

A Contentious Interchange with LCMS O.T. Professor Dr. David Adams

"[They examined] the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so."—Acts 17:11

Since my interpretation of the creation days in the first chapters of Genesis is a minority view in my denomination, I have obligated myself to the submission of my paper, "The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look," in order that it might receive rigorous critique. It is my personal standard to avoid all errors and all misrepresentations in my papers, and to quickly correct them wherever discovered. To fulfill this goal I went to the "experts" (approximately ten) in the fields of study that my paper addresses in order to receive their scholarly assessment. Included on this list were two professors of Old Testament, the first of which freely and effectively employs the Hebrew text to emphasize and clarify his points. I was astonished to receive his reply that he was not comfortable with addressing the Genesis creation account (even though I have encountered his comments on this area in public documents). He instead deferred me to the "'Answers in Genesis' man" on the same faculty who was also department head.

Having already received my paper for examination, what follows is a significant portion of his reply:

You asked whether I could point you to "a sustained exegetical study of Genesis 1 that argues successfully for the 24-hour day position." Frankly, since you are already committed to the view that the word 'day' in Genesis 1 is used by the author to represent some long period of time, I doubt whether any treatment of the question could possibly "argue successfully" for the view that you have already rejected. In any case, I have never made a special effort to hunt around to see whether anyone has attempted to address this issue in detail. I am unaware of any serious academic commentary on Genesis that treats the question at all for the simple reason that neither those who hold to a traditional view of Genesis 1 or those who hold to a liberal view of Genesis 1 regard this as a serious question. Both liberals and traditional conservatives know quite well that the Hebrew word 'yom' is used most of the time in Genesis 1 to refer to what we might call a 'common day'. Liberals, of course, acknowledge that while 'yom' is used in Genesis 1 to refer to a common day, the entire account is 'mythological' and therefore by definition non-historical. What you describe as the 'day-age position' is a view promoted by those who desire to find some middle ground between traditional conservatism and liberalism and do so in such a way that they can harmonize Genesis 1 to views of contemporary science about the origins of the material world. As the liberal commentator John Skinner has noted, "It is recognized by all recent harmonists that the definition of 'day' as 'geological period' is essential to their theory: it is exegetically indefensible (John Skinner, *Genesis* (ICC 1930), 5n.)". In this Skinner is right. Nothing in Genesis 1 suggests that most of the account of the creation of the material world in seven yoms should be taken to imply seven 'ages' or long periods of time, and everything in the text militates against it.

There are a handful of challenges I might offer to his letter. But it is most important here to highlight his "appeal to authority" for the express purpose of stifling a thorough investigation of the actual facts of the Hebrew text in Genesis.

I had requested a serious exegetical critique of my paper so that I might either correct or clarify my line of argument. I am a sincere seeker of the truth who is prepared to walk away from stated positions that are demonstrated to be incorrect. I was not seeking approval. Yet I was expecting a higher level of engagement with him the professor than I received. Since I had laid my cards on the table at the outset, thereby giving him an opportunity to freely challenge my position, I was anticipating a serious yet eager challenge from him. So I was surprised and disappointed that he chose to bemoan the fact that I had already taken my stance. The offering of successful counter-arguments, should he have chosen to provide them, would seem to me to have provided him an opportunity to correct me. Instead, he complained about an apparent stubbornness on my part.

In light of the total absence of a direct challenge to my specific arguments that point favorably to the day-age position on the creation days of Genesis, I am quite frankly surprised at the certitude with which he holds his position. The specific set of arguments from the original Hebrew text of the Bible that ground *my* position will be laid out in my next posting. What I find most surprising of all at this point is in the opening statement in the body of his letter, namely, *“I have never made a special effort to hunt around to see whether anyone has attempted to address this issue in detail. I am unaware of any serious academic commentary on Genesis that treats the question at all for the simple reason that neither those who hold to a traditional view of Genesis 1 or those who hold to a liberal view of Genesis 1 regard this as a serious question [sic].”*

The answer to the question of whether there are serious Hebrew scholars who embrace the day-age position on the days of Genesis cannot be legitimately determined by a prejudice that is founded on will-full ignorance. The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod has historically taken a decidedly strong young-earth position on creation. For this reason it is academically inexcusable for him to boast, *“I have never made a special effort to hunt around to see whether anyone has attempted to address this issue in detail.”* Neither his decision in advance that this is not a “serious question,” nor his candid admission that he is “unaware” of serious scholars who embrace the day-age view, can, in truth, be made to harmonize as *serious* academic inquiry. The only legitimate way to arrive at the truth of the matter is to take the trouble to investigate every side of each individual argument one-by-one, which is exactly what my paper, *“The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look”* endeavors to do.

Worse still for the professor, his assertion of a lack of scholarship supporting the day-age position is refuted on the very first page of my paper where I include a roster of top-flight Biblical scholars (adhering to the “inerrant Scripture” standard) who disagree with him. He already had my paper in front of him as of the time of our correspondence. That, despite his protest that he had already read my paper, he dismissed my listing of such as though it did not appear, renders his verdict that there is no serious scholarship supporting me, illegitimate.

It is not by weight of academic degrees that academic questions are answered, but by the level of scholastic investigation that is determined to follow the evidence wherever it actually leads.

Gary Jensen, Pastor © September 19, 2013

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