

Categorizing Genesis 1

Using Assumptions from the Foundations Chapter

This chapter of this Big History supplement examine the text of Genesis 1 in a detailed fashion. These detailed examinations of Genesis 1 build upon the three reasonable assumptions from the Foundations chapter.

1. The Hebrew word **yôm** that is translated as **day** in English can be appropriately interpreted as a long period of time
2. The point of view or frame of reference for the events in Genesis 1 is from the perspective of an observer near the surface of the earth
3. Some of the text in Genesis 1 may be metaphorical or may directly describe some wisdom or purpose from the Creator about what has been created. Such passages are less subject to direct scientific examination. However, the remaining passages in Genesis 1 that describe specific physical events are more open to scientific examination. Those passages that *are* more open to scientific examination will receive most of our attention in the chapters of the Big History supplement.

Categorizing Genesis 1 Passages into Three Categories

Based on these three reasonable assumptions, we have created a set of tables below. In these tables, all of the passages in Genesis 1 are classified into one of **three categories**.

1. Passages that seem metaphorical. (denoted by METAPHOR in the table below)
2. Passages that seem to be declarations or assessments from the Creator and so are less subject to examination from a scientific perspective. (denoted by CREATOR in the table below)
3. Passages that seem to be more descriptive of a physical event and so can be more easily examined from a scientific perspective. From a scientific perspective, each time period could vary and could cover a relatively long period of time from a human standpoint. (denoted by SCIENCE in the tables below)

This is One of Many Possible Categorizations for Genesis 1

This is, of course, only one of many ways to categorize the passages of Genesis 1. Since the Bible was meant to be relevant throughout mankind's history and was written by a Being with intelligence that is well beyond human comprehension, it is reasonable to assume that our Creator has written Genesis 1 in such a way that there could be several valid ways

to classify passages in Genesis 1. For example, one valid approach would be to view Genesis 1 as a message to help ancient Israelites to understand how their God was different from the other gods around them. Another valid approach to understanding Genesis 1 could be as a message that shows the triumph of light over darkness, of order over chaos. Another valid message from Genesis 1 is the importance of Sabbath rest, which becomes part of the law given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Similarly, it may be valid approach in our time, given our scientifically oriented culture, to view Genesis 1 as a text that accurately describes many of the creation events over billions of years - if indeed each of those descriptions in Genesis 1 can be shown to have a corresponding scientific description. It would seem appropriate for the beyond-genius Creator of this universe to create Scripture passages that can have different perspectives as long as the messages in the overall text of the Scriptures remain consistent.

The Profundity of Harmony Between Science and Genesis 1 Physical Events

In the tables below, we identify 14 events in Genesis 1 that appear to be good candidates for describing a physical event that can be examined from a scientific perspective. For these 14 physical events from Genesis 1, two significant aspects can be noted. The first aspect is that each physical event corresponds to something that has been described by mainstream science, using appropriate assumptions (which are covered in detail in the later chapters of this supplement). The second aspect is that these 14 physical events from Genesis 1 are in the same order as described by current mainstream science, using the assumptions that are described in the chapters of this supplement. This harmony between Genesis 1 physical events and descriptions from modern science is too improbable to be coincidental. Since Genesis 1 was written over 3000 years ago then this harmony is a strong witness that the Creator is the ultimate divine author of the Bible. As mentioned throughout this supplement, this harmony between Genesis 1 and science would suggest that reading Genesis 1 from this scientific perspective would be something that our Creator would have wanted us to discover and accept for this period in our history.

Notes Concerning the Tables

In the tables below, the headings use the Hebrew word “Yôm” for “Day”, as a reminder that the original Hebrew word can have meanings besides a 24 hour day. Genesis passages utilize the New International Version (NIV) translation. This format for the table rows are as follows.

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [Scripture]		
<i>The Big Bang</i> [Science Event]	13.8 Ga [Estimated Time]	SCIENCE [Category]

Before Yôm 1 through Yôm 3

1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.		
<i>The Big Bang</i>	13.8 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #1)
1:2a Now the earth was formless and empty,		
<i>Initial accretion of dust and gas particles to form planetesimals and then the earth</i>	4.56 to 4.54 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #2)
1.2b darkness was over the surface of the deep,		
<i>Dark clouds cover a water covered planet</i>	4.4 to 4.3 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #3)
1.2c and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.		
<i>Provides a point of view or frame of reference for the rest of Genesis 1</i>		CREATOR
1:3 And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.		
<i>Cloud cover turns from opaque to translucent</i>	4.3 to 3.9 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #4)
1:4a God saw that the light was good,		
		CREATOR
1:4b – 5 and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning - the first day.		
		METAPHOR
1:6 – 8a And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water.” So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault “sky.”		
<i>Water cycle created</i>	3.8 to 3.5 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #5)
1:8b And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.		
		METAPHOR
1:9 – 1:10a And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.”		
<i>Continental landmasses appear out of oceans</i>	3.3 to 1.8 Ga	SCIENCE (EVENT #6)
1:10b And God saw that it was good.		
		CREATOR
1:11 – 12a Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds.		
<i>Plants appear on land</i>	360 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #7)
1:12b – 13 And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the third day.		
		CREATOR + METAPHOR

Yôm 4 through the Beginning of Yôm 6

1:14 – 18a And God said, “Let there be lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness.		
<i>Atmosphere becomes transparent</i>	340 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #8)
1:18b - 19 And God saw that it was good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day.		
		CREATOR + METAPHOR
1.20a And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures,		
<i>Large animals appear in oceans</i>	252 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #9)
1.20b and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.”		
<i>Appearance of birds in the sky</i>	150 to 120 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #10)
1:21 So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.		
		REPEAT of #9, 10
1:21b - 23 And God saw that it was good. God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the fifth day.		
		CREATOR + METAPHOR
1:24a And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock		
<i>Appearance of mammals that can be domesticated</i>	55.4 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #11)
1:24b the creatures that move along the ground,		
<i>Appearance of rodents and small mammals</i>	60 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #12)
1:24c and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.		
<i>Appearance of wild carnivorous animals</i>	62 Ma	SCIENCE (EVENT #13)
1:25 God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds.		
		REPEAT of #11, 12, 13
1:25b And God saw that it was good.		
		CREATOR

End of Yôm 6

1:26 - 30 Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

So God created mankind in his own image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

Appearance of homo-sapiens - modern humans.

120 to 50 ka

SCIENCE (EVENT #14)

1:31 God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning—the sixth day.

CREATOR + METAPHOR

Ga - billions of years ago (stands for giga-annum)

Ma - millions of years ago (stands for mega-annum)

ka - thousands of years ago (stands for kiloannum)

(annus is Latin for year, with annum being the plural)

(these are the recommended abbreviations for geological time scales used by most professional scientific organizations)