

Evenings and mornings

Andrew Kulikovsky

A common objection to reading Genesis 1 as simple historical narrative is the supposed impossibility of an evening and a morning for the first three days of Creation, given that the Sun was not created until Day 4. This apparent problem has caused many to see Genesis 1 not as plain history, but rather as a literary framework.¹ But is this objection valid? I do not believe so. There are, in fact, two possible and very plausible explanations.²

A temporary light source

On the first day of Creation, God created light but no light sources are mentioned. Where, then, did the light originate? What was generating it? Genesis 1:4 gives us a hint: ‘... and he [God] separated the light from the darkness.’ Compare this with verse 14: ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years ...’ It appears, then, that for the first three days, God was either directly or indirectly involved in separating the light from the darkness, which He had named ‘day’ and ‘night’ respectively (v. 5). After Day 4, however, this task was assigned to the newly created Sun and Moon.

Therefore, given that light and darkness were being separated for the first three days such that day and night existed, it is not at all unreasonable to suggest that some kind of temporary, directional light source existed up until Day 4. It is interesting to note that the rabbinical interpreters believed that God created a primeval light independent of the Sun, which was later withdrawn and stored up for the righteous in the Messianic future.³ Indeed, Revelation 21:23 and 22:5 also seem to support this view: God Himself, rather than the Sun, will somehow illuminate the New Jerusalem.

General markers of time

Rather than actually describing particular events, these terms may simply be general markers of time. As with most words, the terms ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ can have different shades of meaning depending on the context. The word ‘evening’ usually describes the short period of time when the sun is sinking below the horizon. However, it is also often used to generally describe the period of time at the end of the work day, i.e. between finishing work and going to bed. Indeed, it is during this period of time that most people have their ‘evening’ meal, yet this does not necessarily mean that they actually eat it while the sun is setting!

Similarly, ‘morning’ can refer to any time before midday, not just the short period of time when the sun is emerging from

the horizon.

This idea fits very well with the context of Genesis 1. Each day of Creation describes the activities of God on that day and is terminated by the phrase, ‘And then there was evening and then there was morning—the n^{th} day’. Thus, God worked for a period of time before finishing (marked by the term ‘evening’), and began a period of inactivity which continued until ‘morning’ when he began working again. In other words, the term ‘evening’ refers to the beginning of the period when God was inactive, and the term ‘morning’ refers to the termination of God’s inactivity and the beginning of the next day’s work.

Furthermore, note that sunset and sunrise can occur at vastly different times of the day depending on the country and the season. For example, for about a month during summer, Gällivare, in Lapland (northern Sweden) which is inside the Arctic Circle, experiences sunlight 24 hours a day. Lapland is known as the land of the ‘midnight sun’. Conversely, for about a month during winter, Gällivare experiences perpetual darkness.⁴ Sunset and sunrise never occur during these periods, so ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ in this sense never occur! But the absence of sunlight or the absence of darkness, however, does not mean that there is no concept of evening or morning (or day-time and night-time). Rather than referring to sunset and sunrise, ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ serve as simple time markers for the beginning and ending of God’s activity as described above.

In any case, the occurrence of evenings and mornings before the creation of the Sun on Day 4 provides no reason to doubt the truth of Scripture in general and the Creation account in particular.

References

1. For a detailed refutation of such views see Kulikovsky, A.S., A critique of the literary framework view of the days of Creation, *CRSQ* 37(4):237–244, 2001.
2. Other solutions have been suggested by Hugh Ross and John Sailhamer, but their interpretations are forced and stretch the text beyond breaking point. See Sarfati, J., Genesis questioned by billions of years beliefs; a review of *The Genesis Question* by Hugh Ross, *CEN Tech. J.* 13(2):22–26, 1999, and Kulikovsky, A., Unbinding the rules, a review of *Genesis Unbound* by John Sailhamer, *CEN Tech. J.* 14(3):33–38, 2000.
3. Lewis, J.P., The Days of Creation: an historical survey, *J. Evangelical Theological Society* 32(4):433–455, 1989; p. 449. Scholar Victor P. Hamilton holds to a similar view in his commentary on Genesis (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, p. 121, 1990).
4. The north and south poles experience six months of daylight and six months of darkness.

Andrew Kulikovsky is an M.A. candidate in theology at Louisiana Baptist University, and is working on a Biblical theology of creation. He holds a B.App.Sc.(Hons) in Computer and Information Science from the University of South Australia, and currently works as a software engineer for Saab Systems Australia.