

AN APOLOGIA FOR AN EARLIER COMMENCEMENT FOR DAY 1 OF CREATION: A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS BASED ON A WORK CORRESPONDENCE

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Abstract

While Genesis 1 indicates the first Creation workday was foundational and unique, there is scholarly disagreement about when the first day commences in the text. This paper summarizes and evaluates the various scholarly positions on the commencement of the first day and analyzes the structural form of the text to evaluate the strengths of each position. Examination of the Gen 1:1–5 structure supports the conclusion that it is a cohesive unit describing the first day. This paper identifies weaknesses in evidence that has been advanced in support of separating Gen 1:1–2 from the creation week. Using a structural analysis based on a work correspondence, an apologia for the position that the first day commences from v.1 is provided. Also provided is biblical evidence that the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) is best regarded as a cosmic subspace. The conclusion of this paper is that Gen 1:1–5 is best understood as an account of two creation projects: (1) a cosmic subspace, identified as the human universe, and (2) light, both of which were created during the first day of the creation week.

Keywords: first day, structural analysis, work correspondence, evening theory, cosmic subspace, human universe.

Introduction

Christians who hold a high view of Scripture, yet acknowledge the proven success of the scientific method, face the hermeneutical challenge of integrating scientific conclusions into their biblical worldview. There is an epistemic risk, though, that Christians who are favorable towards science may feel compelled to integrate scientific conclusions into their worldview wherever they can and reject scientific conclusions only where absolutely necessary. Sometimes postsecular people may reject religious beliefs in favor of scientific conclusions even though there may be greater warrant for particular religious

teachings.¹ A possible example of this risk includes the widespread approach of Christians who, either consciously or subconsciously, integrate current geological dating models into their interpretation of Gen 1:1–5. This integration may run contrary to a plain reading of Genesis, which suggests that the earth was created within the same recent, short time frame in which biological life was created.² A postsecular approach can result in attempting to locate or accommodate deep geological time in the text of Genesis. Gerhard Hasel has pointed out the problems with taking concordist approaches regarding the interpretation of the duration of the days of creation.³ Similar problems arise when attempting a concordist approach with the text respecting the age of the earth. The critical question in this specific instance, from a textual perspective, is when the first day of creation commences in the text itself. To mitigate this epistemic risk of concordism and exegetically resolve the teaching of Genesis, it is valuable to carefully consider the literary unit describing the first day of creation.

There are significant reasons to hold that the opening unit of Gen 1:1–5 is foundational for the rest of the first creation account in Gen 1:1–2:3.⁴ This unit sets the cosmic stage for the main divine work story line. The literary cadence “and there was evening and there was morning, one day” (author’s

¹ Alvin Plantinga notes, “It isn’t automatically current science that has more warrant or positive epistemic status; perhaps the warrant enjoyed by Christian belief is greater than that enjoyed by the conflicting scientific belief” (*Where the Conflict Really Lies: Science, Religion & Naturalism* [New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011], 120).

² While not endorsing the young universe position, statements of the Seventh-day Adventist pioneer Ellen G. White infer that she was advocating that the planet Earth itself was created relatively recently (*Spiritual Gifts* [Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1864], 3:92; *The Spirit of Prophecy*, 4 vols. [Battle Creek, MI: Steam Press, 1870], 1:87; *The Signs of the Times*, 20 March 1879 [see section: Chapter 8—Disguised Infidelity]; *Patriarchs and Prophets* [Oakland, CA: Pacific Press, 1890], 112).

³ Gerhard Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/Epochs’ of Time,” *Origins* 21.1 (1994): 5–38.

⁴ The terms “first and second creation accounts” may concern scholars holding to the unity of the received Hebrew text. Richard Davidson’s comments are helpful: “Instead of comprising multiple sources, I find that Genesis 1 and 2 provide a unified dual perspective on creation—and the God of creation. Genesis 1:1–2:4a gives the picture of an all-powerful transcendent God (*’elōhîm*) and a cosmic view of creation. In Genesis 2:4b–25, God is further presented as the personal, caring, covenant God (*YHWH ’ēlōhîm*), and creation is described in terms of humankind and their intimate, personal needs” (“The Genesis Account of Origins,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald Klingbeil [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015], 60n4).

translation) (וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד) is first set in motion in this unit, which establishes the temporal markers for the rest of the workdays in the creation account. Basil, the fourth-century theologian who defended the Trinitarian Nicene Creed, pointed out how this unit linguistically identifies the significance of the first day of the creation account: “If then the beginning of time is called ‘one day’ rather than ‘the first day,’ it is because Scripture wishes to establish its relationship with eternity. It was, in reality, fit and natural to call ‘one’ the day whose character is to be one wholly separated and isolated from all the others.”⁵

Jacques Doukhan affirms this reading, stating, “The phrase *yom ahad* means literally ‘day absolutely unique.’ The same word is used for God in the *shema* (Deut 6:4) to emphasize God’s absolute uniqueness.”⁶

There is, however, scholarly disagreement about where the first day commences in the text and about the scope of the divine work accomplished on the first day, both from a literary perspective and from its physical referent.

This paper reexamines the opening unit of Genesis to explore where the evidence points regarding the temporal boundaries and cosmic scope of the divine creative work completed on the first day. The research strategy is as follows. First, the literary structure of the unit is examined in light of its broader context. Second, the unit is evaluated using a work correspondence, where the analogous nature of the divine “work” to the basic rhythm of human work is considered. Both the text and the Decalogue encourage taking this correspondence perspective on human work. Jean Calvin highlighted the divine accommodation of the first creation account, stating, “Let us rather conclude that God himself took the space of six days, for the purpose of accommodating his works to the capacity of men.”⁷ Contemporary scholars agree. C. John Collins writes, “The structure of the account shows us that our author has presented God as if he were a craftsman going about his workweek. This comes out from the structure of the account, the six workdays followed

⁵ Basil, *Hexaemeron* (Homily 2) (NPNF²8:64).

⁶ Jacques Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” *Origins* 55 (2004): 26.

⁷ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society), 1:78. Some scholars propose that from Calvin’s appeal to divine accommodation, it follows that he was not designating six literal days (e.g., Alister McGrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998], 11). However, this proposal has been contended, for example, by Peter van Bemmelen (“Divine Accommodation and Biblical Creation: Calvin vs. McGrath,” *AUSS* 39.1 [Spring 2001]: 116). This shows that the hermeneutic of divine accommodation can provide support for literal interpretations of the Genesis text and does not necessarily provide unequivocal support for nonliteral interpretations.

by a Sabbath. It also comes out from the refrain, ‘and there was evening, and there was morning, the n^{th} day.’”⁸

Theological Framework for Creation

Before commencing any exegetical work, it is important to identify the theological framework of the study. The text brings a present, yet transcendent, Creator-God into clear view, as Kenneth Mathews has noted, one who uses a teleological process to create an inhabitable world and who pauses, at various stages throughout the process, to bless his creation.⁹

The theological framework emerging from the Genesis text also includes the revelation that this Creator-God is not bound by the natural laws he creates, the literary structures that he uses to describe his creative work, or the choices of his creatures who have been gifted libertarian free will.¹⁰ Some raise the divine consistency objection, concerned that it would be ontologically incoherent for a God of order to act contrary to the regularities that he has established,¹¹ but Alvin Plantinga points out,

[H]owever, he might have reasons for “dealing in two different manners” with his cosmos; how could we be even reasonably sure that he doesn’t? Perhaps he aims to establish basic regularities, thus making science and free intelligent action possible for his creatures. But perhaps he also has good reason for

⁸ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 77. Other scholars who identified the use of a work analogy within the first creation account include Victor Hamilton (*The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 119, 121); John Lennox (*Seven Days That Divide the World: The Beginning According to Genesis and Science* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011], 49); Henry Morris (*The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976], 55); and John Sailhamer (*Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* [Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996], 95). Unfortunately, the term “analogy” has been associated with literary yet nonliteral interpretations for the creation days. Gerhard Hasel has cogently argued against this nonliteral interpretation (“The ‘Days’ of Creation,” 5–38). An analogy does not necessarily use different time frames, but since the association of “analogy” with nonliteral interpretations has been established in the scholarly literature, this paper uses the phrase “work correspondence” to indicate that identical time frames could be involved for both the divine creation week and the human week.

⁹ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 23, 55–56; Elizabeth Ostring, *Be a Blessing: The Theology of Work in the Narrative of Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).

¹⁰ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 61; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 6, 14.

¹¹ For example, Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (London: Nisbet, 1953), 1:129.

sometimes acting contrary to those regularities: to mark special occasions, for example, or to make clear his love or his power, or to authorize what someone says, or to guide history in a certain direction. Why should any of this be in any way incompatible with his unsurpassable greatness?¹²

This theological unboundedness applies exegetically and linguistically as well. While literary structures or patterns may be discerned in the text that evidently point to an orderly process that God follows in his creative work, these observed literary structures should not obscure the possibility that his sovereign creatorship may transcend these structures.

Survey of Previous Exegetical Studies

Single Stage (Young Galactic Universe) Creation Position

Young universe creationists hold that the entire galactic universe, and everything in it, was created during the creation week. Henry Morris maintains that the summary statement in Gen 2:1 “clearly refers to the previous six days, including the first day. However, it includes ‘the heavens’ in this summary; and the only mention of the heavens during the six days is in Genesis 1:1, a fact which demonstrates that the summary of Genesis 2:1 embraces also the work of Genesis 1:1.”¹³

Commentators holding this position consider the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) to be a merism that refers to the entire created order. Jonathan Sarfati states, “In ... Old Testament Hebrew ... the words ‘heaven(s) and earth’ are conjoined, it is a figure of speech called a *merism*, in which two opposites are combined into an all-encompassing term.” Further, “throughout the Bible (e.g. Gen 14:19, 22; 2 Kgs 19:15; Ps 121:2), this means the totality of creation, not just the earth and its atmosphere, or our solar system alone.”¹⁴

Young universe creationists find confirmation for this position in the Decalogue motivation for remembering the Sabbath. They note the use of the

¹² Plantinga, *Where the Conflict Lies*, 107. White points to the same divine unboundedness: “Many teach that ... the operations of nature are conducted in harmony with fixed laws, with which God Himself cannot interfere. This is false science, and is not sustained by the word of God. Nature is the servant of her Creator. God does not annul His laws or work contrary to them, but He is continually using them as his instruments.” (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, 114).

¹³ Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 42. In spite of Morris’s serious exegetical oversight that “heavens” (הַשָּׁמַיִם) is also mentioned in vv.9, 14–15, 17, 20, 26, and 30, it remains reasonably clear that he held a single-stage (young galactic universe) creation position (Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 90n96).

¹⁴ Jonathan Sarfati, *The Genesis Account: A Theological, Historical, and Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (Powder Springs, GA: Creation Book Publishers, 2015), 102, emphasis in original.

phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ) in Exod 20:11a, which is identical to the Hebrew phrase employed in Gen 1:1. Sarfati points out, “Further on in the Bible, we see an even more emphatic declaration of God’s universal creation. The Sabbath command of Exod 20:8–11 is based on God’s creation of the ‘heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them’ in six ordinary days. This reinforces the merism of totality by going even further: including the sea as well as the contents of everything.”¹⁵

Thus, the young universe position maintains that Gen 1:1–5 describes the initial creation of the entire galactic universe along with the primordial creation of light itself.

Two-Stage (Young Life) Creation Position

More recently, scholars have identified a different frame of reference to pinpoint when the first day of the creation week commences, based on a literary structure of the daily reports.¹⁶ Each day’s report for days 2–6 is framed by “And God said, ‘Let there be...’” (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי) and “And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day” (וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אָחַד). This structure appears in the work report for the first day as well, thus providing potential literary markers for the temporal frame of that day.

John Hartley employs this frame of reference extensively in his analysis of the first creation account. Based on this frame, he notes, “The consistent pattern used for each day of creation tells us that vv.1–2 are not an integral part of the first day of creation (vv.3–5). That is, these first two verses stand apart from the report of what God did on the first day of creation.”¹⁷

Gordon Wenham exegetes this frame in more depth. He identifies seven recurrent formulae that appear consistently throughout the first creation account and notes the significance of these standard formulae with respect to the work report for the first day: “It is the only occasion where all seven elements are present in simple sequence.”¹⁸ Wenham sees this as reason to hold that the first day began in v.3.

Collins strengthens this conclusion with his linguistic analysis of the verb forms in Gen 1:1–5. He first observes that it is not clear whether vv.1–2 are part of the first day or stand outside of all of the creation workdays, and then

¹⁵ Sarfati, 103.

¹⁶ Note that many of the scholars referenced in the discussion below do not hold a young life creation position. However, a significant number of young life scholars refer to the conclusions of these other old earth creation scholars who defend a two-stage creation position.

¹⁷ John Hartley, *Genesis*, NICOT (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000), 41.

¹⁸ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:6, 17. These seven recurrent formulae are: (1) announcement, (2) command, (3) fulfillment, (4) execution, (5) approval, (6) subsequent word, and (7) day number.

he identifies a transition to the *wayyiqtol* verb form in v.3. Collins notes all the other workdays begin with *wayyiqtol* verb forms.¹⁹ Having demonstrated that the linguistic transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms corresponds to the commencement of the main story line in a number of Hebrew narratives, Collins concludes, “It follows from this that we should expect that the first workday to begin with God’s speech in Genesis 1:3, and this makes good sense in view of the clause types.”²⁰

Many commentators agree with Hartley, Wenham, and Collins that the first day commences with Gen 1:3.²¹ There is also widespread agreement that the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ) is a merism that refers to the entire created order. Exod 20:11 may *prima facie* appear to contain the first creation account within the six workday frame, but John Sailhamer considers that the Fourth Commandment “does not say that God *created* ‘the heavens and the earth’ in six days; it says God *made* three things in six days—the sky, the land and the seas—and then filled them during that period.”²² Sailhamer concludes, “Exodus 20:11 is thus not speaking of Genesis 1:1, where God ‘created’ the universe, but Genesis 1:2–2:4, where God ‘made’ the sky, land, and the seas, and then filled them.”²³

Summarizing the observations of these commentators, Richard Davidson provides ten lines of evidence to support a two-stage creation position:²⁴

1. The consistent pattern which Genesis uses, beginning each day with the phrase “And God said,” and ending with the formula “And there was evening and morning, day [x],” suggests the first day commences in v.3.
2. *Wayyiqtol* verbs first appear in v.3, and continue for each creation day, providing linguistic confirmation that the first day begins in v.3.
3. The phrase “the heavens and the earth” is a merism referring to the entire galactic universe, which means verse 1 refers to a prior creation event, if the entire galactic universe was not created in the creation week.

¹⁹ These *wayyiqtol* verb forms occur at the points in the text when God says, “Let there be . . .” (vv. 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24). Collins suggests that the workdays commence at these points in the text (Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 42).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 42.

²¹ For example, Walter Brueggemann (*Genesis* [Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1982], 30); Hamilton (*Genesis 1–17*, 119); Derek Kidner (*Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967], 50); Mathews (*Genesis 1–11:26*, 144–146; and Nahum Sarna (*Genesis* [Jerusalem: JPS, 1989], 7).

²² Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 106, emphasis in original.

²³ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁴ Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 93–99.

4. The dyad “the heavens and earth” in Gen 1:1 should be distinguished from the triad “heaven, earth and sea” in Exod 20:11, suggesting a two-stage creation.
5. The creation of the dyad “heavens and earth” is concluded in Gen 2:4a and not 2:1, suggesting that the first creation account has a broader focus than only what was created during the six days of the creation week.
6. As Sailhamer points out, the Hebrew word “beginning” (בְּרֵאשִׁית) refers to a period of time and not a point in time, suggesting Gen 1:1 extends back further than the creation week.
7. Genesis emphasizes God differentiating or separating previously created material, suggesting that the material earth was already in existence at the commencement of the creation week.
8. A two-stage creation is supported by the second creation account of the creation of man.
9. The intertextual parallels that exist between Gen 1–2 and the construction of both the wilderness tabernacle and the Solomonic temple, which occurred in two stages.
10. God’s creative activity often involves a two-stage process, such as the creation of Israel or of a new heart. As Davidson notes, Israel already existed as a people before God created the nation of Israel and a new heart is not created ex nihilo, but rather renewed from what was present before.²⁵

Davidson has accumulated weighty and persuasive evidence, but this does not preclude careful reassessment of each line of evidence.²⁶

Two-Stage (Young Human Cosmos) Creation Position

Another reading of Genesis 1:1–2:3 sees the text as a description of the creation of the human universe—namely, that the entire first creation account involves the creation of our human world in six divine workdays, followed by the seventh day of rest. This position is held by some Seventh-day Adventist scholars.²⁷

²⁵ Davidson, 98n111,112.

²⁶ Using a textlinguistic approach, Daniel Bediako has arrived at similar conclusions (*Genesis 1:1–2:3 in the Light of Textlinguistics and Text-Oriented Literary Studies* [PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, 2009]; “Genesis 1:1–2:3 as a Historical Narrative Text Type,” *Valley View University Journal of Theology* 1 [2011]: 18–35).

²⁷ Such Seventh-day Adventist scholars include Niels-Erik Andreasen (“The Word ‘Earth’ in Genesis 1:1,” *Origins* 8.1 [1981]: 13–19); Ferdinand O. Regalado (“The Creation Account in Genesis 1: Our World Only or the Universe?” *JATS* 13.2 [Autumn 2002]: 108–120); Doukhan (“The Genesis Creation Story,” 12–33); and William Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD; Review & Herald, 2000), 419–420.

Niels-Erik Andreasen studied the semantic scope of the Hebrew word “earth” (אֶרֶץ) and concluded, “The best we can say about the creation of the earth in Genesis 1:1 is that it concerns this world, our earth, and that it involves the ecological system within which we live.” He added that his word study

does not allow us to conclude that Genesis portrays a second stage of a two-stage creation, first the matter of the planet, then the earth, with a temporal interval in between. It does allow a distinction of perspective between our world system, heaven and earth, and the earth as dry land with its life and territories, but any temporal distinction between them we will have to introduce on our own initiative, without the help of the Bible.²⁸

Ferdinand Regalado endorses Andreasen’s position, pointing out that the Hebraic mind perceived the world as a concrete unity and was not much concerned about other worlds. Also, ancient Jews did not perceive this world as being preexistent.²⁹ Thus, he concludes, “The creation narrative is talking only about our world and is silent about the creation of the entire universe, as we understand the universe today.”³⁰

Doukhan has identified several lines of evidence within the syntax and literary structure of the first creation account that describe the creation of the human cosmos. He points out the *inclusio* formed by Gen 1:1 and 2:4a, which leads him to hold “that the introduction refers also to the same work of creation and not to another probable pre-creation.”³¹ He finds that the parallelism between the structures of the first and second creation accounts “suggests that just as the second creation story reads in one breath with no gap inside, the first creation story should imply the same one-breath reading.”³² Finally, Doukhan notes that in Exod 20:11, the “commandment does not suggest either that the biblical creation story was also concerned with some kind of pre-creation.”³³ He concludes, “It is clear to me then that the biblical text does not imply any kind of gap theory.... For the intent of the text is clear: God created all the human cosmos (heaven and earth) during this first week. The text means to tell us that everything, ‘all’ (emphasis on the seventh day), has been created during the first week and says nothing about a pre-creation.”³⁴

²⁸ Andreasen, “The Word ‘Earth,’” 17–18.

²⁹ Regalado, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1,” 116–120.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 120.

³¹ Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story,” 29.

³² *Ibid.*, 30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 31. It could be suggested that Doukhan’s position is motivated by a commonly held prejudice towards the gap theory. However, it would be a genetic fallacy to impugn his conclusion by surmising about his motivation. Also, Doukhan has confirmed in a personal communication that he still does not support the gap theory (email message to author, May 12, 2021).

A Close Reexamination of the Text

After this survey of the main positions regarding where the first day commences in the first creation account, we can reexamine the exegetical data. The key issues are (1) the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) and the literary termini associated with it, and (2) the frame for each of the workdays 2–6: “And God said, ‘Let there be....’” (וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי) and “And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day” (וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֲחָד). We’ll examine these in reverse order.

Workday Frame

A number of commentators have noted that there are actually eight divine commands issued during the first creation account that are distributed across six divine creation workdays.³⁵ The distribution of the divine commands is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of divine commands across the creation workdays

Day Number	Divine Command Frequency	Day Number	Divine Command Frequency
Day 1	One (1): v.3	Day 4	One (1): v.14
Day 2	One (1): v.6	Day 5	One (1): v.20
Day 3	Two (2): vv.9, 11	Day 6	Two (2): vv.24, 26
Day 7	None (0)		

Prima facie, there seems to be a conspicuous correspondence between this distribution and the frequently identified “formed/filled” parallelism between days 1–3 and days 4–6. This parallelism is based on linguistic and thematic correspondences existing between the respective days and can be set out diagrammatically thus (see table 2):

³⁵ Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 55; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 115; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 6; and Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 88.

Table 2. Parallelism between Days 1–3 and Days 4–6³⁶

Day Number	Forming the Environment	Day Number	Filling the Environment
Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Expanse or Sky	Day 5	Birds and Fish
Day 3	Land and Seas (Plants)	Day 6	Animals and Humans (Plants for food)
Day 7	Divine Rest		

To conclude that the distribution of the divine commands in table 1 provides structural support for the position that the only creative work accomplished on the first day was the creation of light is tempting, yet premature. Lawrence Turner notes there are disturbances to exact symmetry in this parallelism:

The balance between the first and second triad is *almost* exact. The lower waters separated on the second day are not gathered together or named “seas” until the third day. Thus there is some ambiguity as to whether their creation belongs to the second or third day (and “waters” of course were present before God’s first creative command, 1.2). The symmetry elsewhere in the account tempts one to favour day 2, thus balancing the creation of aquatic creatures on day 5, but a case could be made for opting for day 3, thus producing an “asymmetrical” reading. Similarly, the repetition of common elements on each day is *almost* precise. The fourth element, that of evaluation, is missing from the second day (producing *seven* evaluations in the whole week). And the non-conformity of the seventh day is absolute. Such disturbances to exact symmetry in the creation account give advance notice of a tendency to be found throughout Genesis. The book confounds the reader’s expectations. Chapter 1 reveals at the outset that not everything can be predicted, and that the narrative will contain surprise, complication and interest.³⁷

Wayne Grudem highlights more disturbances:

The proposed correspondence between the days of creation is not nearly as exact as its advocates have supposed. The sun, moon, and stars created on the fourth day “as lights in the firmament of the heavens” (Gen. 1:14) are placed not in any space created on Day 1 but in the “firmament” (Heb. *raqia*) that was created on the second day. In fact, the correspondence is quite explicit: this “firmament” is not mentioned at all on Day 1 but five times on Day 2 (Gen. 1:6–8) and three times on Day 4 (Gen. 1:14–19).

³⁶ See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 16; Lawrence Turner, *Genesis* (London: Sheffield Academic, 2000), 19; and Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 7.

³⁷ Turner, *Genesis*, 20–21.

Of course Day 4 also has correspondences with Day 1 (in terms of day and night, light and darkness), but if we say that the second three days show the creation of things to fill the forms or spaces created on the first three days, then Day 4 overlaps at least as much with Day 2 as it does with Day 1.³⁸

Thus, although the symmetry identified in table 2 was developed on the linguistic and thematic correspondence with the proposed parallel days, there are linguistic and thematic correspondence with other days. The proposed parallelism between days 1–3 and days 4–6 therefore appears forced in a number of places. William Lane Craig has expressed his skepticism about the proposed parallelism, concluding with the statement, “It seems to me that this parallelism that has been constructed is not something that’s really there in the text but rather it’s imposed on the text by the mind of the interpreter.”³⁹ This raises the question whether the symmetry in table 2 actually forces our reading of the text into a structural straitjacket, obscuring interpretations that extend beyond the parallelism. This includes the possibility that day 1 commences prior to God saying, “Let there be light!”

What becomes apparent from the distribution of the divine commands is that the text does not consistently allocate a unique divine command to each day. There are two divine creative commands issued during the third and sixth days, and there is no divine creative command recorded for the seventh day.

The difficulty resulting from distributing eight commands over six days has not eluded commentators. Wenham describes the arrangement as “highly problematic.”⁴⁰ Claus Westermann is even more pessimistic, advising, “All attempts to bring the works of creation into a systematic order must be given up.”⁴¹ However, using a work correspondence can resolve this issue. Each of these divine creative commands indicates a new phase of divine creative work that commences *during* a creation workday. This would mean they are not being used as literary markers for the commencement of the day *itself*;

³⁸ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 302.

³⁹ William Lane Craig, “Excursus on Creation of Life and Biological Diversity (Part 7): The Literary Framework and the Functional Creation Interpretations,” *Reasonable Faith*, 6 March 2019, <https://www.reasonablefaith.org/podcasts/defenders-podcast-series-3/excursus-on-creation-of-life-and-biological-diversity/excursus-on-creation-of-life-and-biological-diversity-part-7>.

⁴⁰ “The arrangement of 1:1–2:3 is itself highly problematic. Briefly, the eight works of creation are prompted by ten divine commands and executed on six different days. Many attempts have been made to discover a simpler, more symmetrical arrangement underlying the present scheme. None of these suggestions has proved persuasive” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 6).

⁴¹ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 89.

allowing substantial progress in explaining why there can be two divine creative commands on the third and the sixth day—there were two phases of divine creative work during those days. It also reinforces why there are no divine creative commands on the seventh day. The text states God rested on the seventh day, logically indicating no divine creative commands were issued that day. This conclusion using a work correspondence can be stated clearly and unequivocally—it is not necessary that *any* particular creative command of the Creator be temporally aligned with the commencement of the actual creation day within which he issues it. They simply record the Creator’s announcement and simultaneous commencement of a new divine work project during their respective creation days, the exact timing of which could occur at any time during those days, dependent on the sovereign will of the Creator.

The structure of Gen 1:2–5 suggests a different temporal alignment for verse 3. Based on the Hebrew words for “darkness” (אֲדָמָה) and “light” (אוֹר), the following double-inverted chiastic structure can be identified:

Table 3. The tight double-inverted chiastic structure of Gen 1:2–5 ESV⁴²

Section	“darkness” (אֲדָמָה)	“light” (אוֹר)
A	The earth was without form and void, and darkness [אֲדָמָה] was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.	
B		And God said, “Let there be light [אוֹר],” and there was light [אוֹר]. And God saw that the light [אוֹר] was good.
B’		And God separated the light [אוֹר]
A’	from the darkness [אֲדָמָה].	
B’’		God called the light [אוֹר] Day,
A’’	and the darkness [אֲדָמָה] he called Night.	
A’’’	And there was evening	
B’’’		and there was morning
Summary	the first day.	

⁴² Note the separation of light from darkness in v.4 presupposes the preexistence of the darkness.

This tightly coupled double-inverted chiastic structure of Gen 1:2–5 signifies that the divine creative command “Let there be light!” heralded a number of coterminous primordial events. As the text explicitly indicates, the command heralded the creation of light and second, the commencement of the divine process of reshaping a formless and void earth into a beautiful, inhabitable world for humanity. Significantly for this apologia, the tightly coupled structure indicates that the divine command also heralded the morning period of the first day, as opposed to the commencement of the entire day itself.⁴³

An objection can be raised at this point, which is that the familiar symmetric structure of table 2 has been downplayed in favor of an obscure and infrequently, or possibly never previously highlighted, double-inverted chiasm in Gen 1:2–5. It may even appear that this chiasm has been artificially constructed to bolster the conclusion that the divine command in verse 3 heralds the morning of the first day. In response to this objection, it should be noted that the structure of Gen 1:2–5 identified here needs to be evaluated on its own exegetical merits. Otherwise, the objector risks committing a genetic fallacy. Second, it is important to refer to the theological framework of the tension between divine order and unboundedness. As indicated in table 2, the luminaries are paired with light, so it could be insisted, from a spatial perspective, that the luminaries could not be located in “the expanse of the heavens” (בְּרִקְיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם) because this space was created on day 2. Thus, a rigid adherence to the structure is clearly restricted and inflexible because verse 15 explicitly states that the luminaries were placed in “the expanse of the heavens” (בְּרִקְיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם). Similarly, from a temporal perspective, caution is needed before applying rigid adherence to the table 2 structure and saying that day 1 could not include verses 1–2 because the structure implies only verses 3–5 should be included in day 1. God’s creative schedule is not bound to the literary structures that we derive from the text.

⁴³ The double-inverted chiastic structure provides structural support for the evening theory for the definition of the biblical day, identified by Amanda McGuire (“Evening or Morning: When Does the Biblical Day Begin?” *AUSS* 46. 2 [2008]: 201–214). With McGuire, Andrew Steinman (“Night and Day, Evening and Morning,” *BT* 62. 3 [2011]: 145–150); and H. R. Stroes (“Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning? Some Biblical Observations,” *VT* 16.4 [1996]: 460–475), I concur that Gen 1:2–5 supports the evening theory, contra Cassuto (*A Commentary on Genesis*, 28–29), Collins (“The Refrain of Genesis 1: A Critical Review of Its Rendering in the English Bible,” *BT* 60.3 [2009]: 121–131), and Sarna (*Genesis*, 8). Davidson’s attempt to accommodate the position (that the first day commences in v.3) with the evening theory, by saying v.3 describes the sunset on the first day, is intriguing. However, his efforts to divide asunder the appearance of light during the first day results in an unnecessarily complicated disarrangement of the temporal framework for the first day (“The Genesis Account of Origins,” 96, 97n109).

Using a work correspondence to align the first creative command with the commencement of the morning period offers an interesting insight. Several commentators suggest the first creation account provides the divine model for the human experience of work, not only the weekly cycle of six workdays and a seventh day of rest but also the daily cycle of rest during darkness and work during daylight hours. Collins writes,

We have also discussed the refrain: its effect is to present God as a workman going through his work week, taking his daily rest (the night between the evening and the morning) and enjoying his Sabbath “rest.” To speak this way is to speak analogically about God’s activity; that is, we understand what he did by analogy with what we do; and in turn, that analogy provides guidance for man in the proper way to carry out his own work and rest.⁴⁴

The human correspondence to the divine model is portrayed in the Hebrew creation hymn: “You make darkness, and it is night.... When the sun rises ... Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening.”⁴⁵ Turner notes the parallel between divine rest at the beginning and end of the first creation account: “What is not noted so often, however, is that the introductory and concluding statements of ‘chaos’ and ‘rest’ form a complementary pair.”⁴⁶ Using a work correspondence, this suggests that divine rest at both literary termini are contained within a creation day; otherwise, the significance of the correspondence of the divine rest at the beginning of the unit for the human workweek is lost. The significance, though, of using divine accommodation with respect to daily divine rest should remain an inference only and should not overshadow the explicit divine rest recorded on the seventh day. Nor should this inference of daily divine rest be pressed too hard. For example, it is logically possible that God performed some creative work during the night, as in Genesis 1:1, and it is clear that the Spirit performed a divine work of conservation and supervision during the primordial nocturnal period, as Gen 1:2 indicates.⁴⁷ The critical argument

⁴⁴ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 125. This aligns with Calvin’s principle of divine accommodation. For other commentators proposing this divine model for each working day, see Hamilton (*Genesis 1–17*, 119, 121); Lennox (*Seven Days*, 49); Morris (*The Genesis Record*, 55). Gerhard von Rad also identifies the daily cycle with our human experience (*Genesis: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1972], 54–53).

⁴⁵ Ps 104:20, 22–23 (ESV). However, it is important to note that the divine model of resting during the night period is not explicitly identified in this hymn.

⁴⁶ Turner, *Genesis*, 19.

⁴⁷ The present middle indicative verb ἐργάζεται in John 5:17 reveals the Father’s and the Son’s continuous work of conservation and particularly salvation, even on Sabbath. However, this should not be pressed to mean that humans are now free to work continuously and that there is no longer a divine requirement to rest on the seventh day. Note that Doukhan maintains that “I do not think either that the text allows for the idea of the creation of matter in vv.1–2 during the first night as a part

in this section is that Gen 1:3 should best be aligned with the commencement of the first morning.

Another corollary of the structural analysis of Gen 1:2–5 identified in table 3 suggests that Gen 1:2 is describing the state of the earth during the night period of the first day. To me, this suggests another unique aspect of the first day—it includes the only literary description in the first creation account of the state of God’s creation and his divine protection of that creation during the night period, even while his work remains teleologically unfinished.

Literary Terminus for the Commencement of Day 1

Returning to the issue of the commencement of the first day, the structural study of Gen 1:2–5 using a work correspondence shows that there are reasons why v.2 should be included. Does this day commence with v.2, such that v.1 is outside this report, or should verse 1 be included as well? Whether verse 1 is an independent or dependent clause is a fascinating topic but beyond the scope of this paper. For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that Genesis 1:1 is an independent clause.⁴⁸

A number of scholars have noted that the conjunction “and” (ו) connects verse 1 with the rest of the first creation account. Copan and Craig have commented that “the function of the *wāw* (and) in 1:2 is to connect the various *subsequent* acts of creation with 1:1, as ‘the *primary* foundation on which they rest.’”⁴⁹ Sailhamer notes, “Though it might seem like a minor point, Hebrew grammar uses this conjunction carefully,” adding in a footnote, “The conjunction ‘and’ (Hebrew: *waw*) at the beginning of 1:2 shows that 1:2–2:4 is coordinated with 1:1, rather than appositional.”⁵⁰ This provides linguistic evidence that the author intended verse 1 to be connected with verses 2–5.

of the creation on the first day, that is, before the creation of light in v.3.” Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story,” 31. However, he does not provide any exegetical or theological justification for this perspective, so it appears to be merely an assertion on his part.

⁴⁸ Acknowledging that scholars have provided arguments for the clause to be dependent, there are significant reasons to maintain the traditional view that it is independent. See Gerhard Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look,” *BT* 22.4 (1974): 154–167; Jiří Moskala, “Interpretation of *berēšît* in the Context of Genesis 1:1–3,” *AUSS* 49.1 (2011): 33–44; Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 61–69; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 11–13; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 136–139; Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 36–41.

⁴⁹ Copan and Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing*, 42, emphasis in original.

⁵⁰ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 103, 253n9:2.

For further evidence, we need to identify which closing literary terminus corresponds with verse 1. Based on the phrase “the heavens and the earth,” there are two candidates:

2:1: “Thus the heavens and the earth [הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ] were finished, and all the host of them” (ESV)

2:4a: “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth [הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ] when they were created” (ESV)

A case has been made for each one of these to be the closing literary terminus for the first creation account. The first argument in favor of 2:4a being the closing terminus is that it includes “the heavens,” “the earth,” and “created” in the order that they appear in Gen 1:1. Also, the verb “created” (בָּרָא), which is used in 2:4a, is only used in the first creation account and never in the second.⁵¹

However, Cassuto, Copan, Craig, Hamilton, Mathews, and Wenham have provided substantive arguments that 2:1 is the summary statement for the first creation account.⁵² The lines of evidence they highlight include: “Generations” (תּוֹלְדוֹת) is a standard structural marker within Genesis that is used to *precede* a historical account, not conclude it (Gen 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). In 2:4, it is used in the sense of creation. There is a chiasmic structure to Gen 2:4:

A: These are the generations of the heavens
 B: and the earth
 C: when they were created
 C': in the day that the LORD God made
 B': the earth
 A': and the heavens.

As Wenham has observed, this “tight chiasmic structure...makes it unlikely that the sources split in the middle of the verse.”⁵³

⁵¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 35; Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 95; Jacques Doukhan, ed., *Genesis*, Seventh-day Adventist International Bible Commentary (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2016), 29–30, 71–72; Hartley, *Genesis*, 55; and Turner, *Genesis*, 55–56.

⁵² Cassuto, *A Commentary on Genesis: Part I*, 98; Copan and Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing*, 41–42; Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 4–5; Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 114–115; and Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 49. See also Kidner, *Genesis*, 64; and Sarna, *Genesis*, 16–17.

⁵³ Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 55, a view supported by Mathews, *Genesis 1:11–26*, 114.

Genesis 2:1 already provides a fitting summary statement for the first creation account. A second summary statement for the first creation account in 2:4a could have been added to make the conclusion more emphatic, but this does not diminish or negate the summarizing role of Gen 2.1.

In the Hebrew text, Gen 2:1–3 already provides a chiasmic conclusion to Gen 1:1, so the argument that Gen 2:4a enjoys a greater linguistic connection to 1:1 than 2:1 is significantly weakened when considering the entire seven day unit:

A: “created” (1:1) (בָּרָא)

B: “God” (1:1) (אֱלֹהִים)

C: “the heavens and the earth” (1:1) (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ)

C’: “the heavens and the earth” (2:1) (הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ)

B’: “God” (2:2a,3a,3b) (אֱלֹהִים)

A’: “created” (2:3b) (בָּרָא)

Confirmation that Gen 2:1 is the concluding statement for the first creation account in the divine testimony is provided in the Decalogue (see table 4):

Table 4. Identifying the literary correspondence between Genesis 1:1–2:3, Exodus 20:11, and Exodus 31:17b through the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ)

Time Period	Creation Account Genesis 1:1–2:3 (ESV)	Decalogue Summary Exodus 20:11 (NASB)	Reiteration of Sabbath Covenant Exodus 31:17b (NET)
Six Days	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth [אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ].	For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth [אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ],	for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth [אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ],
	The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.	the sea,	
	<i>Detailed account of the creation of the contents of the heavens, the earth, and the sea.</i>	and everything that is in them,	
Seventh Day	Thus the heavens and the earth [הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ] were finished, and all the host of them.		
	And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.	and He rested on the seventh day; for that reason the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.	and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

Note: Different English translations of each passage have been employed in this table to clarify that the merism at the commencement of all three passages is identical.

Against this, Sailhamer argues that the space referred to in Exod 20:11 as “the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them” is different from the space referred to in Gen 1:1. First, Exod 20:11 testifies that God “made” (עָשָׂה) the space rather than “created” (בָּרָא) it, which he maintains refers to

God forming the promised land for his chosen people rather than creating the universe. Second, he defines the space in Exod 20:11 as the triad (1) “the heavens,” (2) “the earth,” and (3) “the sea” and its contents, rather than the dyad (1) “the heavens” and (2) “the earth” referred to in Genesis 1:1.⁵⁴

However, Sailhamer’s conclusions can be challenged. As Mathews points out, the first creation account uses the verbs “create” (בָּרָא) and “made” (עָשָׂה) interchangeably, suggesting that a substantive distinction between the divine creative processes implied by both verbs should not be inferred.⁵⁵ Additionally, Exod 20:11 and 31:17 quote the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) verbatim from Gen 1:1, as table 4 highlights. This strengthens the connection between Exod 20:11, Exod 31:17, and Gen 1:1. If this linguistic connection is severed, it leaves the commencement of the six days in Exod 20:11 and Exod 31:17 linguistically floating because neither of these make any explicit or implicit linguistic reference to anything in Gen 1:3–5. It appears that both Gen 2:1 and Exod 20:11 refer to the contents of the space as well as the merism, highlighting the fact that, rather than referring to the localized triad “sky,” “land,” and “sea,” the author intended these summary statements to comprehensively refer to the entire first creation account of Gen 1:1–2:1, rather than just the opening statement of Gen 1:1. The Exodus references to the sea and what is in them further strengthens the connection with the content of Gen 1, which also refers to the creation of things in the seas.

It is possible that the phrase “the heavens and the earth were finished” refers back to the unordered state of the earth in Gen 1:2 instead of the creation of the heavens and the earth in verse 1, with *tohu wabohu* (תְּהוֹ וְבוֹהוּ) meaning “unfinished,” therefore forming the *inclusio* with 2:1. However, there are a number of weaknesses in this proposition. First, the meaning of *tohu wabohu* (תְּהוֹ וְבוֹהוּ) describes the earth being waste, void, empty, and disordered, with the primary focus being that the earth was uninhabited, uninhabitable, and inhospitable⁵⁶ rather than “unfinished.” Second, from a textlinguistic perspective, the statement seems to be a stative-descriptive clause rather than a teleological clause.⁵⁷ A much stronger candidate for a teleological clause is “in the beginning” (בְּרֵאשִׁית). As Mathews points out, this beginning “anticipates the ‘end’ of the universe,” and “creation’s ‘beginnings’ were initiated with a future goal intended, an eschatological purpose.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Sailhammer contends that Gen 1:1 is separated from 1:2–2:4a (*Genesis Unbound*, 29).

⁵⁵ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 128, 130.

⁵⁶ See Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 131; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:6, 15–17; Doukhan, *Genesis*, 51–52.

⁵⁷ Bediako, *Genesis 1:1–2:3*, 105.

⁵⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 126–127.

This indicates that the teleological “beginning” (בְּרֵאשִׁית) forms an inclusio with “finished” (וַיִּכְלֶן) rather than with the stative-descriptive clause “without form and void” (תְּהוֹ וְרֵקֵם).

Confirming or Denying a Two-Stage Creation?

Recognizing that the widely accepted literary structure of Genesis 1 may not be as clear as presented, the various positions can be reevaluated. Copan and Craig consider that a two-stage creation is in view in Gen 1:1–3.⁵⁹ Collins’s identification of the transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms in verse 3 also appears to provide substantive evidence in support of the two-stage creation. Collins’s discourse analysis of *wayyiqtol* verb forms in other narrative sections in the Hebrew Scriptures shows that this transition indicates when the main story line begins,⁶⁰ but he acknowledges in a footnote that “since this verb form can be used for embedded storylines, we cannot mechanically identify the occurrence of the verb form with this function.”⁶¹

Thus Collins’s study does not demonstrate that the story line in the foreground of every narrative is fully aligned with the temporal markers that are associated with the narrative. He simply asserts that the first day commences with the transition in verbal forms. Certainly, where narrative settings are presented, a movement from *qatal* or descriptive clauses to *wayyiqtol* forms indicates movement from background to foreground material. When this transition occurs at the beginning of narratives, what precedes is often antecedent information. Gen 1:1–2 certainly fits here. However, the question is what Gen 1:1–2 is antecedent to in the narrative. Textually, it is certainly antecedent to the creation of light in verse 3 and the organization of an inhabitable world in verses 3–31. However, it is not necessarily antecedent to the commencement of the first day, as commonly assumed. It is this assumption that is questioned in this paper.

The parallel creation account in Gen 2:4–25 highlights this fact. Here the transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms commences at Gen 2:7: “Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground” (ESV). Here, the foreground story line in Gen 2 focuses on the creation of the man and his wife and their Edenic home.⁶² However, aligning the transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms in Gen 2:7 with any of the identifiable temporal markers or dimensions in Gen 1:1–2:3 or Exod 20:11, is not justified. Therefore, it is not temporally justifiable to align the transition in Gen 1:3 to the commencement of the first

⁵⁹ Copan and Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing*, 60–64.

⁶⁰ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 42–43.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 21n33.

⁶² Collins, “The *Wayyiqtol* as ‘Pluperfect’: When and Why,” *TynBul* 46. 1 (1995): 136. Refer also to Alexander Adrason, “Biblical Hebrew *Wayyiqtol*: A Dynamic Definition,” *JHebS* 11 (2011): 24.

day itself either. Collins is justified only in aligning the verbal transition in the text to the commencement of the story line of that account, and possibly to the commencement of the morning period of the first day. It is overreaching linguistically to conclude that “we should expect the first workday to begin with God’s speech in Genesis 1:3”⁶³—the first day itself may have commenced earlier in the text, as the structural analysis presented shows.

Collins may respond by saying there are no explicit temporal markers in the second creation account, which is why it is unjustifiable to align the transition in verbal forms in Gen 2:7 to any particular temporal marker. However, the parallelism between the two creation accounts is confirmed both by the hinge verse Gen 2:4 and the structural correspondence that Doukhan has identified between them.⁶⁴ Based on this parallelism, we should attempt to identify Gen 2:7 either as commencing the first day or possibly the sixth day of the creation week, both of which are unjustified in the text. This demonstrates the temporal confusion resulting from mechanically aligning the transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms in the creation accounts to temporal markers associated with those accounts.

Davidson and Lennox have built on Collins’s linguistic study to defend a two-stage creation process.⁶⁵ However, if the first day of the creation week is not aligned with the transition to the *wayyiqtol* verb forms in verse 3 but rather should be aligned with verse 1, as argued in this paper, the first stage of the creation event should not be separated from the creation week. A two-stage creation could have easily been accomplished within the first day, just as occurred on the third and sixth days, with the period between the first and second stages simply being the night period of the first day.

Davidson presents ten lines of evidence (see above) in support of a two-stage creation that separates Gen 1:1–2 from the creation week. This paper has addressed four of Davidson’s lines of evidence and will focus on another in the next section.⁶⁶ For his sixth evidence, Davidson refers to Sailhamer’s observation that the Hebrew word for beginning (בְּרֵאשִׁית) “does not refer to a point in time but to a period or duration of time which falls before a series of events.”⁶⁷ Even if Sailhamer’s observation is correct, it is

⁶³ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 42.

⁶⁴ Doukhan, “The Genesis Creation Story,” 16.

⁶⁵ Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 52–53; Lennox, *Seven Days*, 52.

⁶⁶ The lines of evidence addressed are: (1) that the first day is framed by the formula “And God said” and “And there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day”; (2) Collins’s linguistic analysis of the transition to *wayyiqtol* verb forms at v. 3; Collins *Genesis 1–4*, 42,43; (4) the distinction between the dyad “heavens and earth” and the triad “heaven, earth, and sea”; and (5) the literary terminus for the end of the six workdays. The third line of evidence will be addressed in the next section.

⁶⁷ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 38.

important to highlight his acknowledgement that the “length of that period of time is not specified.”⁶⁸ Wenham notes that the period of time following “beginning” (בְּרֵאשִׁית) is unspecified.⁶⁹ If the series of events following the “beginning” is a series of work projects that commences with the work project of creating light, and this first project commenced at the dawn of the first day, then this “beginning” period could be contained within the preceding night period of the first day.

For his seventh evidence, Davidson notes the emphasis on God separating previously created materials. However, this ignores de novo creation projects that occurred during creation week, such as the creation of the marine animals, which were not separated from anything. God could have commenced the creation week with a de novo creation event, even if most of the other creation events involved a process of separation.

Davidson’s eighth evidence refers to the two-stage creation account of man in Gen 2. Genesis 1 explicitly states, however, that this two-stage creation was completely contained within a single day, “the sixth day” (יוֹם הַשֵּׁשִׁי). Hence, this evidence actually provides strong support for the position argued in this paper—namely, that the two-stage creation event in view in Gen 1:1–5 could be contained in the first day.

For his ninth evidence, Davidson draws upon the intertextual parallels between the Genesis creation accounts and the two-stage building processes of the wilderness tabernacle and Solomon’s temple. However, the problem with this line of evidence is that it does not establish that God always uses a two-stage building process for sanctuary-like entities, nor does it establish that a two-stage sanctuary building process cannot occur within a single day.

Finally, Davidson’s tenth evidence that “God’s creative activity throughout the rest of the Bible often involves a two-stage process, presupposing a previous creation,”⁷⁰ does not establish that divine creative activity always involves two-stage processes. Logically, the regress of the complete series of divine creation and conservation events must terminate in a creation ex nihilo event, thus showing it is not logically possible to hold that all creation events must be two-stage processes. Therefore, some creation events can be ex nihilo or de novo creation events. Furthermore, Davidson has not established that two-stage divine creative processes must involve a temporal interval greater

⁶⁸ Sailhamer, 105.

⁶⁹ Wenham observes the period of time following בְּרֵאשִׁית is “left unspecified” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 14. While he says that the context suggests that בְּרֵאשִׁית “refers to the beginning of time itself, not to a particular period within eternity,” the question remains whether this is the leading temporal boundary of the human cosmos, the galactic universe, or the entire created order. This, unfortunately, cannot be resolved from the Hebrew term בְּרֵאשִׁית itself.

⁷⁰ Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 98.

than a day. In summary, none of the biblical evidence that Davidson amasses for a two-stage creation demands or requires that a two-stage process be used in every divine creation event, or, if God does employ a two-stage creation process, that the temporal separation between the two stages need extend beyond a single day.⁷¹

Literally Everything or a Subspace Thereof?

The physical referent for the phrase “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) will now be examined. I concur with the appreciable scholarly opinion that this is a merism referring to two extremities of an entity to denote its entirety.⁷² However, a merism in and of itself does not necessarily refer to literally everything—simply to the entirety under discussion. The spatio-temporal extent of a merism is determined by its context and cannot be merely presupposed.⁷³

For example, note another merism employed in the first creation account, the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning” (וַיְהִי עֶרְבַּ וַיְהִי בֹקֶר). The author of Genesis uses this merism to refer to one complete day.⁷⁴ However,

⁷¹ This conclusion also applies to Davidson’s perspective that Ps 104:5–9 seem to “lend support to a two-stage creation for the raw materials of this earth” (“The Creation Theme in Psalm 104,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald Klingbeil [Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2015], 182).

⁷² A case can be made that in Gen 1:1, “the heavens and the earth” does not constitute a merism because these items are immediately individuated from v.2 with “the earth.” The elements of a merism are often not individuated. The author appreciates an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out. However, it does not follow that, because elements of a merism are often not individuated, it is necessarily true that they are never individuated. For example, a person could report that they “searched their home from top to bottom looking for their lost keys,” and then state that they started at the top in the attic and finished with searching the basement. Genesis 1:1–2 could constitute another exception, where a merism can be individuated immediately after its first introduction because “earth” can be fairly easily individuated within this merism, due to its well-definable spatial distinction from the “heavens.”

⁷³ Neither should one presuppose linguistically that the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) refers to everything created up until that point in time. This merism does not include an explicit temporal dimension to warrant such a presupposition.

⁷⁴ “The use of the words ‘evening’ and ‘morning’ is a merism” that points to the extremities of the day to denote its totality” (Doukhan, *Genesis*, 54–55). There is scholarly discussion whether this is a merism that refers to the day in its totality or rather uses the two boundaries of the night—namely, sunset and sunrise. Note the discussion between C. John Collins and Andrew Steinman in *The Bible Translator* (Collins, “The Refrain of Genesis 1,” 121-131; and Steinman, “Night and Day,”

the equivalent merism “night and day” (or its inversion “day and night”) is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to longer periods than a day.⁷⁵ Biblically, though, this merism is never used to refer to the entirety of time, from eternity past through to eternity future. Thus, a merism does not necessarily refer to literally everything. It simply indicates the entirety of the subspace being referred to.

Hence, the common assertion in scholarly literature that the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) refers to the entire created order is not justified. It could simply be referring to a subspace of the created order. Indeed, Nahum Sarna points out that the definite article in Hebrew specifies the observable universe, which cosmologically is not identical to the entire universe, but is only a subspace thereof.⁷⁶ As Sarna and many commentators note, there is no single Hebrew word that could be used either to refer to the entire created order or to qualify the merism to show that it does, indeed, refer to the entire universe. Importantly, even if this merism were used elsewhere in the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the entire created order, we should not assume that the merism is being used in the same way here.⁷⁷ Mathews’s teleological exhortation is pertinent: “To insist on its meaning as a finished universe is to enslave the expression to its uses elsewhere and ignore the contextual requirements of Genesis 1.”⁷⁸

Support for this interpretation of the merism is found in the creation hymn Ps 104. Davidson observes, “With regard to the what of creation, Psalm 104 seems to limit its description to the earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres (the moon and sun) and does not discuss the creation of the universe as a whole.”⁷⁹ He notes parenthetically that this is “in contrast to what may be implied by the merism ‘the heavens and the earth’ in Gen. 1:1.” However, Ps 104 appears to be a meditation on the entire first creation account, indicated by references to setting “the earth on its foundations” (אָרֶץ עַל-מְבֹנֵיהָ) and covering it “with the deep” (תְּהוֹם) (Ps 104:5–6 ESV), which logically occurred prior to Gen 1:2 and ontologically extends

145,150). Steinman provides a cogent argument in favor of the traditional understanding of the “evening-morning” merism.

⁷⁵ The merism “night and day” (לַיְלָה וַיּוֹמָם) is used in Deut 28:66, Isa 34:10, and Jer 14:17. The inverted merism “day and night” (יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה) is used, for example, in Lev 8:35, Josh 1:8, and Ps 1:2.

⁷⁶ Sarna, *Genesis*, 5.

⁷⁷ Douglas Bozung only asserts that throughout the Old Testament, the merism אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ refers repeatedly to all there is, and even then he notes that Cassuto objects to the idea of a merism (“An Evaluation of the Biosphere Model of Genesis 1,” *BSac* 162 [Oct–Dec 2005]: 410, 410n24, 411).

⁷⁸ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 142.

⁷⁹ Davidson, “The Creation Theme,” 187.

back into Gen 1:1. This adds weight to the conclusion, contra Davidson's parenthetical note, that the merism itself could also be limited to a cosmic subspace which may be referred to as the human cosmos.

To find exegetical support for the assertion that “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) refers to the entire created order, scholars may turn to New Testament authors who had access to the Greek conceptualizations of the universe.⁸⁰ The opening Johannine account appears relevant. John intentionally quotes Genesis 1:1 when he commences his Gospel with “In the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ). In John 1:3, he also identifies that Christ is the creator of the entire created order. The parallel with the merism אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ seems clear.

However, John first specifically associates the phrase ἐν ἀρχῇ with Christ's primordial existence and his relationship with God. The phrase is not used in immediate association with the Johannine statement regarding the set of created things. Second, the Johannine observation is a metaphysical statement regarding Christ's relationship with the entire created order as its ontological uncaused cause, including everything that was created in Gen 1:1–2:3, as well as everything that has come into existence afterwards. John may, potentially, be referring to created things brought into existence before this creation event. The critical point being made here is that the “beginning” (ἀρχῇ) referred to by John may not be the identical time point or period to the “beginning” (בְּרֵאשִׁית) referred to in Genesis 1:1, though בְּרֵאשִׁית was with little doubt the springboard for John's christological meditation. Christ's preexistence to his creation and his existence through eternity past are in view in John 1:1. In brief, this Johannine statement is not simply a reference to the divine creation of this world, which is the literary intent of Gen 1:1.

Metaphysically, it is valuable to note that many Genesis scholars would hold to an A-theory of time with its notion of temporal becoming, as opposed to the B-theory of time. The A-theory affirms the ontology of our experience of the flow of time. According to this theory, the present exists, but the past no longer exists and the future only exists as potentiality. In contrast, the B-theory considers space-time to be a four-dimensional block and all entities distributed across the time dimension as equally real. Regardless of which theory of time is endorsed, even when these scholars assert that the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) refers to the entire created order, they are still only referring to a subspace of the entire created order, specifically the time slice of four-dimensional

⁸⁰ For example, Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 112n142. As Doukhan observes, “Whether one refers to the creation that took place during the first week (1:1–2:4a) or to the creation(s) that took place before (1:1), nothing that was made was made apart from Him” (*Genesis*, 52).

space-time bounded by the Creation event. They are not referring to the much broader ontological perspective that John had in mind when he penned John 1:3, which is that Christ is the creator and sustainer of everything: past, present and future.⁸¹

The entire *λόγος* passage of John 1:1–14 involves some swift and significant temporal transitions, from “in the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ) to the appearance of John the Baptist to the incarnation of the Word. Care needs to be taken when attempting to temporally locate statements such as John 1:3 since the *λόγος* passage does not constrain itself spatio-temporally to the event described in the first creation account in Genesis.

Further exegetical evidence in the Johannine corpus actually confirms that the merism “the heavens and the earth” is likely referring to a subspace and not the entire created order. Many scholars have pointed out the parallel between the opening chapters of Genesis and the closing chapters of Revelation.⁸² The merism reappears in these closing chapters. John sees “a new heaven and a new earth” (οὐρανὸν καινὸν καὶ γῆν καινὴν), which contrast with “the first heaven and the first earth” (ὁ ... πρῶτος οὐρανὸς καὶ ἡ πρώτη γῆ), which will be no more (Rev 21:1).⁸³ However, it is biblically apparent that God does not intend to annihilate the *entire* created order and begin completely afresh—some entities from the first world, like God’s throne, the righteous angels, saved human beings, and the New Jerusalem, will continue into the new heaven and earth. This provides evidence that the merism “the heavens and the earth” in Gen 1:1 does not necessarily refer to the entire created order.⁸⁴

While the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ) should not be identified with the metaphysical view of the entire created order, as in John 1:3, elsewhere the New Testament does indicate a specific entity within the created order brought into existence at this time. Heb 1:10 quotes Ps 102, attributing the laying of “the foundation of the earth” (τὴν

⁸¹ For an introduction to A-and B-theories of time, see William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God’s Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 115–216.

⁸² Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” 69. Doukhan commences his paper noting this parallel between protology and eschatology (“The Genesis Creation Story,” 13).

⁸³ In the LXX Gen 1:1, “heaven” is singular, unlike in the MT, so the Greek is parallel and relevant.

⁸⁴ Davidson notes that the new heaven and the new earth will not be created *ex nihilo* (“The Genesis Account of Origins,” 98–99). However, he has not followed this evidence to its logical conclusion for the cosmic scope of the physical referent of the merism in Gen 1:1. While he uses this as evidence for a two-stage process using preexisting raw material, the first stage of the original creation event in Gen 1:1 could have been a creation *ex nihilo* or *de novo* event, as suggested by both the word “created” (אָרַץ) and the fact that no preexisting material is described in the Genesis text.

γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας) to the creative work of Christ but sharpens the temporal location of this event to “in the beginning” (κατ’ ἀρχάς). The subsequent reference to “the heavens” (οἱ οὐρανοί) strengthens the linguistic connection to Gen 1:1. Here the temporal locator κατ’ ἀρχάς is directly associated with the creative event τῆν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, so it is exegetically appropriate to identify this creative work with this particular time. This New Testament statement thus provides a poetic confirmation of the creation de novo of planet Earth in the beginning.

Conclusion

This study shows that there is significant structural evidence that Gen 1:1–5 is a cohesive unit describing the first day of the creation week. This is based on the double-inverted chiasmic structure of Gen 1:2–5, the *inclusio* formed by Gen 1:1 and 2:1, and the parallelism between Gen 1:1–2:3, Exod 20:11, and 31:17, which show that Gen 1:1 was intended to be included within the six workdays of creation. The assertion that the first day of creation commenced with the first recorded divine command is weakened by the problematic distribution of eight divine commands over six workdays. A reading of the text that uses a work correspondence identifies these divine commands as describing new phases of divine creative work during the six workdays and not literary termini marking the commencement of each day. The textual fact that there is a transition to the *wayyiqtol* verb forms in Gen 1:3 does not justify alignment of the story line in the foreground to the temporal period and markers associated with the account. The temporal period and markers in the narrative may be associated with the entire narrational canvas rather than with the story line in the foreground, as Gen 2:7 illustrates. Finally, a more accurate understanding of the referent for the merism “the heavens and the earth” (אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ) is a cosmic subspace, possibly the observable universe, but definitely the human cosmos. Also, there is biblical evidence that the creation de novo of planet Earth is being described in this unit. In summary, our structural study of the text using a work correspondence reveals that Gen 1:1–5 describes the divine work undertaken on the first day of the creation, including the creation of a cosmic subspace and primordial light.