

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HEBREW WORD *YOM* (DAY) (*HEMERA* – G) IN PROPHECY

General Jewish Assignments to the word “Day”

The word “day” is used in many ways in the English Bible. Understanding those, plus a few contextual rules, makes difficult interpretations vanish.

The Jews reckoned a **sacred day** from sunset to sunset. *“It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and ye shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall ye celebrate your sabbath”* (Leviticus 23:32; cf. Exodus 12:15-20, II Corinthians 11:25).

1. The daytime was originally divided into **three parts**. *“Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice”* (Psalm 55:17). In addition, the “heat of the day” was at 9:00 a.m. (I Samuel 11:11).
2. The cool of the day was just before sunset (Genesis 3:8). The nighttime (pre-captivity) was divided into **three watches**.
 - a. From sunset to midnight (Lamentations 2:29).
 - b. From midnight till the cockcrowing (Judges 7:19).
 - c. From cockcrowing to sunrise (Exodus 14:24)
3. By the New Testament times (Christ’s day) the division of the night had assumed the Greek and Roman tradition of four watches. *“Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning”* (Mark 13:35).
4. The term “hour” was introduced by Daniel (3:6, 3:15, 4:19, 5:5).¹

The Use of “Day” in Hebrew Expressions

1. Early in Biblical history “day” implied from daybreak (onset of light) to darkness (termination of light). *“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.... While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease”* (Genesis 1:5, 8:22).
2. After the exile, the day (daytime) was divided into twelve hours and the night similarly (Matthew 20:1-12) – 6:00 a.m. began the first hour.
 - a. *“Jesus answered, Are there not twelve hours in the day? If any man walk in the day, he stumbleth not, because he seeth the light of this world”* (John 11:9).

¹ *Easton Dictionary Open Sources, PowerBible Co. Version 5.4 (2007-04-16), Phil Lindner Online Publishing.*

- b. *“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night”* (Acts 23:23)
- 3. The word “day” is also used for an indefinite **period**. This is seen in the phrases “*day that*” or “*day of.*”
 - a. *“day of Yahweh”* (Isaiah 2:12)
 - b. *“day of the Lord”* (I Corinthians 5:5, I Thessalonians 5:2, II Peter 3:10)
 - c. *“day of salvation”* (II Corinthians 6:2)
 - d. *“day of Jesus Christ”* (Philippians 1:6)

An indefinite time – existence in general – Genesis 3:14: *“All the days of thy life”* (compare Genesis 21:34, Numbers 9:19, Joshua 22:3, Luke 1:24, Acts 21:10).

- 4. It is used figuratively:
 - a. A season of opportunity – John 9:4: *“I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work”* (compare Romans 13:12-13, I Thessalonians 5:5-8).
 - b. *“sons of the day”* (I Thessalonians 5:5, 8) means “spiritually enlightened ones.”
 - c. The span of human life – Genesis 5:4: *“And the days of Adam ... were eight hundred years.”* *“And if thou wilt walk ... then I will lengthen thy days”* (I Kings 3:14; compare Psalm 90:12, Isaiah 38:5).
 - d. A set time – Genesis 25:24: *“And when her days ... were fulfilled.”* Daniel 12:13: *“Thou shalt stand in thy lot, at the end of the days”* (compare Leviticus 12:5, Daniel 2:44).
 - e. Past time – Psalm 18:18: *“the day of my calamity.”* Psalm 77:5: *“I have considered the days of old”* (cf. Micah 7:20, Malachi 3:7, Matthew 23:30).
 - f. Future time – Deuteronomy 31:14: *“Thy days approach that thou must die.”* Psalm 72:7: *“In his days shall”* (compare Ezekiel 22:14, Joel 2:29, Matthew 24:19, II Peter 3:3, Revelation 9:6).
 - g. The eternal – In Daniel 7:9, 13 God is called *“the Ancient of days.”*
 - h. Time of salvation – Specially referring to the hopes and prospects of the *parousia* (see *Eschatology of the New Testament*). Romans 13:12: *“The night is far spent, and the day is at hand.”*²

The Twenty-Four-Hour Day

Much work has gone into the literal 24-hour meaning of the Creation **days**. Notable is the work of the late Gerhard F. Hasel (John Nevins Andrews Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Theology, Andrews University).³ He observes and notes that the semantic–syntactical guidelines for a **non-literal** meaning of *yom* is “always found in connection with prepositions, prepositional phrases with a verb, compound constructions, formulas, technical expressions,

² Easton Dictionary as found in Power BibleCD v5.2 [2006.11.14], Online Publishing, Inc., 128 E. Chicago St., P.O. Box 21, Bronson, MI 49028.

³ Hasel, Gerard F.; Berrien Springs, Michigan. “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘days’ or figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of time?”

genitive combinations, construct phrases, and the like. In other words, connections which indicate clearly that a non-literal meaning is intended. If such special linguistic connections are absent, the term *yom* does not have an extended, non-literal meaning; it has its normal meaning of a **literal** day of 24 hours.”⁴

In the Genesis Creation account and in the prophetic periods of 1290 days and 1335 days in Daniel 12, several observations can therefore be made:

1. The term *yom* is always joined with a number (either cardinal or ordinal).
2. The term *yom* is never combined with a preposition, genitive combination, construct state or compound construction. It appears as a simple noun.

When *yom* is joined with a number, which occurs 150 times in the Old Testament, it refers invariably to a literal day of 24 hours,⁵ except in Zechariah 14:7, which is generally accepted to be a difficult text to analyze.⁶ The “numeric qualifier” is inherent in many directives of the Jewish theocracy and historical narratives. The eighth day (*yom*) after birth, a male infant is circumcised (Genesis 17:1-14). The waters prevailed upon the earth 150 days (*yom*) (Genesis 7:24). The Day of Atonement was celebrated on the tenth day (*yom*) of the seventh month (Leviticus 23:27).

An important “numeric qualifier” is noted in Daniel 12: *“And from the time that the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety **days**. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty **days**”* (Daniel 12:11-12).

The word for “days” is plural in both instances. Some say this disqualifies the “numeric qualifier.” If that is so, why is a beatitude given to an **individual** [one person] who waits, comes through to the end of the 1335 days? It has to be a period within a life span of one of God’s people at the “time of the end.”

The Hebrew word *yom* and Greek rendition *hemera*, tied to a number (ordinal or cardinal), refer to a 24-hour literal day, whether singular or plural. Thus, in Revelation 11:3 the “thousand two hundred and threescore days” is literal time in an end-time setting. This parallels the other prophecies of 42 months and time, times, and an half (time).

Thus the ancient use of the word “day” is contextually rich. Within a prophetic setting, the derived meaning of **time** is often understood from the “day” rules. Excellent examples are the timing periods of Daniel 12.

A unique view of the final three and a half years of prophecy was given to expositor White. Much of her writing career she viewed, as many in the Protestant world, the numerous 1260 “days” as years in prophecy. She later saw a literal meaning of Revelation 13:5 – the 42 months.

⁴ *Ibid.*

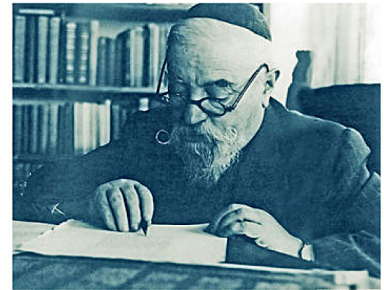
⁵ *Ibid.*, “Origins,” vol. 21(1) (1994), pp. 5-38.

⁶ Whitcomb, John C.; *The Early Earth: An Introduction to Biblical Creationism*; BMH Books (1987), pp. 28-32; Duncan and Hall, “24-Hour View,” p. 31; Kulikovskiy, Andrew S.; *Sizing the Day, Journal of Creation*, 16(1), 41-44, April 2002.

This was her response/thoughts:

“In the last days Satan will appear as an angel of light, with great power and heavenly glory, and claim to be the Lord of the whole earth. He will declare that the Sabbath has been changed from the seventh to the first day of the week; and as lord of the first day of the week he will present this spurious sabbath as a test of loyalty to him. Then will take place the **final fulfillment** of the Revelator's prophecy. ‘And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who *is* like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him? And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue **forty and two months.**’ (Revelation 13:4-5). [Rev. 13:6-18 quoted]”⁷

The late Umberto Cassuto, in his monumental work, *Genesis: Adam to Noah*, shows in the literal day account the beauty of God's perfect “seven” in Creation's introduction of the first week. Not only are words for a day tied to a number, but emphasizing the literalness of this is the phrase “evening and morning.” In addition, man was created on the sixth day, then given a Sabbath. Anything beyond the literal 24-hour day would be a disruption to the wonders of the Genesis narrative.



Rabbi Umberto Cassuto, also known as Moshe David Cassuto (1883–1951)

Time periods such as Creation week and Daniel 12 are literal 24-hour days. To deviate from that understanding is to break ancient rules of thought.

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.
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⁷ White, Ellen G.; *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 19, p. 282.