
The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON IV : GENESIS | OVERVIEW

THE STRONG CONNECTION BETWEEN GEN 1:1,2 AND 2:1-3 — As we consider the story of creation (1:1-2:3), several things stand out in its structure. Comparing Gen 1:1,2 with 2:1-3 we see definite echoes, with 2:1-3 introducing the same phrases as 1:1 but in reverse order:

'he created,' 'God,' 'heavens and earth' reappear as *'heavens and earth'* (2:1), *'God'* (2:2), and *'created'* (2:3)

This brings the section to a neat close which is reinforced by the inclusion *'God created'* linking 1:1 and 2:3.

THE NUMBER SEVEN IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE CREATION STORY — As Rabbi Umberto Cassuto notes in his commentary on Genesis, the number seven is the number of perfection and the basis of ordered arrangement, with particular importance attached to it in the symbolism of numbers:

- After the introductory verse (1:1), the section is divided into *seven* paragraphs in the Hebrew, each of which appertains to one of the *seven* days.
- Each of the three nouns that occur in the first verse (i.e., *God* [’elōhîm], *heavens* [shāmayim], and *earth* [’erets]) and express the basic concepts of the section are repeated in the section a given number of times that is a multiple of *seven*: thus the name of *God* occurs thirty-five times (5x *seven*; as a side note, that Divine Name in one of its forms occurs *seventy* times in the first four chapters of Genesis); *earth* is found twenty-one times (3x *seven*); also *heavens* or *firmament* [rāqî‘a] appears twenty-one times (3x *seven*).
- The ten sayings with which, according to the Talmud, the world was created (i.e., the ten utterances of God beginning with the words, *'and ... said'*) are clearly divisible into two groups. The first group contains seven Divine fiats enjoining the creation of the creatures, to wit, *'Let there be light'*, *'Let there be firmament'*, *'Let the waters be gathered together'*, *'Let the earth put forth vegetation'*, *'Let there be lights'*, *'Let the waters bring forth swarms'*, *'Let the earth bring forth'*. The second group comprises three pronouncements that emphasize God’s concern for man’s welfare (*three* being the number of emphasis), namely, *'Let us make man'* (v. 26; not a command but an expression of the will to create man), *'Be fruitful and multiply'* (v. 28), *'Behold I have given unto you every plant yielding seed'* (v. 29). Thus we have here, too, a series of *seven* corresponding formal pronouncements.
- The terms *light* and *day* are found *seven* times in the first paragraph, and there are *seven* references to *light* in the fourth paragraph.
- *Water* is mentioned *seven* times in the course of paragraphs two and three.
- In the fifth and sixth paragraphs forms of the word rendered *'living, living thing, beasts'* [chayyāh] occur *seven* times.
- The expression *'and it was so'* appears *seven* times.

- The expression ‘*it was good*’ appears *seven* times (the seventh time, *very good*).
- The first verse has *seven* words.
- The second verse has fourteen words (2x *seven*).
- In the *seventh* paragraph which deals with the *seventh* day there occur the following three consecutive sentences (*three* for emphasis), each of which consists of *seven* words and contains in the middle the expression ‘*the seventh day*’:

*‘And on THE SEVENTH DAY God finished His work which He had done,
and He rested on THE SEVENTH DAY from all His work which He had done.
So God blessed THE SEVENTH DAY and hallowed it.’*

- The words in the *seventh* paragraph total thirty-five words (5x *seven*).

“To suppose that all this is a mere coincidence is not possible.” [Cassuto, 12-15]

OTHER NUMERIC ANOMALIES — The structured use and repetition of numbers other than that already mentioned is readily apparent throughout the creation story:

- the number 3: *three* namings, *three* uses of ‘*created*’ [bārā’]
- the number 7: *seven* uses of ‘*made*’ [‘āsāh] in the suffix or prefix conjugations
- the number 10: *ten* ‘*and God said*’, *ten* ‘*according to their kind*’, *ten* occurrences of ‘āsāh in all their forms

This creation section also includes 8 works of creation, prompted by 10 divine commands, and executed on 6 different days.

OTHER ITEMS WORTH NOTING — Some observations of the creation narrative:

- The account is framed in narration but it is the direct speech of God, however brief, that drives and forms the account, ‘*and God said*’. “God is the soloist; the narrator is the accompanist.” [Hamilton, 119] The hero of creation is God. Each event occurs according to God’s expressed will and through the agency of His word. ***Speech signifies that God is intimately bonded to His creation.***
- ***God’s word in conjunction with His Spirit is irresistible and creative; consequently, it overcomes chaos and emptiness (cf. 2 Cor. 4:6).*** “God’s powerful words bring separation, dividing day and night, waters and land, fish and fowl. Boundaries are important in both the created and social orders. When everything keeps to its allotted place and does not transgress its limits, there is order, not chaos.” [Waltke, 56]
- ***‘And God made’ affirms that everything exists by God’s expressed will, purposes, and word.*** “This stands in marked contrast to ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation, in which creation erupts from the battles among the gods. God fights with no one to create this ordered universe. He speaks. His words take form.” [Waltke, 56]
- ***‘God saw that it was good’*** – Everything, including the bounded darkness and sea, satisfies God’s purpose. ***Because God is completely benevolent, as well as all-powerful, humanity had nothing to fear from the original creation.***

- **God’s blessing is the potency for life.** Beginning with the fish and fowl, God blesses each creature with procreativity. Naming displays God’s sovereignty since naming is an indication of dominion (cf. Num 32:38; 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17) and reveals God as the supreme ruler. Even the negative elements of the precreated state, darkness and chaotic waters, are under His dominion and brought within His protective restraints.
- The narrative structure also highlights the third and sixth days of creation, both having a double announcement of the divine word ‘*and God said*’ (vv. 9, 11, 24, 26) and the approval formula twice (vv. 10, 12, 25, 31).

THE TWO PHASES OF THE DAYS OF CREATION — Gen 1:2 says, ‘*The earth was without form [tōhû, ‘desolation, waste’], and void [bōhû, ‘empty, uninhabitable’]*’. It could be said the first three days of creation were addressing the ‘formlessness’ while the second three days were addressing the ‘emptiness.’ Many have noted a *general* parallel of content with the first six days of creation.

THE UNPRODUCTIVE BECOMES PRODUCTIVE	THE UNINHABITED BECOMES INHABITED
the first triad separates the formless chaos into three static spheres of inanimate objects, followed by vegetation; i.e., all the created entities that cannot move by themselves	the second triad fills the static spheres with mobile things being created; i.e., on day 4 the luminaries or moving bodies in which the light formed on the first day is crystalized; on the fifth and sixth days were created moving creatures which likewise correspond to the works of the second and third days
Day 1 – the creation of light / the separation of light and darkness (1:3-5)	Day 4 – lights in the firmament (sun, moon, stars; 1:14-19) to ‘rule’ the day and night (1:18; see also Ps 136:7-9) / the separation of light from the darkness
Day 2 – the creation of firmament / the separation of the waters above and below the firmament (1:6-8)	Day 5 – creation of marine life & fowl to fly in firmament above the earth (1:20-23)
Day 3 – waters under the firmament gathered together, creating the seas and dry land (1:9,10) / dry land brought forth grass, herb yielding seed after its kind, tree yielding fruit with seed inside itself (1:11-13)	Day 6 – creation of land animals & insects (1:24, 25) / creation of man (1:26-31) which rules the earth (1:28)
Day 7 – The seventh day stands apart from the standard framework of the other six days. Note there is a threefold mention of the seventh day, each time in a sentence of seven Hebrew words.	

We note there is a *general* parallel of the six days because it is not perfect and several have noted the inconsistencies if one attempts to make too much of this parallelism. Keil for example notes that if the creation of the fowl which fill the air answers to that of the firmament, then the formation of the fish as the inhabitants of the waters ought to be assigned to the sixth day as being parallel to the creation of the seas. Edward Young also notes these supposed parallels of creation

are subjective; for example, ‘light was created on day one and on day four the sun was created;’ but one could just as easily say the sun and moon were placed in the firmament which was not created until day two, thus destroying the parallelism. Their comments are worth noting.

This general comparison of days 1-3 with days 4-6 were commented on in most of the sources I am using but it can be taken to extremes and misapplied. The comparison between the days was first noted by Professor Arie Noordzij of the University of Utrecht in 1924. *He called it the ‘framework theory’ and the reason behind his developing this hypothesis was to avoid the normal sense of ‘day’ during the creation week. To Noordzij, the ‘days’ in Genesis was not in ‘literal’ chronological order but rather a ‘literary’ framework, as if Moses (or the Holy Spirit) was merely employing a literary device instead of recording actual history.* Noordzij says the following:

“We are given two trios which exhibit a pronounced parallelism, all of which has the purpose of bringing to the fore the preeminent glory of man, who actually reaches his destiny in the sabbath, for the sabbath is the point in which the creative work of God culminates and to which it attains.... What is significant is not the concept ‘day’, taken by itself, but rather the concept of ‘six plus one’. [Noordzij; quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, ‘*Creation and Change*’, 156]

For Noordzij, the writer of Genesis was merely using evenings and mornings as a framework, a literary device and not as literal ‘days’ and ‘nights’. His theory has been repeated and developed in the last fifty years through the writings of several, one being Professor Meredith Kline of Westminster West Seminary, Reformed OT scholar and author of a significant work on Covenant Theology. In his ‘*Commentary on Genesis*’ he states:

“The prologue’s literary character [i.e., Gen 1:1-2:3], however, limits its use for constructing scientific models, for its language is that of simple observation and a poetic quality, reflected in the strophic structure, permeates its style. *Exegesis indicates that the scheme of the creation week itself is a poetic figure...*”. [Meredith Kline, ‘*Commentary on Genesis*’ in *The New Bible Commentary Revised*; Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI, 1971, 81f; quoted in Douglas F. Kelly, ‘*Creation and Change*’, 156]

But it is not necessary to reject the literal understanding of the creation week just because we recognize a parallelism involved therein. “Elsewhere in Scripture, elegant literary form (such as the strophic or hymnic structure of Philippians 2:5-11, for example) does not appear to vacate the literal, historical significance of the great stages in the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. If there is no dichotomy there between the literary form and historical, chronological facts, why should there be in Genesis 1 and 2?” [Kelly, 163]

Therefore while the parallelism of days is interesting in the creation week, those of us who accept the literal reading of the creation story should be careful how much stock we put in such concepts.

THE CREATION STORY IS NARRATIVE AND NOT POETRY — *This is of vital importance because those who desire to discount a literal creation relegates these verses to poetry and thus symbolic in language rather than giving a report of actual facts. The commentaries I have been using however emphasizes anyone taking the Hebrew language seriously has no grounds to make such a conclusion.* The reasons for understanding this as a narrative are as follows:

- ***In biblical Hebrew there is a grammatical device called a ‘vav-consecutive-plus-imperfect’, and its purpose is to present events in a historical sequence.*** It appears throughout Hebrew narrative, but it is almost non-existent in Hebrew poetry. For example, it is present 4x in Josh 1, at least 20x in Josh 2, and so forth. ***In Genesis 1, this grammatical device occurs 51x.***
- ***Genesis 1 contains little or no indication of figurative language.*** There are no figurative use of words or expressions, symbolism, or metaphors. Even if we were to allow for the example of alliteration language in Gen 2:3, the dearth of figurative language in this chapter is quite striking.
- ***The most basic feature of biblical Hebrew poetry is line parallelism;*** for example, Psalm 19 reads as follows (literal translation from the Hebrew):

a	b	c
<i>The heavens</i>	<i>are telling of</i>	<i>the glory of God</i>
c ¹	b ¹	a ¹
<i>The works of his hands</i>	<i>is declaring</i>	<i>the firmament</i>

The second line is essentially saying the same as the first line but it employs distinct language. Such line parallelism is a critical feature of Hebrew poetry. There is none in Genesis 1 with the possible exception in v. 27 (although even there it is more likely to be merely chiasmic repetition than poetic parallelism).

- ***Some propose that the overall structure of Genesis 1 reflects a poetic or at least a semi-poetic arrangement by such repetitions as ‘evening and morning’.*** ***But repetitive formulas do not necessarily signify poetry or metaphors.*** For example, the entire book of Genesis is structured according to the repetitive ‘*this is the book of the generations of ...*’ (as has been discussed in earlier lessons) yet no one would argue that such a highly complex structure would reflect a poetical, semi-poetical, or figurative framework for the entire book. [Currid, 36ff; see also Wenham, 9f]
- An obvious point but one worth noting is that ***the days of Genesis 1 are numbered by the author.*** Foundational to numbers is the concept of sequence; in other words, counting is sequential and chronological by its very nature. Derek Kidner comments, ‘*... the march of days is too majestic a progress to carry no implication of ordered sequence; it also seems over-subtle to adopt a view of the passage which discounts one of the primary impressions it makes on the ordinary reader.*’ [Kidner, 54f]

In the final analysis, there are few (if any) internal content matters in Genesis 1 that would reflect Hebrew poetical practice. “By all means, therefore, we must oppose any effort from any source to mythologize or allegorize the Genesis record. It was written as sober history, the divinely inspired account of the origin of all things.” [Morris, 22]