

A Defense of a Literal Hermeneutic for Interpreting Genesis 1

J. Paul Tanner, ThM, PhD

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Introduction

How one chooses to interpret the creation account in Genesis 1 depends on several factors. It depends, for example, on how one understands the syntactical relationship of the verse three verses. It also depends on how one handles the various exegetical details throughout the chapter (and the details in chapter two as they relate to chapter one). More fundamentally, however, it depends on how one handles the chapter from a hermeneutical perspective. In the following paper, I explain why one should regard Genesis 1 as historical narrative and to treat it in a literal way as we would other historical narrative material. By doing so, this will result in a literal six-day creation view involving a literal Adam and Eve as the first humans who are created directly by God's spoken Word, not as a product of evolution or arising from lower life forms.

I. Reason One

The literary genre of Genesis 1–2 (and all of Gen 1–11) is that of historical narrative, not that of poetry or myth.

Support:

- A. The primary feature of historical narrative is the preponderance in the Hebrew text of the *waw-consecutive* sequence, and that is precisely what we find in Genesis 1 and 2.

As an example, we have a case of the waw-consecutive on the verb in Gen 1:3:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹר וַיְהִי-אֹר :

Waw-consecutive

It is worth noting that Genesis 1 contains 50 waw-consecutive forms, which amounts to 1.6 per verse. That is more than all but three of the first twenty chapters of Genesis.

- B. If Genesis 1–2 was cast as Hebrew poetry, we might allow for a figurative interpretation, but the primary feature of Hebrew poetry (namely, parallelism) is noticeably absent in Genesis 1–2. Ps 19:1 provides a good example of parallelism:

“The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”

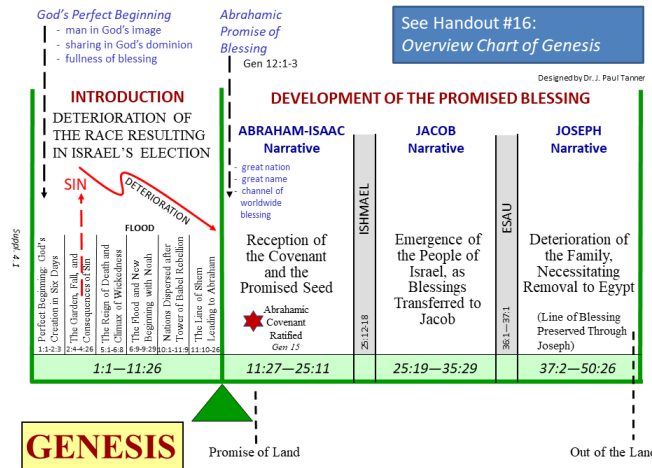
- C. Genesis 1–2 needs to be seen in the larger context of the book of Genesis in which the repeated *tôl'dôt* statements underscore the fact that this unit is an integral part of the historical narratives that comprise the whole of Genesis.

The word *tôl'dôt* (sometimes translated “These are the generations of” or “This is the account of”) is derived from the Hebrew verb *yālaḏ*, meaning “to bear, bring forth, give birth to.” In the book of Genesis, it serves to tie one unit of material to the next as though to say, “This is what became of the preceding.” We have the first of these statements in Gen 2:4, the implication being that the unit of material in 2:4–4:26 explains what became of the previous section (i.e., Gen 1:1–2:3). What became of God's perfect creation in Gen 1:1–2:3 is that despite man being blessed in the Garden of Eden with a wife to complement him, the couple disobeyed God and in doing so

became sinners from whom sin quickly spread to their descendants and led to murder and rebellion against God. These repeated tôl^edôt statements provide the structuring of the book, and Gen 1:1–2:3 is certainly a part of these units, all of which fall under the genre of *historical narrative*.

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| 1. | Creation Account | 1:1–2:3 |
| 2. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of the heavens & earth | 2:4–4:26 |
| 3. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Adam | 5:1–6:8 |
| 4. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Noah | 6:9–9:29 |
| 5. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Shem, Ham, Japhet | 10:1–11:9 |
| 6. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Shem | 11:10-26 |
| 7. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Terah | 11:27–25:11 |
| 8. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Ishmael | 25:12-18 |
| 9. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Isaac | 25:19–35:29 |
| 10. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Esau | 36:1–37:1 |
| 11. | <u>tôl^edôt</u> of Jacob | 37:2–50:26 |

Cf. the book chart of Genesis on my website in which the major and minor sections of the book are demarcated by these tôl^edôt units.



II. Reason Two

A departure from a literal hermeneutic leaves one with no reliable guidance as to how the Author/author meant for us to understand what is revealed.

- A. What evidence is there that a *different hermeneutic* should be used in the interpretation of Genesis 1 and 2?

- B. Once you conclude that Genesis should be interpreted in some kind of figurative way, how far do you go with this and where do you stop?
1. Was Eden a literal garden or only for story-telling purposes?
 2. Was the “serpent” a real animal that Eve heard speaking?
 3. Were Adam and Eve even real historical people? Were they the first humans?
 4. Is evolution the true explanation for the origin of our universe? If so, is Gen 1:1–2:3 only a “story” for the purpose of explaining about evil?

III. Reason Three

There is nothing in the text of Genesis 1 or 2 that remotely hints that evolution was involved.

Support:

- A. Life is not said to develop from a single-cell organism.
- B. Man does not originate from lower forms of life but is created noticeably distinct from the animal world. He is made in the image of God and is given the privilege of exercising dominion (ruling on behalf of God).
- C. The sequence of development in Genesis is in direct contradiction to the theory of evolution.
Evolution teaches that the “big bang” came first (with stars, planets, sun). Yet Gen 1:11-13 reveals that vegetation on earth came before the sun/moon.
- D. The biblical account reveals that all of creation came by God’s spoken word, not by evolution with its doctrine of *survival of the fittest*.
Heb 11:3 – “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.”

IV. Reason Four

The testimony of the New Testament reveals that the creation account in Genesis cannot involve millions of years, since man was present “in the beginning.”

Support:

- A. In Jesus’ teaching on divorce (Mk 10:6), He declared, “But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female.”
- B. In Rom 5:12-21 we are taught that Adam was the “first man” who brought death and condemnation for all mankind. Thus, Adam was an historical figure, and there were no others before him.
- C. In Rom 1:20, the Apostle Paul declared, “Since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes . . . have been clearly seen . . .”

V. Reason Five

Millions of years are NOT needed to explain the geological rock layers . . . once we accept the abundant evidence of a worldwide flood as described in Genesis 6–9.

In support of this, we have the testimony of the sedimentary rock layers filled with land and marine-life fossils in the Grand Canyon of Arizona. In this remarkable canyon, we find fossils of sea creatures in rock layers high above sea level . . . even in upper limestone levels of the rim of the canyon that are 2,130-2,400 meters in elevation.



CONCLUSION

The evidence we have clearly gives attests to the fact that Gen 1:1–2:3 should be regarded as *historical narrative* and should be interpreted accordingly. There is no reason to resort to treating this figuratively or in a non-literal way. Following this kind of hermeneutic results in an understanding that God created the heavens and the earth by His spoken word in six literal 24-hour days.