

# Creation and Time: A Biblical Reflection

Thoughts on God's Ongoing Creation  
and the Six Literal Days of Genesis 1

*By Dalton D. Baldwin*

Science and the Bible seem to contradict each other regarding the time that life forms appeared on earth. Traditional Adventist biblical interpretation portrays all life forms coming into being within six days at a specific time less than ten thousand years ago. However, scientific interpretation describes life forms coming into being with increasing complexity over millions of years starting millions of years ago.

Ellen G. White summarized early Adventist convictions about the relation between God's revelation in nature and the Bible as follows: "Since the book of nature and the book of revelation bear the impress of the same master mind, they cannot but speak in harmony."<sup>1</sup> She recognized that apparent contradictions arise, but attributed them to "imperfect comprehension of either science or revelation."<sup>2</sup> She also wrote, "The book of nature and the written word shed light upon each other."<sup>3</sup>

For many years, official Adventism has blamed a faulty interpretation of scientific data for disagreement about the appearance of life forms. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has spent millions of dollars seeking scientific evidence to support a short chronology. However, the results of these expenditures in money, time, and effort have not convinced many scientifically competent Adventists. In a questionnaire sent to college science teachers in the North American Division, for example, less than half of 121 teachers affirmed the traditional Adventist position.<sup>4</sup> Many Adventist young people have found the scientific interpretation more convincing and some have responded by abandoning their beliefs in creation and the inspiration of the Bible.

Adventists need to develop an understanding that supports belief in creation and the inspiration of the Bible. If contradictions arise from a faulty interpretation of either science or the Bible, and if science and the Bible throw light on each other, it might be helpful to reexamine our interpretation of the biblical material. This article is an effort to reinterpret the time factor in the Bible's creation statements.

The first major section of this article cites a number of statements in the Bible in which temporal expressions are related to creation. These statements will be arranged in three groups. First are those that refer to six days in relation to creation. Next are statements that appear to place creation about four thousand years before

Christ. The third group of statements includes a number of biblical passages in which creation is depicted as ongoing.

The second major section of this article discusses the contradiction between the concepts of creation within six days six thousand years ago and creation as an ongoing process. Reasons are offered that support treatment of the six days as having symbolic significance and interpretation of the Bible as portraying an ongoing creation.

### Survey of Time Statements Six-Day Duration of Creation

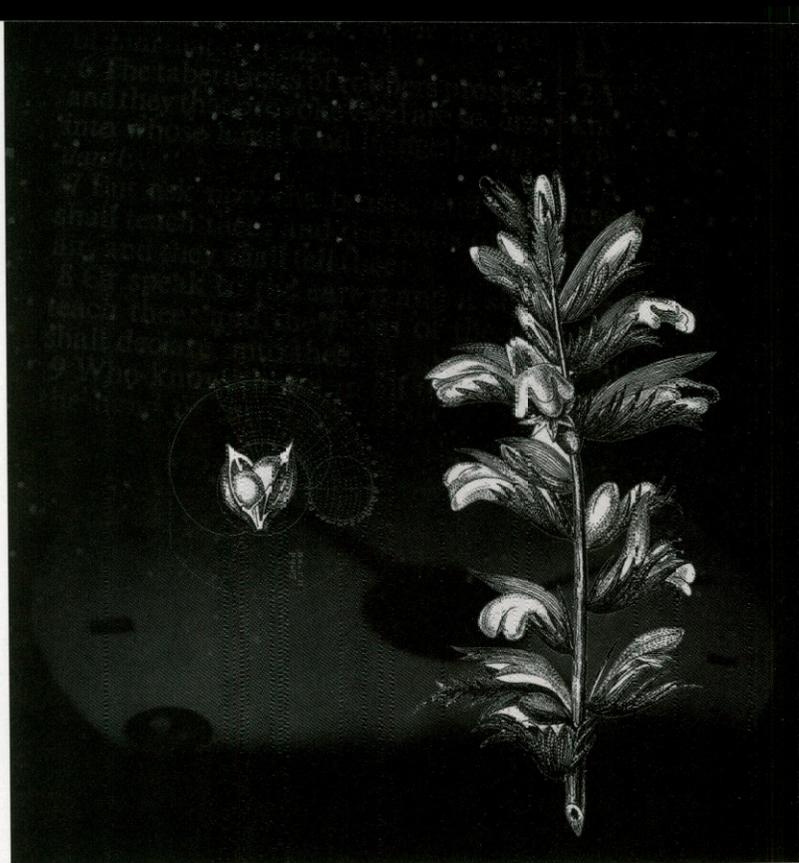
Three sections of the Bible refer to six days of creation events. The first appears in Genesis 1:1–2:3. The passage emphasizes the day as a unit of time by closing the description of creative activity on each day with a formula that refers to evening and morning and the number of the day. The account says that at the end of the sixth day everything in heaven and earth was completed. This carefully structured creation story is a masterpiece of biblical literature.

The fourth commandment in the Exodus version of the Ten Commandments contains the second description of six days of creation activity. "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it" (Exod. 20:11).<sup>5</sup>

The third description appears at the end of a collection of statements about the Sabbath: "It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed" (Exod. 31:17).

### The Beginning of Creation

The Bible does not contain a chronology that explicitly tells when creation began. The Hebrew word *adam* means humanity. The creation story in the first chapter of Genesis uses *adam* to refer to both male and female humans. Genesis 3:20 reports that the man



named his wife Eve, but it contains no statement about the name of the first male human. The Hebrews frequently used meaningful words as names. Genesis 5 uses this word, *adam*, which means human, as the name of the first person in the genealogical list of patriarchs. Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656) concluded that this *adam* was the first man, whose creation is portrayed in Genesis 1. Ussher added the age of "Adam" at the birth of Seth to the age of each of the patriarchs when their sons were born and arrived at the approximate date of 4000 B.C. for the creation of the first humans.

### Ongoing Creation

Outside the Pentateuch, the Old Testament describes creation as ongoing. Those who believe that Moses wrote the six-day creation story and that the remainder of the Old Testament was written centuries later usually interpret ongoing creation metaphorically and symbolically. A metaphor uses a word or expression, which previously had a known, literal meaning, to convey a different meaning in a new context. In contrast, most biblical scholars believe the passages that describe ongoing creation were actually written earlier than those that describe creation occurring within a single week. If the concept of creation was understood as an ongoing process, these words were actually used to express divine creation and should not

be considered metaphors. To understand what these words meant in their own context let us first analyze a representative sample of expressions in these passages about time in relation to creation.

## Ongoing Creation of Humans

A number of biblical statements describe God creating a human when that particular human came into being. For example, the call of Jeremiah refers to God creating him in his mother's womb: "Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations'" (Jer. 1:4-5). The Hebrew word translated here as "formed" is the same word used in Genesis 2:7, where God "formed" the first man from the dust of the ground.

Job speaks about himself being created by God. "Your hands fashioned and made me; and now you turn and destroy me. Remember that you fashioned me like clay; and will you turn me to dust again? Did you not pour me out like milk and curdle me like cheese? You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews" (Job 10:8-11). The word translated as "made" in the eighth verse is *asah*, also used in the fourth commandment, which says that "in six days the LORD *made* heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them" (Exod. 20:11).

We can infer from Job's rhetorical question that God creates every human in the womb. "Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15). The word translated here as "made" is again the Hebrew word *asah*.

One of the psalmists also refers to this ongoing creation of himself. "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:13-14).

Ecclesiastes also suggests ongoing creation: "Just as you do not know how the breath comes to the bones in the mother's womb, so you do not know the work of God, who makes everything" (Eccles. 11:5).

When sons and daughters of Israel were taken

captive, a redemptive return was promised to "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made" (Isa. 43:7). The word translated here as "created" is *bara*, the word used in Genesis 1:1. God's future ongoing creation would produce each one of these individuals, who would later be made a captive and then redeemed from captivity.

## Ongoing Creation of Life

Job uses *asah*, the word that refers to creation in the fourth commandment, to describe God's ongoing creation of all life:

But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
the birds of the air, and they will tell you  
ask the plants of the earth, and they will teach you;  
and the fish of the sea will declare to you.  
Who among all these does not know  
that the hand of the LORD has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every living thing  
and the breath of every human being.

(Job 12:7-10)

The creative power of Yaweh has *done* this. He creates life in every living thing.

Isaiah uses *bara*, the word that describes creation in Genesis 1:1, to refer to the creation of heaven and earth, and then describes the ongoing creation of life in humans. "This is what God the LORD says—he who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, who gives breath to its people, and life to those who walk on it" (Isa. 42:5 NIV).

Mitchell Dahood, the author of the three-volume commentary on the Psalms in the *Anchor Bible*, dates Psalm 104 before the composition of the Genesis 1 creation story.<sup>6</sup> This particular psalm is recognized as a hymn to God the Creator. In it, there are references



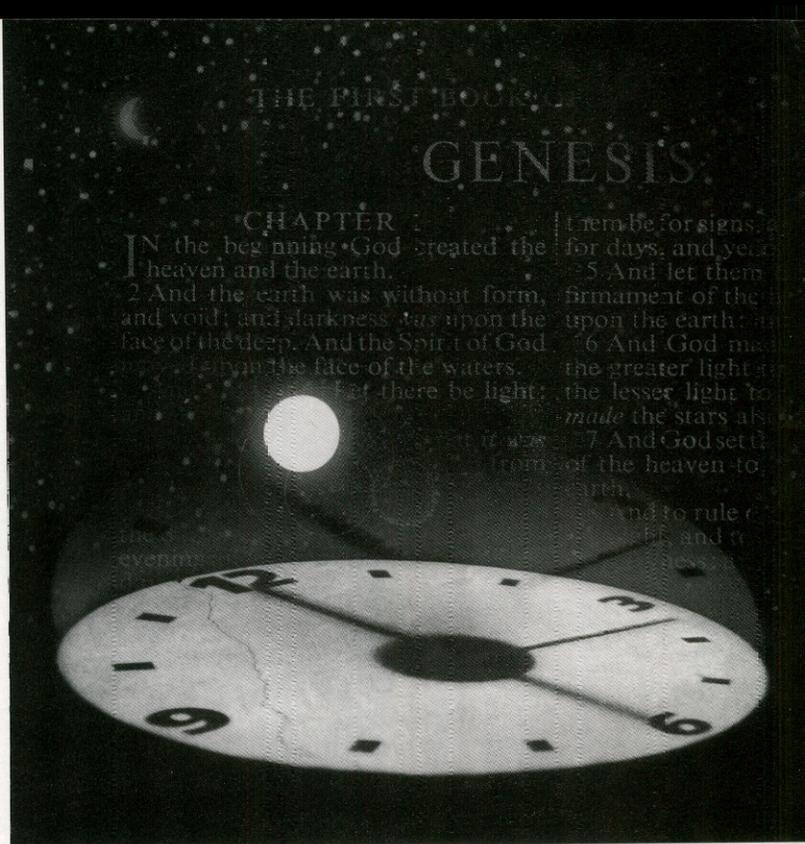
to the eight creation actions, which are later condensed into the six days of the creation week.<sup>7</sup> The psalm mentions light, firmament, dry land, vegetation, sun, and moon in the same sequence that they appear in the first chapter of Genesis, but it contains no indication that the sequence of presentation is the chronological sequence of their coming into being. The psalm presents God's creation activity as ongoing. God causes the grass to grow for cattle, which already exist, and plants, which provide wine and bread for humans, and which are also already present (Ps. 104:14-15). One passage, which refers to death and renewal, portrays the ongoing creation of life. Referring to the creatures of air, sea, and land that have just been mentioned, the passage says:

These all look to you  
to give them their food in due season;  
when you give to them, they gather it up;  
when you open your hand, they are filled  
with good things.  
When you hide your face, they are dismayed;  
when you take away their breath they die  
and return to their dust.  
When you send forth your spirit,  
they are created;  
and you renew the face of the ground.  
(Ps. 104:27-30)

"Created" in the next to last line translates *bara*, which is used in Genesis 1:1. Ongoing renewal parallels the Hebrew term for "created." This renewal is creation. This passage seems to say that each creature comes into being and stays alive as long as God's ongoing creation in it continues, but it ceases to live when God discontinues his creative activity.

### Problematic Conflict in Time

When we attempt to interpret the Bible in regard to the relation of time to creation, we have a problem. On the one hand, some passages seem to limit creation to six days at a specific time less than ten thousand years ago. On the other hand, the Bible describes creation as



constantly ongoing. How should we respond?

One solution is to acknowledge a conflict, then take the position that the relationship of time to creation is unimportant as long as we affirm creation itself. This approach allows us to decide not to interpret what the Bible says on the subject of time and creation. Most of us deal in this way with chronological conflicts between various Gospel accounts of the cock crowing and Peter's denial. Whether Peter denied three times before the cock crowed twice, as in Mark 14:30, 72, or three times before the cock crowed, as in Matthew 26:34, 74-75, and Luke 22:34, 60-61, is inconsequential.

However, ignoring all time statements about creation is not very helpful because creation is a divine act in time and its temporality is important for human response to it. Furthermore, we cannot ignore time statements about creation because so many people have interpreted the Bible to teach that creation began less than ten thousand years ago and continued for six days. In short, the doctrine of creation is commonly understood to include this time element. Thus, when science presents convincing evidence that life appeared millions of years ago and that it evolved with increasing complexity over millions of years, some people either reject science with hostility or abandon their belief in creation and the inspired authority of the Bible.

A second possible solution regards both positions as literally true because the Bible is inerrant in all its parts. Harold Lindsell, longtime editor of *Christianity Today*, takes this approach to the chronology of

Peter's denial. He combines the accounts of the three gospels and claims no conflict exists if the cock crowed twice and Peter denied his master six times. "The first crowing of the cock would occur after the first three denials and the second crowing of the cock would occur after the sixth denial."<sup>8</sup> This type of solution is so ridiculous that it also leads many to abandon their belief in the inspiration of the Bible.

A third possible solution has often been used in the past. It treats the six days of the creation story and the years of Genesis 5 and 11 as chronological history. This solution interprets the chronological feature of biblical statements that portray ongoing, originating, divine activity as metaphorical references to creation. Metaphorically, creation goes on, and literal creation occurred in six days at a specific time less than ten thousand years ago.

This third solution is problematic because the earliest biblical statements about creation refer to it as ongoing. If the original basic understanding considered creation in this manner, these earliest statements would not refer to creation metaphorically. Most biblical scholars hold that all of the references to six days of creation came into being very late. They come to this conclusion because of evidence largely present in the Bible itself.

However, saying that the first chapter of Genesis was written long after Psalm 104 threatens those who from their earliest years have had assurance in their hearts that Moses wrote the Pentateuch and that the prophets and the Psalms were written centuries later. Time and space do not permit discussion of evidence in support of dating these texts at a time later than often believed, but it should be noted that a powerful conviction exists among some that faith requires us not to engage in historical investigation about the date and authorship of various parts of biblical writings.

If this is true, we should not engage in historical investigation about the development of Scripture, and Ellen White made a terrible mistake when she referred to its development and explained how errors from human tradition have crept into the text.<sup>9</sup> We need to reexamine our views about the value of historical investigation into the authorship, time, and historical

setting of various parts of Scripture, and then reexamine the evidence for the late date of references to a six-day creation.

A fourth possible solution to the conflict between ongoing creation and a six-day creation more recent than ten thousand years ago would treat the six days and the years of Genesis 5 and 11 as symbolic and understand God as constantly acting to create and save.

### Reasons for Symbolic Interpretation

For a number of reasons, we should not treat the years of Genesis 5 and 11 and the days of the week in Genesis 1 as chronological history.

In 1979, Sigfried Horn, chair of the Old Testament Department and, later, dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, read a paper at Loma Linda that asked the question, "Can the Bible Establish the Age of the Earth?" His answer was, "No!" He held that no biblical chronology exists before Abraham and argued that the number of years mentioned in Genesis 5 and 11 are part of a genealogy and should not be viewed as chronological history.<sup>10</sup>

Why don't the "years" in the genealogical lists present chronological history? Analysis of ancient Middle Eastern genealogical lists shows that they were often written to establish the legitimacy and authority of the most recent person mentioned. The name of the first king in the Babylonian list of kings, which contains ten names, means "man." A great flood occurs at the time of the tenth king. Each king in the list reigns for thousands of years. Perhaps these inflated years were designed to enhance authority, but they are certainly useless for chronology. The years symbolize authority and should not be considered chronological history.

The Genesis 5 patriarchal list seems to be influenced by the same tradition. The list begins with the



name *adam*, which also means “man.” The list claims that each patriarch lived hundreds of years. Genesis 6:3 portrays the ordinary life span as 120 years. The average life span of the nine patriarchs excluding Enoch is 912 years. This figure represents an average of 792 more years than the ordinary life span at that time. This inflated life span no doubt symbolizes the legitimacy and authority of Abraham and of God’s chosen people. Furthermore, the flood occurs during the life of Noah, the tenth patriarch.

Using the “years” in the Genesis lists as chronological history, Archbishop Ussher dated the flood at about 2348 B.C. and creation at about 4000 B.C.. Writing civilizations existed in Egypt and Babylon in 3000 B.C., a date confirmed by astronomical data calculated in recent years. This civilization already existed more than 650 years before Ussher’s date for the flood, yet there is no evidence of flood disturbance in the mounds that contain archaeological remains related to this civilization. In the tells below these remains, other, progressively more primitive archaeological ruins can be found through chalcolithic, neolithic, paleolithic, and hunter-gatherer times. Beneath the hunter-gatherer remains are limestone formations that geoscience paleobiologists agree contain remains of living organisms.

Once while attending one of Sigfried Horn’s classes, I became concerned about his orthodoxy and asked how much time this accumulation of archaeological artifacts represented. He evaded the question by answering that he was not a paleontologist. However, he had been hinting that these data show the development of this civilization to have taken a long, long time.

An analysis of the pattern of numbers in the list offers further evidence that the “years” in the Genesis 5 and 11 lists represent symbolic rather than chronological history. If the numbers actually portray historical chronology, they would exhibit a random pattern, but the years in the list are actually schematic.<sup>11</sup> Many of the periods are divisible by five and forty.

Differences between the number of years in the Masoretic Hebrew text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint furnish more evidence that the numbers do not actually reflect chronological history. The Masoretic text has six of the patriarchs living one

hundred years less before the birth of their sons than the same patriarchs listed in the Septuagint. Copyists who either added or subtracted one hundred years from each of these patriarchs must have felt free to make such changes because they knew they were not dealing with chronological history.

Textual critics say the most difficult reading is probably the original from which changes are made. The earliest Septuagint list has Methuselah living fourteen years after the flood. Perhaps the Septuagint list represents the earliest tradition. Later Septuagint and Hebrew manuscripts increase the number of years that Methuselah lived before the birth of his son by twenty years to correct this problem. Perhaps those responsible for the Masoretic tradition subtracted one hundred years from each of the six patriarchs out of discomfort over so much exaggeration.

Sigfried Horn was correct: The “years” mentioned in the genealogical lists in Genesis 5 and 11 do not portray chronological history. We should treat them as symbols for the authority and legitimacy of Abraham and of Israel as God’s chosen people.

### Symbolic “Days” of the Creation Week

A number of Adventist scholars, who hold an elevated view of Scripture, have revised the chronology for the creation of light, firmament, land, sun, and moon for scientific reasons. They believe that the sun, moon, stars, and earth with its atmosphere were created on or before the first day of the creation week, in contrast to Genesis 1:14–19, which portrays the sun, moon, and stars coming into being on the fourth day—after the earth’s creation. If these scholars are correct, we can conclude that the time elements of the first chapter of Genesis do not comprise part of a chronological history of actions by God that brought the heavens and earth into being. If these days are not chronological history, they must have some symbolic function.

Frank Marsh, first director of the Seventh-day Adventist Geoscience Research Institute, held that God created the entire solar system on the first day of creation week. Marsh suggested that light appearing on the first day came from the sun, which was not visible through the fog. By making this suggestion, he

solved the problem of explaining the presence of light before its source existed. According to him, on the second day the sun warmed the air near the surface of the earth enough to form a “clear space” between the water on the surface of the earth and the dense clouds above. The high clouds prevented an observer on earth from seeing the sun, moon, and stars. However, they appeared to a surface observer on the fourth day, when the dense upper layer of clouds cleared.<sup>12</sup> By holding that God created the sun on the first day rather than the fourth, Marsh solved the problem of how the earth remained in orbit without the sun’s gravitational pull. However, by doing so, he denied the strictly chronological character of the account.

Rue E. Hoen, for many years chair of the chemistry department at Pacific Union College, took the position that the solar system existed before the first day of creation week. Time calculations would not have been possible for surface observers before the first day because a dense layer of clouds enveloped the earth in total darkness. On the first day, the atmosphere cleared enough so that light, evening, and morning became apparent to an observer on the earth.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Brown, the third director of the Geoscience Research Institute, has written about “the last 4.5 billion years of which discrete entities of the Solar System have been in existence.”<sup>14</sup> He has held that radiometric dating and other evidence shows the sun, moon and stars to have been in existence for billions of years. Brown has pointed out that the impact of small particles in the solar wind have eroded the oldest craters on the moon.

Marsh, Hoen, Brown, and other Adventist scholars have suggested changes in understanding about the creation of the firmament, sun, moon, and stars on the basis of scientific evidence known today but unknown when Genesis was written. Making these changes in the chronology of creation solves a number of problems in the Genesis 1 account.

Light is no longer created before the sun, the source of light. Vegetation, which needs sunlight, comes into existence after the sun. A landmass, which experiences evenings and mornings, is no longer created before a sun exists to provide gravitational orbit and light on one side of a rotating sphere, which produces evenings before mornings.

Of course, these writers would deny changing temporal aspects of the creation account. They would interpret the temporal element as referring to the time such aspects appeared to an observer on the earth’s surface. However, interpretation that changes “let there be lights” into “let an observer be able to see the lights” actually does revise the chronology of the sun and moon’s creation.

At the time Genesis 1 was written, features that are problems for us would have not been problems for the writer or readers. People of that time envisioned the world as a flat disk covered with a solid dome, or firmament, which separated a vast upper sea from another sea under the earth. This dome also provided space for the sun and moon to pass overhead. This dome “proclaims” God’s handiwork, his engineering genius, and provides a “tabernacle” under which the sun, like a “strong man,” runs its “circuit” from horizon to horizon (Ps. 19:1-5 KJV).

At the beginning everything is a deep mass of water, it would be logical to create such a dome to hold the waters above the dome away from the waters beneath it. This dome would logically precede the creation of the sun and moon, which would then have a space through which to pass.

Chronological problems in the Genesis 1 account are also present in a Babylonian epic that refers to creation. Alexander Heidel considers the references to creation in Enuma Elish and Genesis 1:1-2:3, so similar that they must have depended on a common tradition. He has published a table that points out the following similarities:<sup>15</sup>

Enuma Elish	Genesis
• Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal.	• Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it.
• Primeval chaos; Tiamat enveloped in darkness.	• The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep ( <i>tehom</i> ).
• Light emanating from the gods.	• Light created.
• The creation of the firmament.	• The creation of the firmament.
• The creation of dry land.	• The creation of dry land.
• The creation of the luminaries.	• The creation of the luminaries.
• The creation of man.	• The creation of man.
• The gods rest and celebrate.	• The Lord rests and sanctifies the seventh day.

Enormous differences exist between Enuma Elish and Genesis 1:1-2:3. The Babylonian story is an epic intended to explain the supremacy of the god Marduk. After a series of battles between various gods, Marduk kills Tiamat, the goddess of the deep, splits her "like a shellfish into two parts," then makes the firmament out of the upper half. The metaphorical picture of a cosmic clam shell dome inverted over the earth to prevent the upper waters of the abyss from crashing down and snuffing out life on earth corresponds to a worldview that many cultures of that period held.

A number of features in the Genesis 1 creation story correct and protest against pagan beliefs at that time. These polemic qualities of the biblical account appear even in Heide's listing of similarities.<sup>16</sup> Genesis describes a transcendent, monotheistic God creating matter; however, Enuma Elish has cosmic

saw that the Word of God, as a whole, is a perfect chain, one portion linking into and explaining another.<sup>18</sup>

Ellen White recognized three important things. First, she saw that the Bible has undergone development. Second, she recognized that in the course of that development errors from human tradition have been introduced into it. Third, she saw that if we study the Bible as a whole we can often find biblical ideas consistent with each other that will constitute an interconnected criterion by which to identify and overcome such errors.

Treating time elements of the first creation story in Genesis as symbolic should be less threatening if we notice that we have been doing this with the time elements of the second creation story, which is found in chapter two. Chapter two is not an expansion or

### "This inflated life span no doubt symbolizes the legitimacy and authority of Abraham and of God's chosen people."

matter eternally coexistent with polytheistic gods. In Genesis, God creates light and the luminaries, but in Enuma Elish, the sun and other luminaries are gods who emanate light.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps because of its polemic intent, Genesis 1 refers to greater and lesser lights rather than using the words for sun and moon, which were also names for gods.

We can quickly recognize that the idea of a solid dome firmament in the Genesis account can be explained as a product of an erroneous worldview present in the cultural tradition. No such firmament was ever created.

The example of the way Ellen White dealt with errors introduced into the Bible from human tradition is helpful. In her day, some had apparently rejected the Bible's inspiration because they thought it taught eternal misery for the wicked, as suggested in such passages as, "The smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever" (Rev. 14:10). She explained such texts as follows:

I saw that God had especially guarded the Bible; yet when copies of it were few, learned men had in some instances changed the words, thinking that they were making it more plain, when in reality they were mystifying that which was plain, by causing it to lean to their established views, which were governed by tradition. But I

elaboration of the account in chapter one, but a separate story. The first few words of Genesis 2:4, "These are the generations of," constitute a form or pattern used nine times in Genesis to introduce an account that follows.<sup>19</sup> In Genesis 1, God creates by speaking the creative word; in Genesis 2, God works as an artisan on preexisting materials.

In the creation account of Genesis 1, the temporal factor is expressed with events on each of six days. In the second account, temporal expressions that relate the various events to each other express the order of creation. When vegetation was not "yet" on the earth (2:5), God formed man out of the dust and breathed into him the breath of life, and man became a living person. Then God created vegetation for beauty and for the man's food (2:9). Announcing that he would make a helper appropriate for this lonely man (2:18), God formed animals and birds out of the ground (2:19) and presented them to the man. According to the account, after the man named the living beings there was still no partner appropriate for him. Then God created the woman. The chronological sequence of male humanity, vegetation, animals and birds, and finally Eve's creation from the man's rib after it was found that he had no mutually helpful partner among the previously created birds and animals is required to bring out the point that husband and wife are equal and mutually dependent. God inspired the imagination

to develop a story of creation that would communicate a very important truth about the relationship between male and female humanity.

The following table portrays the very different chronological order of key features of creation in the two stories:

Genesis 1	Genesis 2
1. Light	1. Male humanity
2. Firmament	
3. Dry land	
4. Vegetation	2. Vegetation
5. Greater and lesser lights and stars.	
6. Sea creatures and birds	3. Animals and birds
7. Land animals	
8. Humankind	4. Female humanity
9. Divine rest and consecration	

The writer who placed these differing creation stories next to each other certainly knew they were not historical accounts because the actions of God on preexisting materials in a different order in the second account is so different from the order of the fiat creation acts in the first. It seems that God inspired the development of the second story in a way that used the time elements symbolically to show the mutual dependence and equality of men and women.

If God's creating activity is ongoing, as shown in the many texts cited, God inspired the development of the first story to correct errors in the creation tradition represented in *Enuma Elish*. Light is not an emanation from the gods, but a creation of God. The sun and moon are not gods, but creations of God. There is no conflict between gods in creation. God does not depend on preexisting material, but creates out of nothing. Treating the time features in the first creation story as symbolic should be no more of a problem than doing so in the second creation story.

## Origin of the Sabbath

Changing the chronology of the events of creation from a duration of six days to ongoing creation for millions of years might seem to threaten confidence in the divine origins of the Sabbath as an institution. Biblical scholars point out that the Bible contains laws that prescribe work for six days and rest on the seventh day, which is a Sabbath of the Lord, known long before the composition of the creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:3. God revealed the value of the Sabbath before the truth of creation. These oldest Sabbath

laws contain no reference to creation, nor do early references to God as Creator suggest that he needs rest or takes time out. Isaiah reassured Jews in the Captivity that God as Creator works constantly to create life and salvation without becoming weary or taking time out to rest (Isa. 40:26-31). It is interesting to note that when Jesus was attacked for healing on the Sabbath, he explained that God works constantly (John 5:17). This means that God's creation of life and salvation continues twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

We might ask why God rested or desisted on the seventh day in the first creation story in Genesis. The only answer the Old Testament gives is because the seventh day is the Sabbath. The divine rest on the seventh day in Genesis 2:1-3 depends on the Sabbath. The Sabbath does not depend on six historical days of creation activity followed by one day of divine rest. Perhaps the story in Genesis 1 arranged the eight or more features of creation listed in Psalm 104 into six days of creation activity and one day of rest because existing Sabbath laws provided for six days of work followed by one day of rest, and the creation tradition, which included a solid dome firmament, described the gods resting when creation was completed.<sup>20</sup>

The older edition of the Ten Commandments provides additional evidence that the Sabbath does not depend on a literal seven-day creation week. Biblical scholarship shows that most of the material in Deuteronomy was written some time earlier than the creation story in Genesis 1:1-2:4 and the Exodus edition of the Ten Commandments. According to the fourth commandment as recorded in Deuteronomy, the reason to remember the Sabbath differs significantly from that given in the later Exodus edition. Instead of urging readers to remember the Sabbath because God created heaven and earth in seven days—as related in Exodus 20:11—Deuteronomy 5:15 says, "Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day." This different wording does not amplify explanation



of the Exodus 20 fourth commandment, but refers to the wording of the fourth commandment at the time Deuteronomy 5 was written.

The next verse after the Deuteronomy Ten Commandments says, "These words the LORD spoke with a loud voice to your whole assembly at the mountain, out of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, and he added no more. He wrote them on two stone tablets, and gave them to me" (Deut. 5:22). This statement suggests that the earlier wording of the fourth commandment connects the Sabbath with the saving liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery. The Exodus wording of the fourth commandment includes this significance when it broadens the meaning of the Sabbath to commemorate the saving liberation of all of humanity from *tohu wabohu* (formless void, Gen. 1:2).

## Summary and Conclusion

This article began with a reference to the conflict between biblical interpretation, which portrays a six-day recent creation, and scientific interpretation, which envisions long ages of development for life forms. We assumed that God's revelation in nature does not conflict with his revelation in the Bible and that when conflict seems to arise it comes from a misinterpretation—either of data from science or the Bible. The Church has spent many years seeking an interpretation of scientific data that would harmonize this conflict, but has not produced results that are very convincing to most of its scientists.

The author decided to collect a representative sample of statements throughout the Bible that deal with time in relation to creation and then reinterpret them, seeking to use the Bible as a whole as its own interpreter. In these statements, we found a conflict between a group that, taken literally, describes creation as ongoing, and another group that describes creation beginning less than ten thousand years ago and being completed in six days.

In the past, Adventists have taken the six-day creation statements as the earliest original statement of creation and, therefore, interpreted them as symbolic and metaphorical expressions of ongoing creation. However, because the earliest statements that relate time to creation express ongoing creation, they cannot be taken as metaphors. The author has offered reasons to support treatment of the statements as symbolic and metaphorical descriptions of a six-day creation.

One of the most important reasons that supports this conclusion involves the late date of the six-day creation statements. Because our community has held for years that faith requires us not to engage in historical investigation of authorship, date of writing, and historical setting of biblical material, giving a late date to the six-day creation statements is very controversial. With mutual respect for the integrity of one another, we need to discuss whether we should engage in such investigation and then examine the data that support the late date of the six-day creation statements.

This study proposes that we treat the six days of the creation story in Genesis 1 as symbolic and think of God's creative saving activity as constantly ongoing. The primary authority for this conclusion is the Bible. When we use the Bible this way, we strengthen confidence in it as inspired authority.

## Notes and References

1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1903), 128, hereafter cited as Ed.
2. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1890), 114.
3. Ed 128. I do not cite Ellen G. White here to give the impression that she would have supported my treatment of the "six days" and the "six thousand" years as symbolic. The White Estate distributes a compilation entitled "Ellen G. White Statements Touching on Geology" that contains eighteen different statements (*Spiritual Gifts*, 3:92; *Testimonies to the Church*, 2:172, 3:138, 3:492; *Spirit of Prophecy*, 2:93, 4:371; *Great Controversy*, x, 518, 552-53, 656, 659, 673; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 51; 342; *Counsels on Health*, 19; *Desire of Ages*, 413) that refer to the age of the earth as six thousand years, and fourteen statements (*Great Controversy*, vii, 328, 546; *Selected Messages*, 1:267, 269, 280, 2:88; *Review and Herald*, July 18, 1874; manuscript 14, 1897, Ellen White Estate; *Desire of Ages*, 48, 117, 652, 759) that refer to creation about four thousand years before Christ. I have found five other statements (*Signs of the Times*, May 8, 1884; *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* [Basle: Polyglotte, 1886]; 133; *Story of Jesus* [1896; reprint, Nashville, Tenn.:

Southern Publishing, 1949], 183; *Manuscript Releases* [Silver Spring, Md.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1981-93], 1:61; *Counsels to Teachers*, 467) in her writings that portray the age of the earth as six thousand years. There are also at least thirty-nine instances of these basic statements quoted in compilations and republications. She interprets the seven days of Genesis 1, Exodus 20:11, and 31:17, as literal twenty-four-hour days (*Spiritual Gifts*, 3:90-93; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 111; *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, 135-36; *Selected Messages*, 3:317). I use this statement about the book of nature and the Bible throwing light on each other to show that she treats truths from scientific investigation as valid for theological reflection. She herself used scientific evidence to revise an impression conveyed by a portion of her account of her 1863 health reform vision. She had written, "I was shown that more deaths have been caused by drug-taking than from all other causes combined" (*Spiritual Gifts*, 4:133). She had also written that "Drugs never cure disease" (*ibid.*, 134). She had classed quinine with calomel (HgCl) and strychnine as "poisonous mixtures" (*ibid.*, 139). Because of this statement and others like it, many early Adventist physicians refused to use quinine for cases of malaria. Doctor S. P. S. Edwards, practicing on the Mississippi River, found that he could not assist his patients to remove malaria plasmodia from the blood stream with hydrotherapy alone, but that hydrotherapy used together with quinine proved successful. When he told Ellen White about his experience, she approved. Later, Elder J. E. Fulton wrote to Ellen White, asking for counsel because missionaries in the South Pacific were dying because they refused to use quinine to treat malaria. She asked Edwards to describe his medical experience, then wrote across the bottom of his letter, "If quinine will save a life, use quinine. Ellen G. White." Edwards to Joe S. Haskell, Mar. 29, 1956; Edwards to F. D. Nichol, Nov. 24, 1957, both in White Document File 111-b, Heritage Room, Vernier Radcliff Library, Loma Linda University.

4. Floyd Petersen, "Science Faculty Vary in Views on Creationism," *Adventist Today* 2 (Nov./Dec. 1994): 19.

5. Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations in this article are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

6. Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms III, 101-50* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 33.

7. Light, v. 2; firmament, v. 2; dry land, v. 5; vegetation, v. 14-16; moon and sun, v. 19; air and water creatures, v. 12, 17, 25-26, 29-30; land animals, v. 11, 14, 18, 20-22; humans, v. 14-15, 23, 33-35. Richard Hammill first called this observation to my attention in a Sabbath School presentation.

8. Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1976), 175.

9. See note 18, below.

10. Sigfried H. Horn, "Can the Bible Establish the Age of the Earth," *Spectrum* 10 (Nov. 1979): 15-19.

11. Colin L. House, "The Successive, Corresponding Epochal Arrangement of the 'Chronogenealogies' of Genesis 5 and 11B in the Three Textual Traditions: LXXA, SP, and MT" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1988);

Donald E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: A Statistical Study," *Origins* 9 (1982): 30; James L. Hayward and Donald E. Casebolt, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11: A Statistical Study," *Origins* 9 (1982): 75-81.

12. Frank Lewis Marsh, *Studies in Creationism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1950), 210-18.

13. Rue E. Hoen, *The Creator and His Workshop* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1951), 17.

14. Robert H. Brown, "Geo and Cosmic Chronology," *Origins* 8 (1981): 31.

15. Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of the Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942),

109. Heidel explained that the Hebrew *tehome* is derived from the same word as the Babylonian *Tiamat*.

16. For the polemic qualities of the Genesis account, see Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81-102.

17. We have noticed that Psalms 104 influenced Genesis 1. It is interesting to note that instead of speaking about God creating light, Psalms 104:1, says of God, "You are clothed in light as with a garment." Perhaps the reason that Genesis 1:3-5 describes light being created on the first day, before the sun (which came into being on the fourth day), was the mention of light at the beginning of this psalm before the moon and sun, as discussed in Psalms 104:19. There may have also been a polemic against thinking about light as a divine emanation.

18. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (1882; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1945; 220-21).

19. Gen. 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2.

20. See the last event in Heidel's table of creation events of Enuma Elish, note 15.

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