

SELECTED LEXICAL AND GRAMMATICAL STUDIES IN GENESIS 1¹

DAVID M. FOUTS
Bryan College
Dayton, Tennessee

A traditional evangelical understanding has been that Gen 1:1–2:4 records the very recent and quick creation of the heavens and earth by the God of the OT, i.e., the “young earth” view. With the growing numbers of evangelicals who hold to Progressive Creationism or Theistic Evolution, either of which could be considered an “old earth” view, it is important to study the words of Scripture to establish a solid foundation for future discussion. With the Evangelical Theological Society’s (ETS) emphasis on the inspiration and inerrancy of the autographs of Scripture, the Scriptures themselves must be the deciding factor in the issue.

To that end, this paper will analyze the Hebrew terms יום (“day”), ערב (“evening”) and בקר (“morning”), and וַיְהִי־כֵן (“and it was so”) as they are used syntactically within the remainder of the OT, in order to see if those other usages inform Gen 1:1–2:4. This paper will also analyze the jussive verbal forms of Gen 1:1–2:4 to ascertain what information these terms may add to the discussion.

There have been many recent attempts to harmonize the traditional young-earth view of the terms in Gen 1 with the seemingly overwhelming evidence from science as to the age of the earth. At the center of this discussion is the understanding of the use of the Hebrew term יום (“day”). Hugh Ross, a popular proponent of the Progressive Creationist school, has stated:

The first chapter of Genesis declares that within six “days” God miraculously transformed a “formless and void” earth into a suitable habitat for mankind. The meaning of the word *day*, here, has become the center of a controversy. Does it, or does it not, make for a conflict between Scripture and science?

The answer to that question depends upon whether the time periods indicated are twenty-four hours or, rather, something on the order of millions of years. Most Bible scholars (and scientists, too) would agree that a correct and literal interpretation of the creation “day” is one that takes into account definitions, context, grammar, and relevant

¹This paper was presented at the national 2001 Evangelical Theological Society meetings in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

passages from other parts of Scripture. A careful analysis of all these elements yields many reasons for interpreting the creation days of Genesis as long periods of time.²

Bernard Ramm stated much earlier: "In view of the fact that such a great array of geologists and theologians accept the metaphorical interpretation of the word *day*, the case for the literal day cannot be conclusive nor the objections to the metaphorical interpretation too serious."³

Since many on both sides of the issue would agree that the proper understanding of "day" (יִום) is crucial, it is necessary to begin the investigation with the testimony of its use in Scripture as a whole before trying to understand its use within Gen 1.

Possible Syntactical Arrangements of יִום in the Singular

Basic Gloss

The anarthrous term יִום is glossed as "a day" in Ps 84:10 (clearly twenty-four hours or less) and as "day" in balanced parallelism with "night" (לַיְלָה) in Ps 19:2 (perhaps a twelve-hour day). It rarely serves as the subject of a sentence without numerical qualifiers or demonstratives.

Used with the article, הַיּוֹם is normally understood to have the meaning "the day," often as the genitive in construct relationships: e.g., "cool of the day" (Gen 3:8), "heat of the day" (Gen 18:1). Either of these types of usages, though generalized, is obviously limited by the day of twenty-four hours. With the article, יוֹם is often used as "today" or "this day."⁴ In certain instances, it is found with the nuance of "at this time" or "this day and from now on" (Gen 4:14; 31:43).

With a Demonstrative

The singular of the term יוֹם appears often with near and far demonstratives זֶה and הוּא used attributively with the basic glosses of "this day" (הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה; e.g., Gen 24:42, 1 Kgs 1:25; also as "today") and "that day" (הַיּוֹם הַהוּא; Gen 30:35; Exod 32:28). In predicate position, the phrase "this is the day" is quite common (Judg 4:14; Ps 118:24). Similar

²Hugh Ross, *The Fingerprint of God: Recent Scientific Discoveries Reveal the Unmistakable Identity of the Creator*, 2d rev. ed. (Orange, CA: Promise, 1991), 146.

³Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 213.

⁴Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 59.

types of usages are found with the plural of the term יום. In each of these cases, the term serves as a reference for a point in time. Though it may be indefinite as to total length of time in a given context, it certainly must be understood as less time than that indicated by similar terms such as “that millennium, this century, that year, this month, that week” that are commonly used in English, some of which would have been readily available in Hebrew (e.g., week, month, year).

As a Temporal Adverb

Much has been made about the use of יום in Gen 2:4, where it seems to indicate that the creation took place all in one day, since therein it is stated: “in the day the Lord God made earth and heaven.”⁵ This particular phrase involves the use of יום with the inseparable preposition ב' (בְּיוֹם, *bēyôm*), followed by an infinitive construct. It is now thought by many scholars that this construction probably should be understood as an indefinite temporal adverb meaning “when.”⁶ Thus, the NIV translates it as “when” in Gen 2:4 (cf. Gen 2:17, 3:5, 5:1, 5:2). If this is to be understood as an idiomatic usage, then such occurrences add nothing to the argument one way or the other.

As the Construct in Bound Relationships

The term יום often functions in bound relationships as the construct (initial word). In some cases, the construct may be made definite not by the presence of an article or a pronominal suffix on the term, but by the juxtapositioning of the words in sequence. Normally, the second word will be made definite by some means, but such is not always the case. If no definiteness is intended, such indicators will be absent. Both types, definite and indefinite, are found to be used with יום as the construct word.

There are numerous examples of יום in construct with an absolute form (the genitive) that function as a definite day in time. For instance, Lev 23:27-28 speaks about the Day of Atonement being on a specific day of the calendar (the tenth day of the seventh month). Judges 13:7 speaks about the day of the death of Samson (obviously

⁵I understand this to be the view of Augustine, for instance.

⁶See the translation of this word in Gen 2:4b in Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 250, 611; David M. Fouts, “Response Two to ‘How Long an Evening and Morning,’” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 11/3 (1997): 303-304; and idem, “How Short an Evening and Morning?” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 11/3 (1997): 307-308.

within a twenty-four-hour framework, i.e., a date of death). Ecclesiastes 7:1 speaks as well about the day (date) of one's birth.

There are also numerous examples of יום plus the indefinite absolute functioning as an indefinite period of time. Such examples include the "day of battle" (1 Sam 13:22; Job 38:23), the "day of calamity" (Deut 32:35; Prov 27:10), the "day of vengeance" (Prov 6:23; Isa 34:8), the "day of prosperity" (Eccl 7:14), the "day of gladness of heart" (Cant 3:11 = Wedding Day [or week?]), "day of the Lord" (Joel 1:15, 2:1),⁷ and the "day of salvation" (Isa 49:8). One may argue really either way for most of these terms. At times, the word "day" plus indefinite genitive may refer only to an event or events within a twenty-four-hour framework, or it may involve several days or longer. At times, context helps; at times, it doesn't. One should at least consider the significance of such phrases as 2 Kgs 7:9 ("This day is a day of good news") and 19:3 ("This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection") in the discussion. In the first instance, even the indefinite "day of good news" is made date-specific in the context. On the other hand, the latter context lengthens indefinitely the day of "distress, rebuke, and rejection" for Hezekiah and those with him in Jerusalem. Yet, historically the siege of Sennacherib probably lasted only a few months.

With Pronominal Suffixes

The term יום occurs often with pronominal suffixes (*yómēka; yómō*). In these cases, a day of one's birth is generally indicated (Job 1:4; 3:1), but a like term can also mean the day of one's punishment, often by death (Ps 37:13; Jer 50:31). Though it is obvious that the day of one's birth is date-specific within a twenty-four-hour period, as is the date of one's death, it may be that a day of punishment can be a lengthier, undefined period of time.

Figurative Use

The term יום occurs often in the merism, a figure of speech indicating two opposite extremes that contain everything in between. Commonly used are terms such as "heaven and earth," which means "everything," or here, "day and night" meaning "continually."

⁷The term "Day of the Lord" is a theologically technical term with past, present, or future aspects of blessing or judgment, depending on the context in which it is found. The length of time involved varies according to God's purposes.

With Ordinal Numbers⁸

The term יום occurs quite frequently with ordinal numbers (e.g., Exod 19:11; Lev 13:5; Esth 9:1). In every case where יום occurs in the singular with ordinal numbers in the Hebrew OT it indicates a twenty-four-hour day—with possibly one exception: Hos 6:2, a clearly poetic expression of the ANE numerical parallelism formula $x/x+1$.⁹ Clearly poetic (in contrast to the admittedly stylized narrative of Gen 1:1–2:4), this prophetic passage may or may not provide an exception to the rule. If it is a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ, twenty-four-hour days are still in view. However, if a national restoration of Israel is in view, it may be of indefinite stated length, but of finite duration. In other words, the restoration will *one day* be complete (pardon the double entendre). On the other hand, being a conventional poetical device, the occurrence in Hos 6:2 may not even be relevant in the discussion of the length of time indicated by the presence of יום.

Possible Syntactical Arrangements of יום in the Plural (ימים)

With Cardinal Numbers

The plural form of יום (ימים) does not occur with ordinals (e.g., one would not say “the thirteenth days” or “the fourth days,” for this would not make sense). When found with cardinal numbers, ימים normally refers to twenty-four-hour days (as in Judg 19:4 and 2 Sam 1:1). An idiomatic expression does exist where “three days past” refers to a short time ago (1 Sam 9:20).

In Construct Relationships

In construct with other nouns in the contracted form ימי, the term functions as it does in the singular, but with the expanded development in phrases such as “the days of the Philistines,” “the days of Noah,” “the days of Uzziah,” “the days of Ahasuerus,” “the days of Josiah.” These phrases, admittedly indefinite since some refer to life spans and others to periods of political influence, are nonetheless never understood to refer to periods of time necessary to support a meaning for יום of millions of years.

⁸The singular term יום also occurs with the cardinal number “one” (Gen 1:5; 27:45; 33:13; Num 11:19; 1 Sam 9:15; 27:1). The latter five of these all refer to activities within a twenty-four-hour period.

⁹For more on this literary convention of the ANE world, see Wolfgang M. W. Roth, “The Numerical Sequence $x/x+1$ in the Old Testament,” *VOT* 12 (1962): 300-311.

Idiomatic Usage

The plural of יום is often used in Scripture to refer to the “days” of one’s life and then normally expressed in a total of years (Gen 35:28; 47:9; Ps 90:10). This idiomatic usage would seem to suggest that one’s lifetime is constituted of individual twenty-four-hour days, the total of which can normally be understood as a collection of years.

The Use of יום in Genesis 1:1-2:4

Daylight (or Daytime)

The nominative is used as an equivalent with daylight in Gen 1:5. One notes here that it is God naming the period of light as יום, in contrast to the period of darkness he names “night.”¹⁰ This same thought is repeated where “daylight” also should be understood, as יום appears as the genitive object of the preposition בַּיּוֹם in 1:14, contrasting with “night.” Similarly, in 1:16 in construct with the noun “rule” and as the object of the preposition בַּיּוֹם in 1:18 (“to rule in the daytime”), this same “daylight” is in view for יום.

As a Clear Measurement-of-time Passage

The term יום is found a second time in Gen 1:14, seemingly with the meaning of “days” of twenty-four-hour duration¹¹ in the phrase expressing one of the purposes of the heavenly bodies: to be “for signs and for seasons and for days and years.”

With Cardinal Numbers

One occurrence of יום is with the cardinal number “one” (אֶחָד) in 1:5. An ordinal is probably not used here because there were no other days

¹⁰This fact should be important in the discussion. It is God who does the naming of the sequence of light and darkness as day and night respectively, showing his dominion over them.

¹¹It is at least possible, in my thinking, that with the cataclysm of the Flood and the miracle of the long day of Josh 10, a rotation of the earth revealing the presence of the sun and moon may or may not have been of twenty-four hours’ duration in the pre-Flood days. However, with the other terms used in the passage (as will be discussed below) and with the understanding of the author of the passage and later tradents, one doubts the possibility that the length-of-time passage that comprised a day of Gen 1:1–2:4 would have been significantly different from that which we now experience. In other words, if it were widely known and believed that the passage of time involved in these “days” was significantly different than that of the readers, other words depicting lengthier periods were available to the Hebrews who repeated the account to succeeding generations.

with which to compare it.¹² Other occurrences of the phrase יום אחד indicate activities within a twenty-four-hour period of time.¹³

With Ordinal Numbers

The use of the term יום with the ordinal numbers second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh (1:8, 13, 19, 23; 2:2, 3) presents one of the major difficulties in the debate of the length of time involved for the activities of the creation account. Since it was observed above that the juxtaposition of יום with an ordinal within the remainder of the OT (hundreds of times with only one dubious exception) indicates twenty-four-hour days, it seems unlikely that one should understand it differently here. Unless Gen 1 is to be understood as an entirely different and special type of creation genre rather than straightforward Hebrew narrative, the term יום with ordinals seems to indicate twenty-four-hour days here as well.¹⁴

As a Temporal Adverb (יום־כִּי) Plus Infinitive Construct

Only in 2:4b does the term יום appear with the inseparable preposition כִּי before the infinitive construct. As was shown above, an acceptable understanding of this construction is to see it as the temporal adverb “when.” If this is the case, as it appears to be, it argues for neither position as to the length of time involved with the other uses of יום in the same passage.

Conclusion of the Use of יום in Genesis 1:1–2:4

In none of these cases can יום be understood as an indefinite and lengthy period of time from a grammatical/syntactical standpoint if one considers the similar usages of the same constructions elsewhere in the OT Hebrew text. In fact, “day(s)” is never used elsewhere in the OT in the sense of multiple thousands or millions of years, i.e., the period of time necessary for evolution to have occurred. The burden of proof rests upon those who would argue differently—scriptural usage does not allow for such nuances.

¹²Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), 30.

¹³See n. 7 above.

¹⁴It may well be that some ANE passage more directly parallel to the Gen 1 account may someday be revealed by the turning of the spade or in the rubble of the gufa bucket. Until that occurs, however, one must accept the overwhelming data offered by like usage elsewhere in Scripture as paramount.

Evening and Morning (ערב ובקר)

The phrase offered repeatedly in Gen 1 is “and there was evening and there was morning, day x” (וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם x). This phrase is unique to Gen 1. The expression ordering “morning” before “evening” is more prevalent and normally indicates regular daytime activities, such as the sacrifices offered morning and evening (cf. 1 Chron 16:14; 2 Chron 2:4; Exod 18:13). When “evening” precedes “morning” outside of Gen 1, such as in Exod 27:21 and Lev 24:3, it refers to a daily task with emphasis on overnight activity (e.g., keeping the lamps burning in the tabernacle). In Num 19:21, it refers to the cloud of God’s presence, which appeared as fire (Num 19:15), overshadowing the tabernacle throughout the night. Thus, it seems that the particular order of evening before morning in Gen 1 could simply be indicating the period of darkness following the daylight activity of the creative hand of God (decree followed by fulfillment and assessment: see discussion below). On the other hand, the phrase may simply indicate a twenty-four-hour day. The term “evening” precedes “morning” asyndetically twice in Dan 8. In Dan 8:14, the terms are qualified by the numerical modifier 2,300 (the KJV renders this as 2,300 days). This verse is the antecedent reference for the mention of the same in 8:26, wherein Gabriel explains to Daniel the certainty of the vision of the evenings and mornings. Time passage, as we would understand it, certainly seems to be in view in this passage.

Since “evening and morning” are understood and used in the vast majority of cases as “evening” and “morning” in the Hebrew Bible, there is no evidence to indicate they should have a differing meaning in Gen 1. Either ordering of the words effects a time passage of no more than twenty-four hours. In fact, the unusual construction of “and there was evening and there was morning, day x” seems in and of itself to mark a time passage of one twenty-four-hour day, since “day x” or the “xth day” seem to be in apposition to the phrase וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם.

The Statement of Completion (וַיְהִי־כֵן)¹⁵

Though the use of כֵּן (“thus, so”)¹⁶ is found quite frequently in the Hebrew Scriptures, the expression prefaced by the preterit וַיְהִי found in 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30 (i.e., at the end of the initial creative decree of God

¹⁵It is thought by some that the phrase “and there was light” (וַיְהִי אֹר) in 1:3 serves as a statement of completion similar to וַיְהִי־כֵן. Cf. Ronald Hendel, *The Text of Genesis 1-11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

¹⁶“Yes” in Modern Hebrew.

on days 2, 3, 4, and 6) occurs elsewhere only twice.¹⁷ In Judg 6:38, it refers to the completion of Gideon's first test with the fleece. It thus must be seen as reflecting the accomplishment of a task. The second occurrence of the phrase is found in 2 Kgs 15:12. The prophecy spoken to Jehu concerning his royal descendancy (2 Kgs 10:30) is said to have been fulfilled by the kingship of Zechariah. This fulfillment is registered by the phrase *יְהִי יָכֵן*. Though these two examples do not provide absolutely conclusive evidence, they are the only two uses of the phrase outside of Gen 1. An adherent to the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture should at least consider the testimony they offer that something has been completed.

The Jussives of Genesis 1

The verbal forms of the decrees of God in Gen 1 traditionally have been understood as jussives.¹⁸ Jussives of the weak verb are often grammatically indicated by a shortened form of the imperfect tense in Hebrew and are thus readily identifiable (such is the case for *יְהִי* in 1:3, 1:6, and 1:14, all from *הִיָּה*), or from differing vowel patterning (as for *תִּרְשָׁא* in 1:11 and *תִּוְצֵא* in 1:12, 1:24).¹⁹ The verbs *יִקְוּ* (1:9), *יִשְׂרְצוּ* with *יְעוֹפְפוּ* (1:20) in the decretive formulas are likewise thought to be jussives, though the form in the text could be construed in other settings to indicate imperfects instead. However, within the stylized structure of the passage, jussives fit better. Too, after the verb in 1:9, the statement of completion is given, suggesting a jussive nuance to the verb.

Jussives may be one of two types in Biblical Hebrew. These are the jussive of command and the jussive of request.²⁰ A jussive of request is offered from an inferior to a superior; a jussive of command is offered from a superior to an inferior. It is most likely that the jussives in Gen 1 must be understood as jussives of command rather than jussives of request, since the Bible is consistent in depicting no one greater than the Lord, the God of creation.

¹⁷Further study into the textual analysis of this phrase in both the MT and LXX can be found in Hendel, 20-23.

¹⁸1:3, 1:6, 1:9, 1:11, 1:12, 1:14, 1:20, 1:24, 1:26. It is interesting to note at this point that the creation decrees offered by a god are unique to Gen 1 among ANE cosmogonies (David T. Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," in *I Studied Inscriptions from Before the Flood*, ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994], 31).

¹⁹The root does not appear elsewhere in the Hiphil imperfect, but the form is analogous to other third-aleph Hiphil jussives (i.e., with a *šere* instead of the imperfect's *hireq-yod*).

²⁰Allen P. Ross, 150.

It is probably instructive at this point to digress to a related issue—commands in the Bible. It seems in Scripture that the more power held by a king, the faster his commands were carried out. Such was the case with Pharaoh in Gen 41:14 (“then Pharaoh sent and called for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon”) and for Ahasuerus in Esth 7:8 (“as soon as the word went from the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face”). In Dan 2:12-13, Nebuchadnezzar’s power was seen in the response of his servants to his commands: “[The king] gave orders to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain; and they looked for Daniel and his friends to kill them.” Even in the NT the power held by Herod Antipas is witnessed by the speed with which his commands were carried out: “And immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison” (Mark 6:27).²¹ The same seems to be true with Jesus, the King of Kings, in his earthly ministry: “Then He arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea; and it became perfectly calm” (Matt 8; Mark 4; Luke 8). “And He stretched out His hand, and touched him, saying, ‘I am willing; be cleansed.’ And immediately the leprosy left him” (Luke 4). “But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God” (Luke 9).

Though more work remains in this area, particularly in observing possible patterning in the jussives of command that may be present in other ANE inscriptions, it is certainly interesting to note that Jesus, God incarnate, the one who exegetes God, the King of Kings, and the agent of creation (John 1:3), operates almost always instantaneously in his miraculous dealings.²²

The Stylized Narrative of Genesis 1

One increasingly *popular* view is that of Gen 1 as poetry. This claim implies that perhaps it is not meant to be understood as a literal accounting of the creation and that perhaps the terms used have symbolic rather than actual meanings. This would thus allow for a creation to have occurred over long periods of time and, therefore, might very well harmonize with the empirical data from scientific investigation. In fact, the NIV has indented the text of Gen 1:1–2:4 in

²¹All NT citations are from the NASV.

²²In fact, the only impediment to universal obedience seems to be sourced in the sinfulness of humanity.

a way reminiscent of poetic formatting.²³

However, the passage before us lacks the primary structural indicators of Biblical Hebrew poetry: that of parallelism and that of metrical balancing. Too, there are few (if any) figures of speech in the passage, a glaring omission for those who claim for it a poetic genre. There is instead a stylized narrative, as is indicated in the patterning by:

A decree by God employing a jussive of command (to be carried out quickly),
 Followed by a statement of fulfillment/completion in the term “and it was so,”
 At times followed by other information about that day’s activities,
 Followed by an assessment that the results of God’s work were “good,”
 Followed by the phrase “and there was evening and there was morning, day x.”²⁴

The point to be made at this juncture is that the passage is not poetry. It is not prophetic literature. Nor is it myth, as Waltke has recently observed.²⁵ The closest biblical genre it comes to is narrative.²⁶ It employs the use of narrative sequencing with the *waws* consecutive; it involves repetition, a feature highly valued in Hebrew narrative; and it purports to recount the events that occurred in the first week of earth history. One might add that the *tolédôt* formula, a key structural indicator in the narratives of Genesis, is found in 2:4.²⁷ If it is to be understood as a special genre, a creation genre, it reveals itself to be unique in the ANE by the presence of the decrees of the Creator God.²⁸ But no matter under what genre we classify it, it remains revelation from God, inspired by him. It may be that there could be no clearer way of expressing the uniqueness of each day, the separateness of each day, the succession of each day, and the length of each day than that which is offered in Gen 1:1–2:4.²⁹ Given that the

²³It is my understanding that only one Hebrew manuscript has ever indented the passage in poetic format.

²⁴This represents the preliminary observations of the present writer. Bruce K. Waltke sees the pattern as “*announcement, commandment, separation, report, naming, evaluation, and chronological framework*” (*Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 56, emphasis original).

²⁵Waltke, 74, states: “In this case, the word *myth* misrepresents the Genesis account and does an injustice to the integrity of the narrator and undermines sound theology.”

²⁶Claus Westermann, “Gen 1:1–2:4a is a Narrative,” in *Genesis 1-11*, ed. Claus Westermann (Grand Rapids: Fortress, 1994, 80).

²⁷Some would see Gen 1:1 as a variation of this formula.

²⁸Tsumura, 31.

²⁹I do not personally believe that the Hebrew language could express six actual days of creation in any better way. Gerhard von Rad has said: “In contrast, Genesis I presents the results of concentrated theological and cosmological reflexion in a language which is concise and always utterly direct in expression. Its statements are not allusive and

Hebrew language has ample vocabulary to express long periods of time, why were those terms not employed if a longer period was meant?

If one of the goals of the creation account was to establish the power of God as the sole Creator of all there is, and it took eons of time to do so, are we thus to conclude that the God of Israel is not as powerful as the Israelites thought? Psalm 33 seems to indicate that people are to fear God precisely because he is fully capable of acting instantaneously,³⁰ as demonstrated by the creation account. Are we therefore to understand that the Israelite writers were wrong in their recounting or that it was mythopoetic language, or perhaps even an etiological reflection on the beginnings of all things? Perhaps the God of creation, as depicted in Gen 1:1–2:4, is no better than the gods of the other cosmogonies offered by the surrounding nations of the ancient Near Eastern world. Such would certainly seem to be the case if the writer of the passage before us either offered the account solely for propagandistic purposes (i.e., to promote Yahwism) or was mistaken in the assessment of the event as evidenced by his word choice. On the other hand, if the writer of Genesis intended to demonstrate the power of God to create all observable things by the spoken word with instantaneous results (or nearly so), how else would he have done so than that which is present in the text before us?

It is the thinking of this present writer that one who would reinterpret the term *רָאשׁוֹן* in the context of Gen 1:1–2:4 is engaging in selective perception at best, in eisegesis at worst. One does not normally try to reinterpret other clear words in the passage. Heavens are normally understood as heavens (or skies), earth as earth (or land), seas as seas, dry land as dry land, grass as grass, plants as plants, trees as trees, fish as fish, birds as birds, light as light, darkness as darkness, creeping things as creeping things, sea creatures as sea creatures, land animals as land animals, people as people. The motivating factor in trying to reinterpret the term *רָאשׁוֹן* seems to be based in the desire to harmonize Scripture with science. If this reinterpretation is to be done by biblical scholars, it must be done within the biblical, literary, and archaeological disciplines, not from the paradigm of science. To do the latter, for us as biblical scholars, would be to commit the logical fallacy of appeal to misplaced authority.

charged with a hidden meaning . . . but are everywhere clearly contoured and mean exactly what they say" (*Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], 1:141).

³⁰One may compare here Eccl 8:11.