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One"

by John B. Carpenter

The Beginning of Days: A Response to Jeremy Lyon’s “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One”

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Abstract: Jeremy D. Lyon, in his essay “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” claimed that Genesis 1:1–2 is meant to be read as part of day one and that this interpretation “reflects the grammar and syntax in the most straightforward manner” and is supported by “inner-textual commentary” (that is, other parts of the Bible). He helpfully focuses on the most crucial issue for young earth creationists: whether Genesis 1 allows for long periods of time between the creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), in Genesis 1:1, and the beginning of the days, in 1:3. Following the work of Weston Fields, Lyon offers a grammatically impressive defense of a crucial issue for defending Young Earth Creationism (YEC), that Genesis 1:1–2 is “circumstantial;” that is, that it describes the circumstances at the dawn of day one. However, his conclusion about the circumstantial clauses of Genesis 1:2 is overly narrow. Further, Lyon scarcely touches on the literary device demarcating the onset of each day (the “and God said” refrain) and doesn’t deal with the scene-setting grammar and vocabulary of the first two verses, or the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, or the different terms (create, *bā-rā* [ברא] vs make, *‘ā-śāh*, [עָשָׂה]) between Genesis 1:1 and Exodus 20:11 and 31:17. These crucial omissions means that Lyon fails to prove his claims.

Introduction

Jeremy D. Lyon, in a 2019 essay in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, proffered an interpretation of Genesis 1 that begins day one at the first verse.¹ He called this “the traditional interpretation” and claimed it “reflects the grammar in

1. Jeremy D. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” *JETS* 62.2 (2019): 269–85. I prefer to call the first day “day one” rather than “the first day” because that is the literal translation of the term in Genesis 1:5 and to show that in Hebrew the first five days are described without the definite article (“the”) while the sixth and seventh have the definite article (e.g. “the sixth day”, “the seventh day”).

the most straightforward manner” and is supported by “inner-textual commentary.”² It is the standard interpretation for Young Earth Creationists (YECists), like Ken Ham and John MacArthur. The key question: Would an unindoctrinated reader, in the original audience Genesis was intended for, read Genesis 1 as beginning day one in verse 1? By “unindoctrinated,” I don’t mean presuppositionless as no such reader exists. I mean the average reader (or hearer) for which Genesis was intended. Does the author intend us to see the first two verses of Genesis as describing day one? Does Genesis, in that way, create an unbroken, dateable, chronological sequence back to creation? Lyon and other YECists insist that it does. Does their interpretation stand up to scrutiny?

The place to begin is at the beginning. Many readers assume that the key to the debate is the meaning of “day.” But this begs the question as to whether Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. Until that issue is settled, debating the meaning of “day” is premature. The first crucial question: when does day one begin? Thankfully, this is the question that Lyon grapples with. Like Luther wrote to Erasmus, Lyon is to be praised and commended highly for attacking the real issue, the essence of the matter in dispute, and not wearying us with trifles.³ In this debate, the definition of “*yom*” (day) would be a trifle between young and old earth creationism until we settle whether the first two verses preface day one or are part of it.

Begin at the beginning. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1). That’s the first sentence our imaginary unindoctrinated reader would see. Lyon claims that the traditional and “straightforward” reading of this verse is that it begins day one.⁴ Lyon’s interpretation achieves for Young Earth Creationism (YEC) an unbroken, chronological sequence all the way back to the original creation of Genesis 1:1 which is essential to it. Lyon concludes:

Gen 1:1 is an independent clause depicting God’s initial creative act (*creatio ex nihilo*) on day one. Genesis 1:2 is a description of the state or condition of the earth as it was initially created. Genesis 1:3 then moves the narration forward. Thus, the first five verses (1:1–5) constitute the creative acts of day one. The text does not allow for the possibility of preexistent matter or an undisclosed period of time prior to day one.⁵

2. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

3. *The Annotated Luther*, Volume 2: Word and Faith, Kirsi I. Stjerna, editor, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015) 256.

4. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

5. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 285.

The Refrain

There is a major literary marker that we can assume our unindoctrinated reader would immediately notice: the refrain that introduces each day occurs in verse 3. Genesis 1:3 doesn't simply move "the narration forward."⁶ It opens with a refrain – a literary device – that marks it off: "and he said" (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר).⁷ Each of the days is demarcated by a refrain with "And God said" (*way-yō-mer*) beginning each day and "it was evening and morning the *n*th day" concluding it (except for the seventh).⁸ Because we're looking for "the literary boundary" of day one, we cannot dismiss such an obvious boundary marker. Since every day is begun with that refrain, consistency suggests that the writer intends to show us that day one begins with "And God said" (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר) in verse 3. There is no literary reason why verse one could not have begun with "God said" if the intention was to communicate that verses one and two are part of day one.⁹

In a detailed essay on this issue, it is notable that Lyon does not substantially deal with the introductory portion of the refrain. He fills three pages demonstrating the paragraph divisions of the Qumran texts compared to the Masoretic and an entire section on the commentary of ancient Jewish literature but confines his exegesis of the refrain that opens each day to two sentences in the footnotes. He notes that John Collins bases his conclusions on the fact that "the first *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר ("then he said") occurs in 1:3" and that the "the following workdays of creation week (days 2–6) begins with the same *wayyiqtol* verb."¹⁰ He notes that the ending of every day is demarcated by "and there was evening and morning the *n*th day" but dismisses the idea that the phrase that consistently marks the beginning of every other day also marks the beginning of day one.¹¹ He states, "the fact that each of the subsequent workdays of creation week begin with the *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר [*way-yō-mer*] "then he said") does not necessarily mean that day one must also begin with the *wayyiqtol* verb וַיֹּאמֶר ("then he said") in 1:3." He reasons that this is the case because, "within the narrative, וַיֹּאמֶר [*way-yō-mer*] occurs in several places *other than* the beginning

6. Lyon, "Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One," 270.

7. "The days are marked off by a refrain" (John Collins, *Genesis 1–4, A Linguistic, Literary and Theological Commentary* (P & R Publishing: Phillipsburg, NJ, 2006) 55.

8. "There is a clear pattern to the days: they each begin with the phrase "And God said" and end with the statement "and there was evening and there was morning, the *n*th day." This means that, according to the text, day 1 begins in verse 3 and not in verse 1." (Lennox, *Seven Days that Divide the Word* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 2011), 52).

9. For example, it could read, "In the beginning, God said, "Let there be light," when he created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form and void" etc. This is, essentially, the interpretation that Lyon wants us to believe was intended for Genesis.

10. Lyon, "Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One," 279.

11. Lyon on the concluding half of the refrain: "Each of the six days of creation week are clearly marked off by the formula, "Then it was evening, then it was morning, day one/second day/third day/fourth day/fifth day/the sixth day." (Lyon, 269.)

of a day (e.g. 1:11, 26, 29).”¹² This is dubious reasoning. Just because the “and God said” (*way-yō-mer*) refrain is used at other places – each significant creative acts – than just the beginning of the days, doesn’t mean that the refrain still doesn’t mark the beginning of each creation day. Because *way-yō-mer* (וַיֹּאמֶר) is also used to mark the immensely important creative events of vegetation (1:11), humanity (1:26), and food for humanity (1:29), does not alter the fact that it is also the literary boundary marker for the beginning of each of the other days. Shouldn’t we conclude that it is also serving that purpose for the first day? That is, every other day in the creation week is begun with the literary marker “and God said” (*way-yō-mer*). In order to show that 1:1-2 is part of day one, Lyon must show why day one is an exception to this rule. He doesn’t.

Waws: Disjunctive and Consecutive

A major part of Lyon’s case is his exegesis of the Hebrew conjunction beginning verse 2, the *waw*: “The construction of the *waw* plus a noun (in this case, + וַיִּבְרָא, [wə-hā-’ā-reš]) is known as a *waw* disjunctive, which does not convey sequence, but a condition. In other words, the opening clause of verse two is functioning as a parenthetical description or background information concerning the earth as initially created in verse one.”¹³ Hence, he concludes, on the basis of this *waw* disjunctive, that “Hebrew grammar does not allow for the insertion of vast periods of time between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.”¹⁴ Lyon here appears to be carrying on the work, from a generation earlier, of Weston Fields. Fields also strove to provide the academic foundation for YECists to show that Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. In his *Unformed and Unfilled*, he sought to close any possibilities for long intervals between the initial creation and the beginning of day one. That is, like Lyon, he tried to exclude the gap theory as a viable interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2.

The gap theory posits that there is a lengthy, undefined interval of time between the initial creation in Genesis 1:1 and the dawn of day one in 1:3. It was popularized by *Thomas Chalmers* (1780 – 1847), a professor at the University of Edinburgh and founder of the Free Church of Scotland. The Gap Theory was part of the original Scofield Reference Bible (1909). It was more recently propagated by Arthur C. Custance (1910–1985), a Canadian anthropologist, Biblical archaeologist and Hebrew scholar who wrote *Without Form and Void* in 1970. Custance’s gap theory claims there is an epoch between 1:1 and 1:2. Fields responded by describing the

12. Original emphasis, Lyon, 279, fn. 45. I have here reproduced the entirety of Lyon’s engagement with the opening refrain *way-yō-mer*.

13. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

14. Ken Ham, *Six Days* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), 105. This explanation is repeated by Answers in Genesis spokesman Troy Lacey in reply to the question about how much time transpires in Genesis 1:2.

conjunction beginning Genesis 1:2 as a *waw* attached to a noun (e.g. “and the earth”), usually interpreted as a “*waw* disjunctive,” which may indicate the back-ground or circumstances of the main verb.¹⁵ John Goldingay, referring to verse 2, notes that this is “a normal view that those are disjunctive *waws*.”¹⁶ It may indicate that the action is simultaneous or parenthetical material to the main verb. For example: “and the earth was” without form, etc., while God said the first fiat (“let there be light”) that begins day one. It is in contrast to the *waw* consecutive which is attached to a verb (e.g. “and God said”) and, as we’ll see, is usually translated simply as “and.” Fields sought to show that the *waw* disjunctive opening 1:2 prohibits any length of time between 1:1 and 1:2 and, by implication, attaches 1:1-2 to 1:3 and thus day one.

However, there are several problems with Lyon’s narrow interpretation of “*waw*” (ו) in Genesis 1:1-2. First, as Leslie Allen has noted, “*waw*” is so flexible in its meaning that it’s not possible to interpret it so technically and specifically.¹⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs notes that the *waw* “is used freely and widely in Hebrew but also with much delicacy, to express relations and shades of meaning which Western languages would usually indicate by distinct particles.”¹⁸ How we determine what shade of meaning the *waw* might carry is a matter of context and interpretation. It should be interpreted contextually rather than implying that a “*waw*” not connected to a verb is necessarily a “*waw* copulative used disjunctively” and necessarily exclude the possibility of gaps, as Fields and Lyon claim.¹⁹ In this case, common sense demands some kind of sequence as the earth must be “void and desolate” after having been created in 1:1, if, as Lyon rightly argues, 1:1 is describing creation *ex nihilo*. So, while it’s technically accurate to observe that the “*waw*” beginning 1:2 is a disjunctive, as Goldingay remarked, “I don’t really see how this proves anything about creationism!”²⁰

Waw (ו) is an extremely common Hebrew word, really a prefix to other words which may carry the meaning of “and,” “but,” “now,” “then,” etc, or even be untranslated, as it was by the NKJV of Genesis 1:2a, effectively treating it as a punctuation.²¹ Other than in the very first sentence of Genesis 1:1-3, *Waw* begins

15. In my educational experience the conjunction *waw* is usually pronounced “vuv” and the letter *waw* is pronounced like a “v.”

16. John Goldingay, e-mail interview, February 16, 2016. Goldingay (BA University of Oxford, PhD University of Nottingham) is senior professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary.

17. Leslie Allen notes that the *waw* disjunctive is “a slippery term.” (Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, Feb 19, 2016.)

18. Brown, Driver, Briggs, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, (Hendrickson Publishing, Inc.: Peabody, MA, 1979), 252.

19. *Unformed and Unfilled*, (Master Books: Green Forest, AR, 1976), 82. Different scholars use the terms copulative, *explicativum* and disjunctive apparently synonymously.

20. John Goldingay, e-mail interview, February 16, 2016.

21. “Occasionally the English equivalent [of the *waw* consecutive] is “but,” “now,” “then,” “so,” “and so,” or “moreover,” and in a few instances merely a semicolon (typically with paired sentences).” (Samuel L. Bray and John F. Robbins, *Genesis 1-11, A New Old Translation for Readers*,

every sentence there. Further, while most scholars agree with Lyon that the *waw* beginning Genesis 1:2 is a disjunctive and so does not necessarily convey the meaning of a sequence of events, most would also say that the *waw* beginning 1:3 is a *waw* consecutive which likely does convey a sequence. But is it an immediate sequence, with no possibility of other events, no gaps, so immediate that the attached events must have occurred on the same day?

Answers in Genesis (AiG) official spokesman Troy Lacey insists that it is. According to AiG the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, “really means something akin to “and then next”.”

So it is revealed that all of these events from 1:1 through 1:5 equal one day (verse 5) constrained by evening and morning. . . . Therefore at most the time between the Creative events of each day, cannot be longer than 12 hours, for in verse 3 God created light. Had God wanted to convey a time period (some type of gap) between each (or any) Day He could have surely done so by not having Moses connect everything with a *waw* consecutive.²²

To his credit, Lyon does not try to make this case of an immediate sequence of events based on the *waw* consecutive. AiG is right in the basic data they report -- the *waw* consecutive means generally “and then next”-- but wrong in the way they interpret that data. They imply that the *waw* consecutive allows for no intervening events, as though it means “and then immediately next.” This is a rendering of “*waw*” not borne out by Hebrew usage or lexicons.²³ For example, in Genesis 5, the genealogical entry of each name, beginning with Adam (in verse 3, and following in verses 6, 9, 12, etc.), begins with וּ (translated as “when” in the ESV), a “*waw* consecutive.” Surely we are not expected to believe that Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, etc, did nothing other than father a son at the specified time; that there were no intervening events; indeed, we are told each of them “had other sons and daughters” in the intervening time. The truth is that the *waw* consecutive only signifies the next event that the author wishes to narrate.

Fields and now Lyon aren’t so careless, as AiG, as to make inaccurate, sweeping claims about the *waw* consecutive. Rather, they ignore it. Despite relying on the disjunctive of 1:2 for his argument, Lyon doesn’t deal with the *waw* consecutive opening verse 3, (the first word in the refrain “And God said” [*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר].) He doesn’t mention the *waw* consecutive at all. This is a crucial omission because the *waw* consecutive beginning the crucial “and God said” (1:3), can, indeed, allow for a gap. Fields strove to prove that the opening *waw* of 1:2 cannot be a consecutive; that consecutives, not disjunctives allow the possibility of a time interval.²⁴ Hence Fields

Scholars and Translators (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse: 2017), 48.

22. Troy Lacey, Answers in Genesis, e-mail interview, March 16, 2015.

23. Brown, Driver, Briggs’ entry on the “*waw*” contains no such sweeping, absolute statement (251-55).

24. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled*, 81-83.

and Lyon have implicitly admitted that the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3 may separate 1:1-2 from day one, just as the *waw* consecutive separates each day from the one before. That is, the opening *waw* of 1:3 communicates a subsequent act in the same way as the *waws* that begin every other day. Fields and Lyon strove to close any possible gap between 1:1 and 1:2 based on their interpretation of the *waw* disjunctive. But in so doing they appear to have proved the consecutive opening verse three, with the refrain, allows for a break in the sequence of events between 1:2 and 1:3.

The *sin a-qua-non* for YECism is demonstrating an unbroken, datable chronology back to the original creation. So tying 1:2 to 1:3 is crucial. YEC seeks to link the original creation (1:1) to the first fiat of day one (1:3) through the events of 1:2. But that attempt founders on exactly the grammatical point Fields and Lyon worked so hard to prove to close the gap between 1:1 and 1:2: a *waw* consecutive, not a disjunctive, begins 1:3. They argue – unpersuasively – that the *waw* disjunctive opening 1:2 forbids any gap between “In the beginning” (1:1) and “and God said” (1:3) but fail to note that the *waw* consecutive opening 1:3 allows that gap.

Grammar

This then brings the third major issue (after the refrain and the *waw*) regarding time in Genesis 1:1-2: the grammar. Lyon claims that the “straightforward” interpretation of the verbs, suggests that verses one and two are part of day one. C. John Collins disagrees. He noted, “The likely function of Gen. 1:2 is to describe the conditions of the earth just as the first day was beginning (v. 3) — so it says nothing about whether there was any time gap between the initial creation event (v. 1) and the first day. I argue this on the basis of discourse grammar.”²⁵ By “discourse grammar” Collins means that the perfect tense in the opening of a narrative describes an event that occurred prior to the main narrative. “The normal use of the perfect at the very beginning of a pericope is to denote an event that took place before the storyline gets under way.”²⁶ It’s a stage-setting grammatical device. Lyon calls them “*qatal* verbs” (apparently referring to the same thing), a past tense. The main storyline uses what Hebrew grammarians call “*wayyiqtol* verbs.”²⁷ (*Wayyiqtol* means “and + *yiqtol*.” For example, *way-yō-mer* is “and he would say.”)²⁸ To put it simplistically, it’s a story-

25. Collins, e-mail interview, August 7, 2015.

26. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 51.

27. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 51. “These verbs are used primarily to describe a sequence of consecutive actions (*Waw* Consecutive) in which the verb prefixed with the conjunction *Waw* is related to a previous verb (*Waw* Relative). These forms are often referred to by the English transliterations *wayyiqtol* and *weqatal*. The *wayyiqtol* form is one of the most common verbal forms in the Hebrew bible and denotes a simple action in the past, also called “Preterite.”” (Gary Pratico and Miles Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar* [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001], 194.)

28. http://vadimcherny.org/hebrew/grammatical_function_hebrew_yiqtol.htm

telling tense. In Genesis 1, there are no *wayyiqtol* (story telling) verbs in the first two verses. The first two verses use *qatal* verbs which Collins explains are for “stage setting.” The first use of a *wayyiqtol* verb, and thus the marker that the main narrative has begun, is at the onset of verse 3, “and he said” (*way-yō-mer*, וַיֹּאמֶר). The remainder of the Genesis 1 contains these type of verbs.²⁹ Hence, “created” (*bā-rā*, בָּרָא) in 1:1 “denotes an action prior to the main storyline – that is, prior to the beginning of the first day.”³⁰ Collins concludes, based on this “discourse grammar,” that day one begins in 1:3 at an “unspecified time” after the creation of the universe in 1:1.³¹

Lyon’s response is to claim that it is more “natural” to read the first two verses as part of day one and that it “would seem to be a bit out of place” to begin the narrative with a *wayyiqtol* verb.³² He explains that his reading is more natural “considering one of the primary (though not exclusive) functions of the *wayyiqtol* is to move the narration forward sequentially...”. That the *wayyiqtol* verbs beginning in verse 3 move the narration forward isn’t the question. The question is why doesn’t verse 1 begin with such a verb if, as he argues, day one begins in verse 1? Why is the stage set for “and God said,” if there is no stage prior to “and God said”? He further explains, “and given there would have been no creative acts prior to the beginning.” That is, he’s saying, verses 1-2 must be part of day one because there cannot be any acts before “the absolute beginning,” apparently assuming that day one is “the absolute beginning.” Lyon is begging the question of whether Gen 1:1-2 is part of day one. He says it is because that is the “natural reading.”³³

In reality, it is quite natural to preface a narrative by setting the stage; in this case, setting the stage for the six days by briefly describing the events prior to the beginning of days. There are four “stage-setting” statements, one in verse 1 (about the “absolute beginning”) and three in 1:2 focusing on condition of the earth:

And the earth was “void and desolate”,³⁴ (1:2a)

וְהָאָרֶץ, הִיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ

and darkness was over the face of the deep (1:2b)

וְהָאָרֶץ, הִיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ, וְחָשֶׁךְ , וְחָשֶׁךְ

and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. (1:2c)

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

Genesis 1:2b is closely connected to 1:2a because it borrows its verb (*hā-yā-tāh*, הִיְתָה, discussed below) from it. Genesis 1:2c may be interpreted as separable and so as an independent sentence. Or 1:2c may be interpreted as having a participle

29. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 42.

30. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 55.

31. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 57.

32. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280.

33. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280..

34. Bray and Hobbins, *Genesis 1-11, A New Old Translation for Readers, Scholars and Translators*, 68.

(“hovering”, מְרַחֶפֶת, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēṭ*) that assumes the verb of 1:2a (“was” or “became”) alongside it. Either way, the verb in 1:2c describes ongoing action, “was hovering” (מְרַחֶפֶת, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēṭ*).³⁵ To hover is dynamic, an action over some time. This word evokes the image of a hen brooding over her chicks. It suggests nurturing, care, supervision.³⁶ The same word (מְרַחֶפֶת, *mā-ra-ḥe-pēṭ*) is used in Deuteronomy 32:11, “Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that *flutters* over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions”; and in Jeremiah 23:9 where the ESV (and other translations) renders it as “shakes.” It also suggests a process over a period of time. How long a period of time? The passage doesn’t say.

This brings us to two independent though interwoven issues: first, whether the phrases of Genesis 1:1-2 are sequential or circumstantial and, second, whether the verb in 1:2a (*hā-yā-tāh*, הָיָה) is properly translated as “was” or “became.” If they are sequential, they communicate a chain of events over time, a problem if the time is less than 24 hours. If they are circumstantial, they describe the environment of the action. (“A circumstantial clause describes the manner, circumstances or conditions under which the main clause occurs.”³⁷) They can theoretically be interpreted in four different ways: as sequential with *hā-yā-tāh* as “was”, or sequential with *hā-yā-tāh* as “became,” or circumstantial with *hā-yā-tāh* as “was,” or even circumstantial with *hā-yā-tāh* as “became,” describing the events prior to day one which brought about the circumstances on the dawn of that day. None of these possible interpretations establish Lyon’s YEC case. Some trouble it.

A sequential interpretation of 1:1-2 could render the *waws* as “then” and *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָה) in 1:2a as “became,” with the interpretation that it relates a series of events: the earth became void and desolate and then darkness became over the waters and then the Spirit of God nurtured the earth. This approach suggests that the earth was first created by the fiat of 1:1, then it became void. It implies a cosmic catastrophe befell the earth. (Some gap theorists have filled this gap with speculation that tends to discredit the gap theory, speculation that Lyon understandably pounces on.³⁸) Lyon claims that this is impossible, because of the *waw* disjunctive (discussed above) and the grammar. “The form of the verb הָיָה [*hā-yā-tāh*] which is not connected to the *waw* conjunction, cannot be construed as “became” in this context.”³⁹ Lyon asserts this conclusion on the basis of *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (1910) but doesn’t note that many other Hebrew grammarians don’t concur.⁴⁰ Barry Bandstra notes that *hā-yā-tāh* (1:2a) could, indeed, be rendered “as a material process and be translated

35. Collins, *Genesis 1-4*, 42.

36. John MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning* (W Publishing Group: Nashville, TN, 2001), 77.

37. Ronald J. Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax*, (University of Toronto Press, 2014) 176.

38. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 279.

39. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

40. E. Kautzsch and A. E. Cowley, eds., *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2006), 454.

as *became*,” hence sequential contrary to Lyon. This suggests, “that the earth went through a transformation.”⁴¹ Lyon is eager to discredit this as an exegetical possibility because if the earth “became” void as a result of events after creation but prior to day one, the datable sequence of events on which YECism relies is undone.

In an e-mail interview, Leslie Allen, my former Old Testament professor, noted the possibility of interpreting the three statements of 1:2 as “circumstantial” and whether they are dependent or independent clauses.⁴² (Independent clauses are separate sentences, as in the current, major English translations of 1:1-2.) Lyon wants us, as is traditional, to read the first two verses as circumstantial and as independent clauses. He concludes that 1:2 is “a parenthetical description of the condition of the earth in its initial created state.”⁴³ Allen says this is a definite possibility, Genesis 1:2 “is generally interpreted as a nominal circumstantial clause with the verb [*hā-yā-tāh*] . . . just functioning as a copula (“was”) and with the usual order of subject-predicate in a circumstantial clause.”⁴⁴ Wilhelm Gesenius concurs. He believed that Genesis 1:2 is an example of *haya* (הָיָה), the root word, being used as a “connecting word,” what Allen calls a “copula.”⁴⁵ The condition reported by *haya* (הָיָה) is either “contemporaneous with the principal events or continuing as a result of them.”⁴⁶ The relevant question for us is, then, what are the “principal events:” the creation of Gen. 1:1 or the “and God said” of 1:3?

Paul Joüon with Takamitsu Muraoka likewise interpreted *haya* (הָיָה) as a copula (“was” connecting “the earth” with “void and desolate”), describing the circumstances that developed out of 1:1.⁴⁷ But in 1892 S. R. Driver insisted that Hebrew wasn’t so rigid in its rules, especially about what is or is not a circumstantial clause; “emphasis or the love of variety” is a factor.⁴⁸ One must have a sense of the literary nature of the text. It’s literature, not mathematics. Further, even if 1:2 is circumstantial, the circumstantial, with *haya* (הָיָה) may represent “an act completed long before.”⁴⁹ Allen concludes, “There is no 100% proof rule as to whether Gen 1:2 is sequential or circumstantial.” In other words, Hebrew lacks an absolute rule on this

41. Bandstra, 43, 46. Bandstra notes that *bā-rā* “is a finite verb and not an infinitive; normally both components of a construct phrase must be nominal forms.” (Barry Bandstra, *Genesis 1-11, A Handbook on the Hebrew Text* (Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2008), 43.)

42. Leslie C. Allen (BA and MA, Cambridge University; DD and PhD, University of London) is Senior Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary. Richard Muller, when also teaching at Fuller, said that Professor Allen was one of a handful of people in all of North America who could read the unpointed Hebrew of the Dead Sea Scrolls with fluency.

43. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1–3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 279.

44. Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, February 19, 2016.

45. Gesenius, 452, fn. 2, 454.

46. Gesenius, 455.

47. Paul Jouon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2003) 542.

48. *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses*, 200.

49. Gesenius, 455.

grammatical issue. This opens the door to legitimately interpreting the verb in 1:2a, *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָא־תָּאֵחַ), as “became,” in a temporal sequence.⁵⁰

Some scholars want to read the first two verses as circumstantial but as dependent clauses, hence like “When God created the heavens and the earth in the beginning, it was without form,” etc. This is reading it as a dependent clause, following Abraham Ibn Ezra (d. 1167) and Solomon ben Isaac, d. 1105). F. F. Bruce wrote that he was “almost persuaded” that the best translation of Genesis 1:1-3 was, “In the beginning of God’s creating the heaven and the earth (now the earth was waste and emptiness, and darkness on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovering on the face of the water), God said ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” Other mid-twentieth century scholars were more fully persuaded.⁵¹ While this would seem to bolster the conclusion Lyon arrives at, nevertheless Lyon helpfully commits several pages in his essay countering this dependent-clause interpretation.⁵²

Francis Andersen both interprets *hā-yā-tāh* (הָיָא־תָּאֵחַ) as “became” and concludes 1:2 is circumstantial but describing the circumstances arising out of 1:1, the aftermath of the original creation, not necessarily the circumstances of day one (as Collins suggested). Further, – and to complicate matters – it is a circumstantial that describes a sequence of events, effectively both circumstantial and sequential. Genesis 1:2 “is a circumstantial sentence comprised of three conjoined circumstantial clauses, the whole circumstantial to the opening time” (Gen. 1:1).⁵³ As circumstantial clauses with the perfect verb *haya* (הָיָא), Andersen compared the use in 1:2 with Genesis 7:6 (“when the flood came [7:10 ; (“[הָיָא] (“the flood came [הָיָא]” [ESV]); and Exodus 1:5b (“and Joseph *was* [הָיָא] already in Egypt” [ESV]). In these cases, *haya* (הָיָא) represents a circumstance that was the result of a series of prior events, over an extended time. So Andersen considers it more likely that the meaning is “the earth had become (or had come to be) ...” as a circumstance to the preceding verse, the creation of 1:1.⁵⁴ Hence Andersen concludes that while 1:2 is circumstantial, it describes circumstances that are the product of a sequence of events issuing from the original creation of 1:1, “prior to the first fiat” in 1:3.⁵⁵

This issue of sequential vs. circumstantial is directly relevant to whether Genesis 1:1 is interpreted as a title to the rest of the creation account or as the initial statement of it. Bruce Waltke defended the proposition that 1:1 is a title – hence a framing phrase summarizing the entire passage -- in a three part series of articles

50. Leslie Allen, e-mail interview, February 19, 2016.

51. F. F. Bruce, “‘And the Earth was Without Form and Void,’ An Enquiry into the Exact Meaning of Genesis 1, 2,” *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 78 (1946): 21-37, p. 22.) William S. LaSor joined the chorus for this rendering. (according to Fields, pp. 154-155.)

52. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 273-75.

53. Francis Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton: 1974), 86.

54. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 85, 79, 87.

55. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 85.

in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1975).⁵⁶ John MacArthur follows him, “Verse 1 is a general statement.”⁵⁷ MacArthur’s position seems to be that Genesis 1:1 is a summary in advance, like a title, and the events themselves are described beginning in 1:2, with day one. The most obvious problem with this interpretation is that there is then no statement of the creation of the earth. Where did the earth that is “void and desolate,” the “deep” and the “waters” come from? Even if 1:1 is a title, it is still not proven that day one dawns in 1:2 because of the three statements there, before the “and God said” demarcating each day.

John Sailhamer argues, in *Genesis Unbound*, that “beginning” (רֵאשִׁית) in 1:1 is not a title to the following account but God’s original creating act. Lyon concurs, comparing 1:1-3 to 2:4-7 and mustering an impressive grammatical case to the conclusion that “the arguments in favor of the summary statement view of verse one are unpersuasive and appear to be forced onto the text.”⁵⁸ Further, he notes that the crucial issue is whether 1:2 describes conditions or events prior to day one. The “point of contention,” he says, is whether the earth was created “void” or whether it became that way after some process.⁵⁹ Again, Lyon helpfully frames the discussion around the critical issues.

Hence, there are two interwoven, over-lapping issues: whether 1:1-2 is sequential or circumstantial and whether *hā-yə-tāh* (הָיָה) should be translated as “was” or “became.” “Became” suggests a sequential interpretation and would make the YEC position difficult as it would require the text to say the earth “became” “void” within day one before God said “let there be light.” But translating it as “was” and interpreting it as circumstantial doesn’t necessarily help YECism or bolster Lyon’s case. Andersen interprets it as circumstantial, like Lyon, but writes that 1:2 describes the state of the universe after creation, like Collins, setting the scene for the days. Hence, “The first event is reported in Gen. 1:3,” day one.⁶⁰

Vocabulary

Sailhamer essentially concludes the same with Allen and Collins, against Lyon, coming at it from another perspective, that of vocabulary, especially “*rē-šît*” (רֵאשִׁית, beginning). Sailhamer writes, *rē-šît* “always refers to an extended, yet indeterminate duration of time – *not* a specific moment. He notes Job 8:7, Genesis 10:10 and Jeremiah 28:1 using *rē-šît* in just this way. It is a ‘time before time,’ not referring ‘to a point

56. Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3”, Part 1, “Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony” (25-36); Part 2, “The Restitution Theory” (136-44); “The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory” (216-28); Part 4, “The Theology of Genesis 1”, (327-42), *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1975.

57. MacArthur, *The Battle for the Beginning*, 73.

58. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 278.

59. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 276.

60. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, 86.

in time but to a *period* or *duration* of time which falls before a series of events. . . . [I]t says that God created the universe during an indeterminate period of time before the actual reckoning of a sequence of time began.”⁶¹ It is, then, in Collin’s terms, “stage setting.”

Similarly, Gesenius, noting the preposition “in” (בְּ) prefixed to “*rê-šît*” (רֵאשִׁית) that normally such nouns with prepositions (i.e. “specifications compounded with a presupposition”) stand after the verb, except, among other exceptions, “prepositional specifications of time,” citing Genesis 1:1.⁶² If, then, *bə-rê-šît* (בְּרֵאשִׁית, “in the beginning”) is the specification of time, then why would the same event, according to YECists, have another specification of time, namely “day one”? That is, according to Lyon, 1:1-5 is one event all occurring on day one. If so, why does it have two separate specifications of time?

Also, Sailhamer believes that *bā-rā’* (“created”) in Genesis 1:1 “refers to an indefinite period of time” which “could have spanned as much as several billion years or it could have been much less; the text simply does not tell us how long. It tells us only that God did it during the “beginning” of our universe’s history.”⁶³ YECist Ken Ham calls this a “modified gap theory” and concludes that “accepting billions of years” is “the real motive” of Sailhamer’s exegesis, noting, “Sailhamer proposes his idea in order to squeeze long ages into the text.” Ham doesn’t explain how he is able to discern Sailhamer’s “real motive.” Ham exclaims “No one in his right mind would believe this – it’s not even in the Bible!”⁶⁴ Neither Ham nor Lyon, who cites Sailhamer’s work and his conclusion, meaningfully engages Sailhamer’s claims on vocabulary.

Inner-Textual Commentary

Lyon turns to Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 as “inner-textual commentary” – that is, other passages of scripture elaborating on creation – “indicating that the initial creation of “the heavens and the earth” in Gen 1:1 is part of day one of creation week.”⁶⁵ However, Exodus 20:11 and 31:17, in the context of giving the theological basis for the fourth commandment, do not say God “created” (*bā-rā’*, אָרַב) the earth in six days. They say He “made” (*ā-śāh*, עָשָׂה) it. Admittedly, there is a great deal of overlap in the semantic range of the two words, just as with the English words they are rendered as. They can sometimes be synonyms as they are both sometimes translated

61. Emphasis original. John Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1996), 38, 44.

62. Gesenius, 457.

63. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 13.

64. *Six Days* [Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013], 114-115). Ham truncates Sailhamer’s quotation cited here, ending it immediately after the “several billion years.”

65. Lyon, “Genesis 1:1-3 and the Literary Boundary of Day One,” 280.

by the Greek word ποιεω (*poieo*) in the Septuagint (LXX).⁶⁶ In the LXX *bā-rā'* (ברא) is rendered by *poieo* in 1:1 but by ἐγένετο (*egeneto*, aorist middle indicative of γίγνομαι, “were made”) in 2:4. In 2:4, the LXX translators had the opportunity to translate both words into the same Greek word if they believed that the two terms were interchangeable. They did not. So it’s unclear whether the LXX translators regarded the two terms as always synonymous.

In order to show that Exodus 20:11 sums up all of Genesis 1, including 1:1-2, and not just the days starting in verse 3, Lyon must show that “make” (*ā-śāh*, עָשָׂה) is exactly, always synonymous with “create” (*bā-rā'*, ברא).⁶⁷ He does not deal at all with this issue. Although Lyon frequently compares 1:1 with 2:4 (which summarizes the creation with both verbs “created” and “made,”) he doesn’t comment on whether there is a difference in the semantic range between the two terms. This is another crucial omission.

While often synonymous, the key question for Lyon’s use of “inter-textual commentary” to make Genesis 1:1-2 part of the days (Gen. 1:3-2:3) is whether create (*bā-rā'*, ברא) has a meaning outside the range of “make” (*ā-śāh*, עָשָׂה). C. F. Kiel believes that it does. “In Kal [*bā-rā'* (ארב)] always means *to create* and is only applied to a divine creation, the production of that which had no existence before.”⁶⁸ That is, “create” (*bā-rā'*) refers to God’s creation out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Brown, Driver, Briggs defines *bā-rā'* (ברא) as “shape, create,” noting it is “always of divine activity.”⁶⁹ Besides Genesis 1:1, it is used of the creation of the heaven and earth (i.e. the universe) (Is. 45:18); of humanity (Gn. 1:27, 5:1f, 6:7, Dt. 4:32, Ps. 89:48, Is. 45:12; Mt. 2:10); of “the great sea creatures and every living creature” (Gn. 1:21); of a clean heart (Ps. 51:12); of the north and south (Ps. 89:13); of a cloud and fire over Zion (Is. 4:5); of the host (Is. 40:26); of the ends of the earth (Is. 40:28); of transformed nature (Is. 41:20); of the heavens (Is. 42:5); of Israel (Is. 43:1, 7, 15); of salvation and righteousness (Is. 45:8); of the smith and the ravager (Is. 54:16); of the “fruit of lips” (Is. 57:19); of a new heaven and earth and new Jerusalem (Is. 65:17f); of “new things” like the ground swallowing up the Korahites (Num. 16:30) or a woman encircling a man (Jer. 31:22); of wind (Amos 4:13); etc. That’s *bā-rā'* (ארב).

Meanwhile, the verb in Exodus 20:11, *ā-śāh* (עָשָׂה), is defined with two primary meanings “do, make.”⁷⁰ Besides Gen. 2:4, both terms are used in Isaiah 45:7b, “making (*ā-śāh*, עָשָׂה) peace and creating (*bā-rā'*, ברא) evil.” The question, though, is whether

66. ποιεω (*poieō*) means to make, do.

67. Fields, cites numerous instances of *ā-śāh* in which he seeks to show it is interchangeable with *bā-rā'* (60-74). I don’t believe he successfully demonstrates any instance in which *ā-śāh* is clearly used for creation *ex nihilo*.

68. Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1 (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1866), 47.

69. Brown, Driver, Briggs, 135.

70. Brown, Driver, Briggs, 793b.

“create” can have a meaning outside the range of “make.” It can. “Create” (*bā-rā*) is only used in the OT with God as its subject whereas “make” (*‘ā-śāh*) is not so specific.

If 1:1 is describing a creation *ex nihilo* then “create” (ברא) is the proper term. If 1:3-2:3 is describing God working on the earth already created in 1:1, then “make” (*‘ā-śāh*, עָשָׂה) is the proper term. So 2:4 summarizes both the creation *ex nihilo* of 1:1 and the making of a habitable earth in the seven days in a synthetic parallelism.⁷¹ If Exodus 20:11 was meant to be interpreted to encompass the entire creation, from the beginning in 1:1, then *bā-rā* (אָרַב) would have been the proper term. But it uses *‘ā-śāh* (עָשָׂה), the making of something out of pre-existing material. Therefore, Exodus 20:11 can be legitimately interpreted as to only summarize Genesis 1:3-2:3, the “main storyline,” not necessarily the four scene-setting statements of 1:1-2. Given the context of Exodus 20:11, the fourth commandment, the specific reference of “make” (*‘ā-śāh*) is to the seven days (1:3-2:3).⁷² To assume that those seven days includes the creating of Genesis 1:1-2 is to beg the question this essay is written to answer.⁷³

Conclusion

Beginning at the beginning, Lyon and other YECists have not shown a sound exegetical basis to claim that Genesis 1:1-2 is part of day one. The literary marker of the beginning of day one, as with each of the other days, is the refrain “And God said.” Day one is thus marked as beginning in verse 3. That the same phrase is also used of three other significant creation events besides the dawning of new days, doesn’t detract from its function as a literary signal, like a rooster crow, that a new day has begun. Hence, “absolute creation” occurred at an unspecified time before day one. Whether the earth “was” or “became” “void and desolate” is debatable but 1:2c tells us that for an undefined span of time the Spirit of God “hovered” over the water on earth. All of this occurred prior to the first “and God said,” the green

71. Alternatively, Bray and Hobbins (p. 90) interpret the second creation account (Gen. 2:4-25), in which God is called “Yahweh Elohim,” as beginning at 2:3b, thus breaking apart the *bā-rā* (ברא) of 2:4a from the *‘ā-śāh* (עָשָׂה) of 2:4b, displayed by a the paragraph break. The NIV does the same. In this case, the two terms are in no parallel relationship. Bandstra (p. 116) and the ESV, however, more traditionally keep them together in some kind of parallelism.

72. Sailhamer concurs, noting that the use of *‘ā-śāh* (make) in Exodus 20:11 instead of *bā-rā* (create), indicates that this verse doesn’t refer to the original creation of the universe (*Genesis Unbound*, 107). The same could be said of Nehemiah 9:6.

73. Lyon also seeks to put weight on the fact that some Qumran texts and some medieval Masoretic texts demarcated Genesis 1 by means of spacing around the days, setting off each day with a blank line. However, Genesis 1:1-2 was grouped with Genesis 1:3-5, suggesting, Lyons writes, that the scribes saw Genesis 1:1-2 as part of day one. Two full pages of the essay are occupied with reproducing Qumran texts to illustrate this paragraphing (Lyon, 282-283). While interesting for lovers of antiquity, even Lyon admits that the lack of a break may only be “due to the small amount of text involved prior to the first major section break after 1:5” (Lyon, 284). The scribes may have read 1:1-2, like our unindoctrinated reader, as “stage setting.” Further, even if the lay-out is an expression of their interpretation, it only amounts to the opinion of copyists which is no more authoritative than the opinions of the author of the pseudepigraphal book of Jubilees.

light that starts each day. At this point, as far as dating the earth from the Bible, the meaning of the “days” is moot. Whether the days are literal 24 hour days, or long eras, or a literary framework is quite beside the point for dating the creation from scripture. Genesis simply doesn’t provide the unbroken, chronological chain back to creation *ex nihilo*. So, as John Lennox, observed, “the beginning” of Genesis 1:1 is not dated to day one as many assume. The initial creation happened before day one. How long before? Genesis does not tell us. So, quite apart from the input of science, without the pressure of the modern academic consensus, based purely on exegesis of the text of Genesis 1:1-3, we conclude that by separating the absolute beginning (1:1) from day one (1:3), the Bible leaves the age of the universe undisclosed.⁷⁴

Jeremy Lyon has contributed scholarly work seeking to tie the first two verses to day one in a way that closes the door on the possibility of any time before day one and thus bolstering the exegetical case of Young Earth Creationism (YEC). He’s helpfully focused on the most crucial matter in the debate: whether the first two verses are prior to day one. His work is substantially better than that of much of popular Young Earth Creationism, which often concentrates on strained interpretations of the conjunction *waw* and skips to a literalistic interpretation of “day” as though that was the crucial issue. In so doing, he’s made some helpful contributions, such as defending the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 as independent clauses rather than the dependent clause interpretation that was in vogue among some 20th century scholars. However, despite his subjective claims that his “traditional interpretation” is “natural” and “straightforward,” his failure to deal substantially with the “and God said” refrain demarcating the beginning of each day, the scene setting grammar and vocabulary of the first two verses, the *waw* consecutive beginning 1:3, and the differing semantic ranges of “create” and “make” means that Lyon fails to prove his case. So our unindoctrinated reader would not find Lyon’s interpretation “natural” or “straightforward.” Such a reader likely would not assume that the first two verses are part of day one. The Bible doesn’t begin with day one. It begins with an absolute creation, *ex nihilo*, that sets the stage for the seven days. So, until YEC can show that the creation occurred on day one, YEC dogmatism is, also, *ex nihilo*.

74. Lennox, 53. John Sailhamer says this very thing, that after a creation over an “an indeterminate period” “the period of which follows “the beginning” is a single seven-day week....” (*Genesis Unbound*, 44.)