

**COMMONLY
MISUNDERSTOOD
BIBLE VERSES**

RON RHODES



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Contents

Understanding Hard Sayings	7
----------------------------------	---

The Old Testament

Genesis	15	Proverbs	88
Exodus	29	Ecclesiastes	91
Leviticus	41	Song of Solomon	94
Numbers	45	Isaiah	96
Deuteronomy	47	Jeremiah	102
Joshua	52	Lamentations	104
Judges	56	Ezekiel	105
Ruth	60	Daniel	110
1 Samuel	61	Hosea	113
2 Samuel	67	Joel	114
1 Kings	69	Amos	115
2 Kings	72	Jonah	116
1 Chronicles	73	Micah	117
2 Chronicles	74	Nahum	118
Ezra	77	Habakkuk	119
Esther	78	Haggai	120
Job	79	Malachi	121
Psalms	82		

The New Testament

Matthew	125	1 Timothy	254
Mark	160	2 Timothy	257
Luke	172	Titus	258
John	191	Philemon	261
Acts	212	Hebrews	262
Romans	218	James	267
1 Corinthians	224	1 Peter	269
2 Corinthians	232	2 Peter	274
Galatians	236	1 John	276
Ephesians	238	2 John	279
Philippians	243	3 John	280
Colossians	246	Jude	281
1 Thessalonians	250	Revelation	282
2 Thessalonians	252		
A Select Bibliography			289
Index			291

Genesis

Genesis 1—*Are the days of creation 24-hour periods or long ages?*

Many today find theological support for the idea that the days in Genesis are long periods of time. For example, in Genesis 2:4 (KJV) *day* refers to the entire time frame during which God created. In Job 20:28 *day* refers to the time of God’s wrath. In Psalm 20:1 (KJV) *day* refers to a time of trouble. Moreover, in Psalm 90:4 and 2 Peter 3:8 we are told, “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” Besides, the sun was not created until the fourth day of creation, so the first three days couldn’t have been literal 24-hour solar days.

Contrary to this position, many other Christians provide substantive arguments that the days of Genesis 1 are literal 24-hour periods:

1. The Genesis account makes reference to evening and morning, indicating that literal days are meant (Genesis 1:5).
2. Genesis tells us that God created the sun to rule the day and the moon to rule the night. This would seem to indicate that the days were literal solar days (Genesis 1:16).
3. Solar days seem to be implied in Exodus 20:11, where we are told that “in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day.”
4. Whenever a number is used with the Hebrew word for *day* (*yom*), it always refers to a literal solar day (without exception in the Old Testament). Genesis says that God created the universe in six days, so it must have meant literal solar days.
5. If Genesis had intended to communicate that God created

in long periods, a perfectly acceptable Hebrew word would have been ideal to communicate this concept: *olam*. But this word is not used. *Yom* is used, and as noted above, *yom* with a number always refers to a 24-hour day.

6. Second Peter 3:8 does not indicate that a day for God actually lasts a thousand years. Rather it says that a day is *like* a thousand years. God is above the limitations of time.
7. The Genesis account indicates that Adam was created on day six, and he then lived on through day seven and continued to live in the days that followed. If the days of Genesis were long ages, how can these many thousands of years be reconciled with the biblical statement that Adam died at age 930 (Genesis 5:5)?
8. The argument that the first three days could not have been literal days because the sun was not created until day four is not convincing. The first three days were probably the same length of time as the last four days. The exact same kinds of descriptive words are used to describe *all* the days—words like *evening* and *morning*. Some believe God created a temporary localized source of light in heaven (see Genesis 1:3) which, as the earth rotated, gave the appearance of light for the day and darkness for the night, all within a 24-hour period. God Himself could have been the light (see Revelation 21:23; 22:5).

Genesis 1—*How can the creation account be reconciled with what scientists say about the immense age of the universe?*

Scientists typically argue for the theory of uniformitarianism—the idea that the geological, biological, and astronomical processes that we now observe in our present universe operated identically in the past at the same strength and intensity. If this is correct, this would seem to indicate that millions of years would have been necessary to produce such things as fossils, volcanoes, and mountains.

Creationists suggest that one ought not to quickly assume uniformitarianism for earth's past. They suggest that the overwhelming force of a universal flood during Noah's time, combined with the rapid extermination of innumerable plants and animals, was undoubtedly a voluminous producer of thick sediments that entrapped plants and animals. The fossils formed quickly. They thus suggest that the geological column is a record of what transpired in rapid fashion during the flood, not over millions of years.

Genesis 1—*Is the creation account compatible with theistic evolution?*

Theistic evolutionists argue that God began creation and then directed and controlled the processes of evolution to produce the universe as we know it today. He allegedly entered into the process of time on occasion to modify what was developing. Most theistic evolutionists hold to the day-age theory—the idea that each of the days of Genesis refer to a long age of time.

Theistic evolutionists typically deny the historicity of Adam and Eve. They generally argue that at some point in the process of evolution, God modified an already-existing higher primate (an ape), put a soul within it, and transformed it into Adam “in the image of God.” In this view, then, God directly created the spiritual nature of humanity, but the physical nature was a product of evolution.

This view has several problems:

1. Theistic evolution makes a complete allegory out of Genesis 1–2. However, nothing in the context of Genesis indicates it is to be taken as anything less than history.
2. The suggestion that humanity is derived from a nonhuman ancestor cannot be reconciled with a correct understanding of Genesis 2:7. God created Adam's material nature from the dust of the ground. This indicates that God formed Adam from inorganic material rather than obtaining it from some previously living form (like an ape). God then breathed the breath of life into Adam.

3. Christ, as God, is all-knowing. Christ, as God, is also the Creator of the universe (see John 1:3; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2,10). Jesus the Creator affirmed that Adam was created not only in the image and likeness of God (spiritually) but also male and female (physically) (Matthew 19:4). This affirmation from Christ would be quite misleading if in fact the physical nature of man was actually derived from a higher primate that was modified.
4. The apostle Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 15:39 that “all flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.” Man was not created from an ape. Rather, humans and apes have an entirely different “flesh.” This verse cannot be made to agree with theistic evolution.

Genesis 1–2—*Were human beings or animals created first?*

Some argue that in Genesis 1 the animals are portrayed as being created before man, whereas Genesis 2 says that man was created before the animals. There is no real contradiction, however, since Genesis 2 does not affirm precisely when God created the animals. All it says is that God brought the animals to Adam so Adam might name them. The proper way to understand Genesis 2 is that God brought the animals He had formerly created to Adam so Adam could name them.

Genesis 1:1—*How could the author of Genesis know how the universe was created if he wasn't there to witness it?*

The Bible is a book of divine revelation. God Himself gave special revelation to Moses (the author of Genesis) regarding how He created the universe.

Genesis 1:14—*How could there be light prior to the appearance of the sun on the fourth day?*

This light may be totally unrelated to the sun. The universe includes

a number of sources of light, and God Himself is a source of light (Revelation 21:23; 22:5). Some Bible expositors believe the sun existed from the first day, but its light appeared on the fourth day as the mist of creation dissipated.

Genesis 1:26-27—*What does “in the image of God” mean?*

Scripture indicates that man was created in God’s image in the sense that he is a finite reflection of the infinite God in his rational nature (Colossians 3:10), in his moral nature (Ephesians 4:24), and in his dominion over creation (Genesis 1:27-28). In the same way that the moon reflects the brilliant light of the sun, so finite man—as created in God’s image—is a reflection of God in these aspects.

Genesis 1:26-27—*Why are plural pronouns used in reference to God?*

In this passage we read: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.’” The word used of God in Genesis 1:26-27 is *Elohim*, and it has a plural ending (-*im*). This is a “plural of majesty”—pointing to the majesty, dignity, and greatness of God. The plural pronouns *us* and *our* are grammatical necessities required by the plural Hebrew noun *Elohim*. In other words, the plural pronoun *us* corresponds grammatically with the plural form of the Hebrew word *Elohim*. One demands the other.

Genesis 1:26-27—*Does this passage indicate God has a physical body?*

Man is physical, and man is made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27), so does this verse mean God has a physical body? No! A fundamental interpretive principle is that Scripture interprets Scripture. John 4:24 indicates that God is Spirit. Luke 24:39 tells us that a spirit does not have flesh and bones. Man was created in God’s image in the sense that he is a finite reflection of God in his rational nature (Colossians 3:10), moral nature (Ephesians 4:24), and dominion over creation (Genesis 1:27-28).

Genesis 2:2—*Does the fact that God had to rest after six days of creation mean He is not all-powerful?*

God didn't have to rest in the sense that His physical energy had become depleted and He needed to recuperate. Rather, the Hebrew word for rest communicates the idea of ceasing from activity. Genesis 2:2 is simply saying that God completed His work of creation and then stopped. There was nothing further to do. The job was done.

Genesis 2:17—*Did Adam die the same day he sinned, as God promised?*

Genesis 5:5 says Adam lived to the age of 930 years. So, Adam did not die physically the same day he sinned. There is no real contradiction, however, since Adam and Eve did die spiritually the day they ate the fruit.

The word *death* carries the idea of separation. Physical death involves the separation of the soul or spirit from the body. Spiritual death involves the separation of the human being from God. When Adam and Eve partook of the forbidden fruit, they were immediately separated from God in a spiritual sense. Their consequent action of trying to hide from God in the Garden of Eden indicates their awareness of this spiritual separation. The moment of their sin, they became “dead...in transgressions and sins” (Ephesians 2:1-3). Their spiritual separation from God eventually led to their physical deaths.

Genesis 4:3-5—*Why did God accept Abel's offering but reject Cain's?*

The answer to this question is found in the attitude that each displayed in regard to their respective offerings. Abel gave not only the firstborn of his flock but also the choicest of the firstborn (Genesis 4:4). He gave the “best of the best” that was in his possession. By contrast, Cain brought “some of the fruits of the soil” (verse 3). One gets the feeling that Cain routinely gathered some fruit and offered it to the Lord to outwardly fulfill his obligation.

Abel's faith in God was another key factor (Hebrews 11:4). Cain, by contrast, was apparently characterized by unbelief.

Genesis 4:13-16—*What was the mark of Cain?*

This passage tells us that God put a mark on Cain so no one who encountered him would kill him. Scripture does not specify what this mark was. Scripture's omission in informing us about the nature of the mark is probably meant to point us away from the mark itself and to the graciousness of God in protecting someone who didn't deserve it. In other words, God and His graciousness are on center stage, not the mark.

Sadly, we must note that this passage has been misused in church history in a variety of ways. At one time during the Middle Ages, for example, people who called themselves Christians labeled Jews as “murderers of Christ” and forced them to wear a “mark of Cain.” What a tragic misapplication.

Genesis 4:17—*Where did Cain get his wife?*

The biblical text implies that Cain married one of his sisters. Several facts lead us to this conclusion. First, Adam and Eve had a number of children. Genesis 5:4 says, “After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.” Adam and Eve were the first man and woman, and God had commanded them (and their descendants) to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1:28), so we can reasonably conclude that Cain married one of his many sisters. He possibly could have married a niece or even a grandniece.

One must keep in mind that in the early years of the human race, no genetic defects had yet developed as a result of the fall of man. By the time of Abraham, God had not yet declared this kind of marriage to be contrary to His will (see Genesis 20:12). Laws governing incest apparently did not become enacted until the time of Moses (Leviticus 18:7-17; 20:11-12,14,17,20-21). No prohibition regarding marrying a sister (or a niece or grandniece) existed in the days of Cain.

Genesis 5—*Did people actually live for centuries in the early years of humanity?*

In Genesis 5 we read that Adam lived 930 years, Seth lived 912

years, Enosh lived 905 years, and so on. Nothing in Genesis 5 indicates this chapter is to be taken less than literally. We are left to conclude that people really did live that long during the early years of humanity. As to why this was the case, many have suggested that prior to the flood, a water canopy surrounded the earth (Genesis 1:7), and this canopy served to protect the inhabitants of earth from harmful radiation in outer space. People accordingly lived longer. Also, prior to the flood, people may primarily have been vegetarians and not meat eaters (see Genesis 9:3), and perhaps this too contributed to the longer lives. All this points to the truth of Psalm 139:14 that human beings are fearfully and wonderfully made.

Genesis 6–8—*What was the actual source of the floodwaters?*

One verse in Genesis tells us the floodwaters came from rain, while another says the floodwaters came from rain *and* the waters of the earth (Genesis 7:4; 8:2). Correctly interpreted, there is no contradiction. These verses would contradict if Genesis 7:4 said rain would be the *only* source of water, but it does not say that. Taken together, these are complementary verses.

Genesis 6–9—*Was the flood universal or local?*

The flood appears to have been universal. The waters climbed so high on the earth that “all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered” (Genesis 7:19). They rose so greatly on the earth that they “covered the mountains to a depth of more than twenty feet” (verse 20). The floodwaters prevailed for nearly 54 weeks, indicating more than just local flooding.

The Bible also says that every living thing that moved on the earth perished, “the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all mankind. Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out. . . Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark” (verses 22-23). The language of Genesis 6–9 clearly points to a universal flood.

The universal view best explains the source of the worldwide distribution of diluvia deposits. A universal flood would also explain the sudden death of many woolly mammoths frozen in Alaskan and Siberian ice. Investigation shows that these animals died suddenly by choking or drowning and not by freezing.

Genesis 6:2—*Are the “sons of God” evil angels?*

This verse tells us that “the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose.” There is much debate as to the identity of these sons of God. A common view is that some evil angels cohabited with human women. These facts support this position:

1. Some manuscripts of the Septuagint (an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament) have the phrase “angels of God” instead of “sons of God.” The early Jews understood this phrase to be referring to angels.
2. The Hebrew phrase for “sons of God” (more literally, “sons of Elohim”) always refers to angels when used elsewhere in the Old Testament (see Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7, KJV).
3. The “evil angel” interpretation of Genesis 6 may give us a clue as to why some angels are presently bound in prison and others are not (2 Peter 2:4).

Another view is that some fallen angels possessed human men. This view has the merit of providing a good explanation of how angels who are bodiless (Hebrews 1:14) and sexless (Matthew 22:30) could cohabit with human women.

Still another common interpretation is that the phrase “sons of God” refers to members of the godly line of Seth (the Redeemer’s line—Genesis 4:26) who intermingled with the godless line of Cain. Instead of remaining true to God and loyal to their spiritual heritage, they allowed themselves to be enticed by the beauty of ungodly

women who followed the tradition and example of Cain. In support of this view, God sometimes calls men His sons (Isaiah 43:6).

Genesis 6:3—*Does this verse mean man's life span is 120 years?*

In this verse the Lord affirms, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.” This is not likely to refer to man’s life span, for people later than this time lived up to 600 years. Apparently, the 120 years refers to the time God would allow before He sent the flood on humankind. God thus provided plenty of time for humans to repent before sending judgment.

Genesis 6:6—*In what sense did God repent?*

In this verse we read, “It repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (KJV). God does not repent in the human sense of turning from sin. The word *repent*, when used of God, generally refers to a change in God’s course of action due to something human beings have done. For example, God promised to judge the Ninevites, but then God changed His mind (repented) and withheld judgment after the entire city itself repented (Jonah 3:10 KJV). Many people fail to realize that God has what we might call a built-in repentance clause to His promises of judgment. This clause is found in Jeremiah 18:7-10:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

So God changes His policy toward man when He sees a change in their actions.

Genesis 6:14-17—*How could Noah's Ark hold enough animals?*

The ark was an extremely large vessel—450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. It had 1.5 million cubic feet, with three stories. It therefore had plenty of room to carry a very large body of animals.

Genesis 7:24—*Did the flood rains fall for 40 days or 150 days?*

Genesis 7:24 speaks of waters on the earth for 150 days, but other verses say 40 days (7:4,12,17). Actually, these numbers are referring to different things. The rain fell for only 40 days (7:12), but the water flooded the earth for 150 days (7:24). After the 150 days, the waters began to decrease (8:3). During the fifth month after the flood began, the ark rested on the mountains of Ararat (8:4).

Genesis 9:6—*How can capital punishment be justified in view of God's command not to murder (Exodus 20:13)?*

In Genesis 9:6 capital punishment was instituted in view of the sanctity of human life. The underlying basis for this severe punishment is the fact that man was made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Man is so valuable as an individual that anyone who tampers with his sacred right to live must face the consequences of losing his own life. The worth of the individual is so great that the highest penalty is attached to those who tamper with the life of even one man. This was true in the Old Testament, and it is true today. Murder is an outrage against God.

Certainly the death penalty was incorporated into the Mosaic code (see Exodus 21:12; Numbers 35:16-31). And in Romans 13:1-7 the apostle Paul taught that human government has a God-given right to use force in its resistance of evil and to take the life of a criminal. Second Peter 2:13 indicates that one of the purposes of government is to punish those who do evil, and capital punishment is evidently one of the ways this purpose is to be carried out.

It is true that one of the Ten Commandments says we are not to murder (Exodus 20:13). However, a murder by a citizen and an

execution by the government are two different things in Scripture. One is a premeditated crime; the other is a deserved punishment. Government is set up by God (Romans 13:1-7), so capital punishment may be viewed as the enacting of divine judgment through the instrumentality of human government.

Genesis 12:10-20—*Why did God allow Abraham to prosper by lying?*

The biblical text does not say Abraham prospered at God's hand by lying. The text reveals that Pharaoh gave Abraham material gifts probably to make amends for unwittingly taking his wife into his palace. After all, adultery was condemned by Egyptian religious law. We might also note that some of the trouble Abraham experienced in the years that ensued may have been a direct result of his failure to trust in God's protective power instead of lying.

Genesis 15:17—*Is the Bible not to be trusted since it uses unscientific language such as "the sun went down" (KJV)?*

We all know the sun does not literally go down. The earth revolves and merely gives the appearance of the sun going down. However, even modern meteorologists refer to sunrise and sunset. The Bible also uses this nonliteral language as an accepted means of communication.

Genesis 16:1-4—*Why did Abraham agree to sire a son with Hagar when Sarah was still alive?*

What Abraham did was wrong and was not sanctioned by God. In their limited understanding, however, Abraham and Sarah may have thought it was the right thing to do. One primary purpose of marriage in Abraham's day was to give birth to a son. Abraham was 85 years old and did not have one. Moreover, women during that time either attained or lost status depending on whether they had children. Such facts may have led Abraham and Sarah to conclude that perhaps a son through Hagar would solve all their problems. In this case, Hagar would essentially act as a surrogate mother who would bear a

child, after which time the child would be raised by Sarah. Of course, Scripture goes on to indicate that Hagar's offspring was not the child of promise (Genesis 17:21).

Genesis 19:8—*Was the sin of Sodom homosexuality or inhospitality?*

In this verse we read Lot's words to some wicked men regarding Lot's male visitors: "Look, I have two daughters who have never slept with a man. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do what you like with them. But don't do anything to these men, for they have come under the protection of my roof." Some have argued that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality, not homosexuality. The request of the men of the city to "know" the men in Lot's house allegedly means they wanted to get acquainted (Genesis 19:5 KJV) because the Hebrew word for *know* (*yadha*) generally has no sexual connotations whatsoever (see Psalm 139:1).

It is true that the Hebrew word *yadha* does not necessarily mean, to have sex with; nonetheless, in the present context of Sodom and Gomorrah, it clearly has this meaning. This is evident for several reasons. First, 10 of the 12 times this word is used in Genesis it refers to sexual intercourse (see Genesis 4:1,25 KJV). Second, it means to know sexually in this very chapter, for Lot refers to his two virgin daughters as not having known a man (19:8 KJV), which is an obvious sexual use of the word. Third, the meaning of a word is discovered by the context in which it is used, and the context here is definitely sexual, as is indicated by the reference to the wickedness of the city (18:20) and the virgins offered to appease their passions (19:8). Fourth, *know* cannot mean simply to get acquainted with because it is equated with wickedness (19:7).

Genesis 22:2—*Did God intend for Abraham to kill his son?*

The context of Genesis 22 makes it clear that God never intended for this command to be executed. God restrained Abraham's hand just in the nick of time: "'Do not lay a hand on the boy,' he said. 'Do

not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son'” (Genesis 22:12). Scholars agree that God was only testing Abraham’s faith. The test served to show that Abraham loved God more than he loved his own son.

Genesis 32:30—*How can this verse affirm that Jacob saw God when John 1:18 asserts that no one has seen God?*

John 1:18 affirms that no one has ever seen God in His full glory, for if that were to occur, the human being beholding God would die instantly. In Genesis 32:30, Jacob merely interacted with a *theophany*—an appearance of God that shielded His intrinsic overpowering glory. God never appeared to human beings either in the Old Testament or the New Testament in His full glory, for He is aware of our finite limitations as creatures.