genesis 1:1 of God creating the heavens and the earth and its parallel to the Big Bang. Other passages in Genesis 1 seem to use more metaphorical language in a way that is similar to Biblical passages found in some prophecies, dreams, and parables (Psalm 22, Daniel 2, Genesis 41, Matthew 13, Matthew 21:21).

One example from Genesis 1:5 that appears to use metaphor, from an Old Earth Creationist viewpoint, is the use of the phrase, "and the evening and the morning were the first day" (with a similar description for the second through the sixth day). From the perspective of Old Earth Creationism, this phrase can be seen as a metaphor for one phase ending and then the beginning of a new phase (morning is also used metaphorically in Job 11:17 and Psalm 49:14). It is interesting that the phrase starts with evening and ends with morning, as that would well describe the metaphorical interpretation of going from an "evening" state of mystery and disorder to a "morning" state of greater clarity and life.

4. Passages Describing Our Creator or the Creator's Assessments

There are also numerous passages in Genesis 1 that are more direct descriptions of something about the Creator. One example is Genesis 1:2 where the Spirit of God is

described as moving upon the face of the waters. Genesis 1:2 is important in describing the point of view of the story, as explained previously. Another example of a more direct description about the Creator is the passages at the end of verses Genesis 1:10, Genesis 1:18, and Genesis 1:25 that state that God saw that the creation was good. Knowing that God saw His creation as good or very good (Genesis 1:31) helps us to know the heart of God and how we should think about creation as well. But such statements cannot be examined by science as true or false.