

TYNDALE OLD TESTAMENT
COMMENTARIES

TOTC

GENESIS



ANDREW E. STEINMANN



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VOLUME I

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GENESIS

AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARY

ANDREW E. STEINMANN



CONTENTS

General preface	vii
Author's preface	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Select bibliography	xiv
 Introduction	 I
1. Genesis as the foundational book of the Old Testament	I
2. Authorship, composition and date	2
3. Literary features of Genesis	16
4. Historical and archaeological issues	18
5. Theological themes in Genesis	24
6. Genesis as a witness to the promised Saviour	33
7. Sin and grace in Genesis	38
8. Conclusion	39
 Analysis	 41
 Commentary	 49
 Additional notes	
The seven days of creation	59
The knowledge of the name Yahweh in Genesis	76

The ages of the persons in the genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11	87
Noah and the flood account	107
The literary structure of the primeval history (1:1 – 11:9)	134
Polygamy in the Old Testament	176
The chronology of the births of Jacob's children	291
Paired dreams in Joseph's life	385
Parallels between Joseph and Daniel	392

COMMENTARY

1. CREATION (1:1 – 2:3)

Context

Genesis' account of the origin of the heavens and earth not only reveals God's world as he made it for humans to inhabit, but also reveals God himself as the almighty transcendent Creator who was not brought into being but who brought into being all things through his word and will. It serves as the foundation upon which the rest of the book is built, and especially introduces the book's view of humans as a creation of one God who also created the world which humans inhabit.

Comment

A. Day one (1:1–5)

The first five verses of the Bible introduce God's creative acts on the first day. God is elsewhere said to be the creator of heaven and earth (Isa. 40:28; 45:18; see also Isa. 44:24; Jer. 10:16; 51:19; Eph. 3:8–9; Col. 1:16; Rev. 4:11).¹ Therefore, the first verse cannot simply

1. This is also affirmed in early Jewish literature outside of the Bible (e.g. 2 Maccabees 7:28).

be a summary of everything else in the chapter but must be a statement of creation of the earth before it was *formless and void* (1:2). God's existence outside of time and space, however, is simply assumed by the author: he created, but he himself has no origin. Moreover, unless one posits an unmentioned (and, therefore, unlikely) gap in time between the creation of heaven and earth and God's activity beginning at 1:3, the creation mentioned in 1:1 is part of the activity that is later summed up by 1:5 as *one day*.

1. *In the beginning* is a statement that locates the creation of space, matter and time when God, including the person of the Son of God, already was (John 1:1–3; 17:5, 24). While some versions attempt to take this phrase as the beginning of a clause completed in verse 3 ('When God first created . . . God said . . .'; cf. NRSV, TNK), there is little support for this, and it could imply that verse 2 is stating that the earth was pre-existent and not part of creation. Most versions as early as the LXX take this as an independent clause (CSB, ESV, GW, NET, NIV) and this verse as a complete sentence. The word for *beginning* (*rēšit*) denotes the initial portion of something.² Here it is the initial stage of creation, which is the bringing forth of the raw material of the universe that will be shaped by God's almighty power into a complete and good world.

Created is a word that in Hebrew is used only of God's activity. It occurs six times in this opening account of creation. While at 2:3 it is used as a summary for all of God's activity in this narrative, in the first five instances it introduces new things brought into being: the heavens and earth (v. 1), animate life that is endowed with the *breath of life* (vv. 21, 30) and human beings bearing *the image of God* (v. 27 [three times]). *Created* is in contrast to the Hebrew word for *do* or *make*, which is used throughout this account for making and forming things from already created items or as a general word for God's work (vv. 7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31; 2:2, 3).

2. For example, at 10:10 it denotes the initial extent of Nimrod's kingdom. At Exod. 23:19 and in many other passages it denotes the first portion of the harvest. At Job 8:7; 42:12 it refers to the first part of Job's life. At Jer. 26:1 it designates the first years of Jehoiakim's reign.

2. *Now the earth* places the narrative in a geocentric stance. Everything in the narrative from this point forward will be told from this point of view. However, *formless and void* describes the earth's initial condition. *Formless* (Hebrew *tōhū*) elsewhere is a description of wildernesses (Deut. 32:10; Job 6:18; 12:24; Ps. 107:40; Isa. 45:19) or of a city in ruins (Isa. 24:10; 34:11), or is a word for emptiness (Job 26:7; Isa. 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9). *Void* (Hebrew *bōhū*) occurs only with *formless* (Isa. 34:11; Jer. 4:22), and here forms a hendiadys – one concept expressed by two words. This verse is a parenthetical comment that describes the earth as amorphous and waiting to be filled by God's creative activity.

Darkness is not simply the absence of light, but is also a creation of God (Isa. 45:7). So is the *deep* (Hebrew *tēbôm*), which signifies the primeval ocean that covered the earth. This word shares a common Semitic root with the word *Tiamat*, the name of the rival of the gods in the Assyrian creation myths. Previously it was argued that this pointed to Genesis borrowing from these Mesopotamian sources, but it is now clear that the Hebrew word and concepts are not derived from or dependent on these pagan myths. Instead, the deep is part of God's created earth which he will shape into the inhabited world.

This verse also contains the first mention of *the Spirit of God*. While the word for *Spirit* could also denote a wind, this phrase occurs fifteen more times in the Old Testament where it always means God's Spirit or a spirit sent from God (i.e. it is not simply a wind).³ Here the reader's attention is called to God's presence focused on the earth, preparing now for the acts which will transform it into the ideal place for those who will bear his image.

3. *God said* marks the power of God to simply speak things into existence (2 Cor. 4:6; Heb. 11:3; 2 Pet. 3:5). This phrase will be used ten times in the creation account (vv. 1:6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). God said that *light* should come into being. Light precedes the

3. Only at 1 Sam. 16:15–16, 23; 18:10 is this phrase used for a (harmful) spirit sent from God. Elsewhere it denotes God's Spirit of wisdom, insight and prophecy (Gen. 41:38; Exod. 31:3; 35:31; Num. 24:2; 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6; 19:20, 23; 2 Chr. 15:1; 24:20; Ezek. 11:24).

creation of the sun and other heavenly luminaries. The source of the light is not stated, but elsewhere the Scriptures connect it with God himself in the person of the Word of God, Jesus (John 1:1–5). At the end of all things light will again be provided by God and the Lamb without need of the sun (Rev. 22:5).

4–5. *Good* is the judgment of God on his creation of light. This assessment will be repeated for other creations of God (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25) until all of creation is very good (v. 31). After creating light God *separated* it. This separation is another key aspect of God's creative activity that will be repeated on days two and four (vv. 6–7, 14–18). Here the separation is between light and darkness. The narrative since 1:2 has been geocentric. The separation is implied as being between night and daytime. As the Creator, God has the right also to label his creation of darkness and light as *day* and *night*. The first day's length is summarized by the statement *there was evening and there was morning*, perhaps better understood as 'In summary, there was evening, then there was morning.'⁴ The evening and morning are then said to make *one day*. In most versions this is translated *the first day*. However, the Hebrew text contains no article ('the'), and the number is 'one', not 'first'.⁵ The beginning of the day is reckoned from evening. This would dictate the way sacred days were celebrated in Israel (Exod. 12:6; Lev. 23:5, 32; Neh. 13:19).

B. A second day (1:6–8)

Since the basic description of the earth as it was originally created highlighted earth's darkness and the deep, that is, the waters

4. This type of chronological summary statement is also used in the primeval history genealogies at 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 18, 20, 23–24, 27, 31; 9:29. For instance, at 5:5 the meaning is 'In summary, all the days of Adam that he lived were 930 years, and then he died.' See also the chronological summary statements at Judg. 10:2; 12:7, 9–10, 11–12, 14–15; Ruth 1:4–5; 2 Kgs 11:3. See Steinmann (2016–17).

5. See the analysis in Steinmann (2002) that demonstrates that the Hebrew 'one' is not a circumlocution for 'first' in this context. Also note that the LXX, the oldest known translation of Genesis, translated this as *one day*.

covering the earth, both needed additional creative acts. The darkness was complemented by light on day one. Now on the second day God divides the waters and creates the sky as one item that complements them.

6–7. God's next creative act was to order that an *expanse* (Hebrew *rāqîa'*) be formed between the waters. The Hebrew word for *expanse* (*rāqîa'*) is related to the verb meaning 'stretch out' or 'spread out' and is used elsewhere of God's spreading out the heavens and the earth (Ps. 136:6; Isa. 42:5; 44:24). It is also used at Job 37:18 to describe God's spreading out the clouds. Here the expanse is the sky with the upper waters – the clouds – and the waters below the sky – the sea.

8. Once again God labels what he has brought into being, calling the expanse *sky* (CSB; traditionally *heavens*). The repeat of the summary formula for a day (evening and morning) is followed by noting *a second day*. While this is traditionally rendered *the second day*, the Hebrew text contains no definite article here, nor for the third, fourth or fifth days.

C. A third day (1:9–13)

God continues to work with the primeval seas on the third day. Here he orders the waters to part in order to form dry land. Thus, the second and third days create items that contrast with the watery *deep* that was originally part of the earth. The seas are now distinct from both the sky created on the second day and the dry land created on the third day. The seas are now complemented by both sky and land, just as the light became the complement of darkness on day one. The third day also relates a second major work of God: the creation of plants.

9–10. Once more God's creative acts are accomplished by his word. For the last time in the creation account God is said to name his creations: *earth* and *seas*. This first work on the third day is again called *good*.

11–12. God next creates *vegetation* (CSB) which appears to be classified into two types: plants that bear seeds, and trees (plants that bear fruit which contain seeds). *Seed* or *descendant* (when used of humans) is an important Hebrew term in Genesis, occurring sixty-five times, almost one-quarter of its occurrences in the entire Old

Testament. This term reveals God's provision for the continued reproduction of life.

The plants are said to produce seed *according to their kinds*. While this should not be understood narrowly in terms of the modern scientific concept of species, it does reflect God's created order for the world in that the plants produce offspring that share the qualities of their progenitors. For the second time on this day, God saw that what he had created was good, thereby demonstrating two distinct creative acts on one day.

13. The chronological summary formula is repeated again, noting *a third day*.

D. A fourth day (1:14–19)

This day sees the creation of physical light sources (as opposed to the light source on day one). For the first time God's creative word also notes the function that a part of his creation will serve as illumination for an observer having a terrestrial point of view, thereby continuing the geocentric perspective that was first introduced at 1:2. This mention of function already hints that God's ultimate goal was the creation of humans.

The narrative for the fourth day has a strong anti-mythological, anti-polytheistic cast to it. The sun, moon and stars are creations of the one God, not gods to be worshipped. They are assigned functions by the true God (Acts 14:15; 17:24), and therefore are not self-actualizing and autonomous gods.

14–15. According to God's own command, the lights in the sky were explicitly designed for three purposes. One was to distinguish day from night. The second was to serve as signs for the passage of time by marking *seasons, days and years*. The third purpose was to provide light on earth.

16–18. These verses pay special attention to the two greater lights in the earth's sky, with the stars mentioned only in passing. The text avoids the Hebrew words for sun and moon, since those words could signify the pagan deities associated with these light sources. As with the heavenly lights in general, these lights are said to serve three purposes: to provide light on earth, to be the dominant lights during day and night, and to separate light

from darkness, a function that light had been serving since the first day (1:4).

19. The chronological summary formula is repeated again, noting a *fourth day*.

E. A fifth day (1:20–23)

The creation of the first animal life demonstrates God's concern to fill the seas and the skies, the object of his attention on the second day. This life merits God's first blessing.

20–21. The life created on this day is distinct from the plant life created on the third day because it is described as *living creatures*, an expression that applies to all animal life. It is an important description of fish, birds and beasts in this chapter (vv. 21, 24) and again in the account of the great flood (9:10, 12, 15–16).⁶ The second use of the word *created* in chapter 1 highlights this new and important aspect of God's creatures.

The sea creatures are described in two categories: *large* or *great sea creatures* and all other creatures in the water. The Hebrew word for the large sea creatures, *tannîn*, is a cognate of the Canaanite word for the sea-dwelling enemy of Baal. Once again Genesis takes an anti-mythological stance by depicting these animals as subject to God. He is able to subdue them (Ps. 74:13–14; Isa. 27:1; 51:9). Elsewhere the word is simply used to denote some kind of land or sea animal (Exod. 7:9, 10, 12; Deut. 32:33; Ps. 91:13; Ezek. 29:3; 32:2).

The creatures of the air are simply described collectively as *winged bird*. The word translated *bird* here can also include flying insects. The verdict of God once again notes the goodness of his work.

22. The Scriptures' first blessing is for the fertility of these newly formed creatures so that they can fill the seas and multiply on earth. God's blessing is not simply a wish, but it endows his creatures with the ability to do what the blessing states.

23. The chronological summary formula is repeated again, documenting a *fifth day*.

6. See also 1:30 where it is often translated *breath of life* (CSB, ESV, NET, NIV).

The phrase 'living creature' is also used at Lev. 11:10, 46; Ezek. 47:9.

F. The sixth day (1:24–31)

Like the third day, the sixth day sees two creative acts, one pronounced *good* by God (v. 25), and the other *very good* (v. 31). Not only is the sixth day the climactic day of creation, but it also serves to draw two distinctions. One is the distinction between the living creatures created on this day and the previous day. This distinction is highlighted by humans alone being endowed with the image of God. A second distinction is between God and humans. The humans God creates possess his image, but they are not God – unlike God they are to multiply, and they also need God’s provision of food just as the living creatures do.

i. The creation of land animals (1:24–25)

24–25. God’s command to the earth to produce living creatures is parallel to his command on the third day that the earth produce plants (v. 11). The animals are listed in three broad categories: domestic animals (CSB, ESV, NIV: *livestock*), animals that creep or crawl on the ground (perhaps reptiles and some insects among others), and *wild animals* (GW, NET, NIV, NRSV). Like the plants, the animals are to reproduce *according to their kinds*.

ii. The creation of humans (1:26–27)

26. God’s use of the plural *Let us . . . our image . . . our likeness* has been the source of much discussion from earliest times and has generated a number of proposals as to its meaning.⁷ Among the more common theories is that God is including the angels or the heavenly court. However, humans are not depicted as sharing the angelic image anywhere in Scripture. Another theory is that this use of the plural depicts God’s majesty, though this is without grammatical support.⁸ Still another hypothesis is that the plural depicts God’s

7. Clines (1968) and Murphy (2013) survey the various proposals.

8. The Hebrew verb translated is *let us*, with *us* included as part of the verb’s meaning. JM (347, §144e n. 7) remarks that the plural of majesty does not exist in verbs in biblical Hebrew.

self-deliberation.⁹ However, this use cannot be demonstrated elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹⁰ Instead, the text clearly depicts God as an inward plurality and outwardly singular – *our image ... his image* (vv. 26–27), and the mention of God’s Spirit at verse 2 supports this.¹¹ While some early Christians took this as a reference to the Trinity, the concept of one God in three persons is only implicit here at best, and is revealed with fuller clarity only in the New Testament.

God’s expressed desire is to make *man* (CSB, ESV), or, better stated, *humankind* (NET, NRSV) or *humans* (GW), since immediately God refers to humanity as *them*.¹² They are to display God’s image in that they will rule the animals created on days five and six.

God’s image in humans is further defined as a *likeness* (see 5:1), indicating that in some respects humans are to be like God. The exact ways in which humans are to be like God are not defined, but later, Adam having a son in his likeness and image (5:3) implies that the image of God was marred by sin but in some sense remains part of every human (9:6; Jas 3:9).

27. The threefold use of *created* emphasizes the high position for which God created humans. Twice they are said to be created in God’s image, and once that they were created male and female. This emphasizes that both men and women were the bearers of the image of God.

iii. God blesses humans (1:28–31)

28–30. The second blessing given by God at creation is specifically for humans. It is twofold: the blessing of fertility and of dominion over the animals. Moreover, God provides for humans and animals through plants that are to serve as their food.

31. Finally, God judges his entire creation to be *very good*. With humans at the climax of his creation, this marks the completion of

9. Arnold (2009: 44).

10. That is, apart from uses in the early chapters of Genesis. See 3:22; 11:7.

11. Clines (1968: 68–69); Hasel (1975: 65–66); Wenham (1994: 134); Mathews (1996: 163).

12. *Man* is the Hebrew word *’ādām* that is also used as the name *Adam*.

God's work. The chronological summary formula is repeated again, this time emphasizing the conclusion of all of God's creative activity by featuring the first use of the definite article: *the sixth day*, or, more precisely, *a day, the sixth one*.

G. The seventh day (2:1–3)

While the accounts of the first six days follow similar patterns, the seventh day is unique, which may explain why the medieval chapter division intervenes. Nevertheless, there are good reasons for considering it a part of the creation narrative. It is striking that the first use of the *tôlêdôt* formula (see the Introduction) occurs after the account of God's blessing the seventh day. Moreover, twice in Exodus the seventh day is explicitly connected with the previous six (Exod. 20:11; 31:17).

The uniqueness of the seventh day is that God did no new creative work. That cessation of work marked the holiness of this day and became a model for Israel's need to sanctify the Sabbath (Exod. 16:23; 20:8, 11; 31:14; 35:2; Deut. 5:12; Neh. 9:14; 10:31, 33; 13:22; Isa. 58:13).

At the end of this day there is no refrain like those appended to the other six days. This lack of the refrain is a literary device that sets this day apart and serves to emphasize its holiness.

1. This verse summarizes the previous six days and prepares for the seventh. The completion of God's work covered heaven and earth and *everything in them* (CSB). This last phrase translates the Hebrew 'their army', and is often used to describe the stars.¹³ The implication is that God had arranged the contents of heaven and earth with each in its own place and with its own function, just as soldiers are organized into an army.

2–3. The phrase *the seventh day* occurs three times to denote three activities of God. First, by the seventh day, he had completed his work. Second, on the seventh day he *rested* – the word can

13. Deut. 4:19; 17:3; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4; 2 Chr. 18:18; 33:3, 5; Neh. 9:6; Isa. 24:21; 34:4; Jer. 8:2; 19:13; 33:22; Dan. 4:35; 8:10; see Acts 7:42.

mean to cease, and here denotes cessation from work. Finally, God blessed the seventh day and declared it to be holy because he ceased his work of creation. It is interesting to note that Genesis mentions God only ceasing creation. God did not cease all work, and his acts of blessing animals (1:22) and humans (1:28) continued.

Meaning

The creation narrative forms the basis for understanding God's relationship with his creation and its creatures throughout Genesis. It sets the stage for the monotheistic tone of the rest of the book. Moreover, it demonstrates God's right to order and direct the affairs of humans, such as his sending the great flood (chs. 7–9), confusing human languages (11:1–9), striking Pharaoh with plagues (12:17), empowering the aged Sarah to bear a son (21:1–2), building a family for Jacob (29:31 – 30:24) and giving Joseph the ability to interpret dreams (40:8; 41:16). Moreover, the blessings that God places on animals and humans continue throughout the book: through Noah, God saves all living creatures from the flood, and he shows mercy to all nations through Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (18:18; 22:18; 26:4).

Additional note on the seven days of creation

In recent decades the interpretation of the creation week has seen several proposals concerning how the days of creation should be understood, and this is especially true among evangelical Christian scholars.¹⁴ While many evangelicals continue to read the text as setting forth historical days making up an actual week, others have offered contrasting ways to read 1:1 – 2:3. Most of these

14. The essays gathered in Charles (2013) present a range of views from American evangelical scholars on how to read 1:1 – 2:24 and, therefore, whether to understand the days as regular (solar) days or simply as some type of literary device for presenting God as the creator of all things without intending the seven days to be understood as the first historical week.

readings of Genesis contain variations and combinations of several proposed interpretations that have circulated for a century or more.

Among these interpretations is the 'framework hypothesis'. This explanation of the six days of creation notes the parallels between the first three days and the last three days (see Introduction). It then posits that this is a literary device to demonstrate God's orderly creation which is, therefore, not intended to be understood literally. Thus, the narrative of the duration of the creation was not intended to depict six actual days. The problem with this use of the framework hypothesis is that it draws a false distinction between the literary aspects of the text and the orderliness of creation as well as the text's chronological features, as if these features cannot coexist in one composition.

Another attempt to explain the six days as figurative is the 'analogical day theory'. This holds that the days are simply an analogy to a week that ends with the seventh day, a Sabbath. God is analogous to a human labourer who does his work in six days and rests on the seventh. The obvious problem with this approach is that later passages in the Scriptures do not state that God's work of creation is 'like six days' followed by a Sabbath. Instead, they state that God did his work of creating the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day, and that Israel are to do the same every week in their work (Exod. 20:11; 31:17). In addition, at Exodus 20:8–11 and 31:12–17 the analogy runs in the opposite direction: the Israelite seven-day working week is compared to God's work of creation, not vice versa. Moreover, it is curious that the provision for the Sabbath year makes no mention of the creation week (Exod. 23:10–11; Lev. 25:1–6, 20–22; Deut. 15:1–3; 31:10–13). There an analogy between the seven days of the Genesis creation and the seven-year cycle of work and rest for the land is obvious, but the Scriptures never make the analogy explicit. If the days were merely analogical, the analogy is more than fitting for the Sabbath-year cycle, but the Scriptures never give voice to such an analogy.

A third approach involves comparing Genesis to the creation myths of the Ancient Near East. Often it is observed that Genesis ought to be read against the backdrop of the generally held ancient

views concerning the origin and structure of the universe (i.e. ancient cosmology). While no-one wishes to divorce Genesis from its ancient context, and some rough parallels can be found, it is clear that Genesis is presenting a view of creation that is counter to the most important assumptions of ancient cosmologies from Mesopotamia and Egypt: Genesis is rigidly monotheistic instead of polytheistic; Genesis does not present autonomous entities (gods), but presents creation as subject to the will of the Creator. Genesis, in contrast to the ancient cosmologies, displays God's work as organized into days. This is an important difference and not to be lightly dismissed. The comparison with Ancient Near Eastern creation myths and cosmologies does not demonstrate that these days are to be understood figuratively, and in fact could be pressed in the opposite direction: in contrast to other ancient creation accounts, Genesis' insistence on days places God's work in time, in actual history, and portrays time itself as a creation of the Almighty.

There are compelling reasons for understanding 1:1-31 as depicting six actual, regular days. All six days of creation are defined as the passing of both evening and morning, and the mention of *days and years* on the fourth day (v. 14) refers to normal days and years. The regulations for the Sabbath day are built on the Israelite workday being parallel to God's work at creation (Exod. 20:8-11; 31:12-17) without any hint that the creation days are something other than ordinary days. Like the days enumerated in the refrain *there was an evening and there was a morning, a/the* [number] *day* in 1:1-31, the days in Israel's sacred reckoning begin at sundown in the evening (Exod. 12:6, 18-19; Lev. 23:32; Deut. 16:6; Neh. 13:19-22; Luke 23:54). From this evidence it is hard to escape the conclusion of Basil the Great (c.330-379):

And the evening and the morning were one day. Why does Scripture say 'one day' not 'the first day'? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says 'one day', it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day – we mean of a day and of a night . . . It is as though it said:

twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality, a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there. Thus, every time that, in the revolution of the sun, evening and morning occupy the world, their periodical succession never exceeds the space of one day.¹⁵

15. Basil of Caesarea, *The Hexaemeron*, in P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.), trans. B. Jackson, *St. Basil: Letters and Select Works* (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1895), 8.64.

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