

A RATIONALE FOR THE STRUCTURE OF GENESIS 1:1-2:3

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Précis

The author of Genesis **1:1-2:3** presents a picture of creating earth and sky from the time viewpoint of Israel's founding. Specific creative acts appear in a set analogous to the intended six-day-week-plus-Sabbath that God established at that same time for his special people. The presentation is topical without concern for exact sequence, duration, parallel entry, completeness, and necessary divisions. The sequence of creation itself can differ from the sequence of the presentation about creation in a sensible order. Analogy describes the connection between the creation of National Israel and the presentation about the creation of the universe (Isaiah **43:1ff**). Inspiration guides and protects the process.

Picturing the Presentation

Presentation re
CREATION

Genesis **1:1-2:3**

Presentation re
"CREATION" OF
ISRAEL (Isaiah **43:1, 15**)

6 + Sabbath

sanctified and blessed

Explains Structure
Exodus **20:11** (manner)

6 + Sabbath envisioned

Enjoins Sabbath
Exodus **31:17**; Deuteronomy **5:15** (sign, meaning)

6 + Sabbath established

The exodus authenticated Yahveh as God and Moses as leader, who presented the creator that enjoined Sabbath as a memorial of the exodus.

The exodus and its preceding plagues authenticated Yahveh as God by his triumphing over Egypt's gods. Those events also authenticated Moses as God's appointed leader, who in turn revealed that Yahveh created earth and sky and enjoined Sabbath as a memorial of the exodus (Deuteronomy **5:15**; **16:12**). As to meaning, Sabbath was a **memorial of the exodus** (not the creation); as to its manner of observance, it was a **day's rest** on the **last day of each week** (Exodus **20:8-11**). Sabbath is a notable feature of the creation presentation, which works up to Sabbath as its culmination.

Explaining the Picture: Analogy

The text does not present just one event like, say, the war with Sihon, king of the Amorites (Numbers 21:21-30; Deuteronomy 1:4; 2:24-37).

Genesis 1:1-2:3 is about the creation and the exodus, the founding of the world and the founding of Israel, which are not completely alike. The Jewish week inside the “exodus side” comes from appointment because it does not derive from any natural cycle like day-night, day, month, and year do. Creation and the Jewish week are alike in being divinely appointed.

The first event is presented as analogous to the second. Analogy works from known to unknown. Terms for parts of the old system become labels for corresponding parts of the new system. In this case, the analogy works from what people knew about work and resting from work, about days as units for activity, about days and nights, about the evening and morning each day has, about sets of days, and about the features of the world people already knew.

New Testament writers follow that common practice by using terms from the Mosaic system to label corresponding features of the Messianic system: Lord, king, elders, church, a person’s body as a temple, Messiah as a sacrifice, he as our high priest; “the Lamb of God,” *etc.* A car could originally be called “a horseless carriage” because it had no horse pulling it as wheeled carriages had before. Paul does this with the building figure more than once for varying applications (Romans 15:20; 1 Corinthians 3:9-17; Ephesians 3:20-22).

There is a time difference between creation and exodus, but not between the time of presentations about them.

The presentations about creation and exodus are by the same author for the same audience.

Three points show that the text is from the time viewpoint of Israel’s beginning as a nation:

- a. Yahveh as God’s covenant name with Israel did not come into use till the time of the burning bush (Exodus 3:1-15). The Pentateuch writes that name back into previous events it records from the time viewpoint of Israel’s founding.
- b. The creation account speaks of Sabbath, which was not observed except by National Israel. There is no reason to believe it was ever observed before, outside, or after that nation as God’s special people. Israel became a nation technically when it was “*baptized to Moses in the cloud and the sea*” (1 Corinthians 10:1-2)—at the Red Sea, not at Sinai, that is, when they identified as a nation with Moses and renounced Egypt as their homeland. The first recorded Sabbath observance took place when God began to give the people manna (Exodus 16:4-5, 21-30). After National Israel as God’s special people, God abrogated Sabbath along with the Law that enjoined it (Romans 14:5-6a; Colossians 2:14, 16-17; 4:10-11). Sabbath was a memorial of the exodus (Deuteronomy 5:12-15), not of creation; that is why it was not observed from the beginning of our race or outside of Israel during that nation’s existence. That is also why it could be abrogated when Messiah’s spiritual Israel began—after the cross-resurrection theologically, Pentecost practically, and the fall of Jerusalem historically. So the seventh day was not blessed and sanctified and then centuries later began to be observed; it was sanctified at the time of the exodus as an analogous application of Yahveh’s rest.

- c. In this presentation the writer uses the Jewish manner of reckoning days from evening to evening.
- d. The Hebrew language more easily lies behind the names and their meaning in Genesis 1-3: man and woman, Eve, Cain, Seth. Nod, Noah, *etc.*

The writer organizes his presentation about creation (unknown/unseen) in light of what he intends to say about the exodus God wants to memorialize by enjoining a 6-day-week-with-Sabbath.

The label for segments of that week (day) serves as the label for aspects of the creation event. The whole creation event could have as likely been instantaneous or presented that way.

The number of segments in the enjoined Jewish week provides the number of aspects in the creation presentation [NUMBER, DURATION].

The final segment of the Jewish week provides a label for the last aspect of the writer's creation account (seventh). As people were to rest on the seventh day, Yahveh's not doing any more creating is called "resting," which in this case is unending [SABBATH]. Besides, God spoke different things into being; he did not "work" like people do. Going from the known to the unknown means going from the way we talk about getting things done and talking about God's getting creative activities done. The enjoined week-with-Sabbath serves as an analogy of God's set of activities plus being done.

As people's activities in segments 1-6 do not have to have a set order or equal lengths and often overlap, so also the presentation about the aspects of God's creative activities do not have an exact order or equal amounts and are not completely parallel [SEQUENCE AND OVERLAP]. They are not necessarily parallel events, but parallel presentations.

As any telling about people's extended activity does not enumerate every relevant part, so also the presentation about creation has major omissions [COMPLETENESS].

Notables in Genesis 1-2

We make the judgment that the presentation about creation is not the same kind of thing as the exodus and its enjoined Jewish week. Quite a few "Notables" do not fit if we take days and ordinals as the same in both events, if we take relationships of "days" as parallel in both cases, if we take same duration the point in both presentations.

That claim brings us to the specifics in this next section. The "plain reading of scripture" raises several considerations for understanding the opening chapters of Genesis. The expression "plain reading" carries a positive connotation and suggests that any reading other than a strictly literal one is trying to avoid what the text plainly means. Imagination, experience, or science falsely so-called is leading the reader away from the truth and authority of the Bible. Below is a list of features internal to this portion of scripture with nothing but the most elemental dependence on what we know from experience. Those features pertain to sequence, duration, parallelism, completeness, and inclusion.

Sequence

light before the sources of light; light in Day 1 with sun, moon, and stars in Day 4
 light independent of sources of light
 located light before the markers for light; evening and morning before the sun existed
 different sequences of events in Genesis **1** and **2** indicate that sequence must not be the point
 plants before the source of photosynthesis

Duration and Sequence

shorter than a day; it does not take all day to say, “*Let there be light*” (יְהי אֹרֶךְ).
 longer than a day; if “day” includes the occurrence of what God commanded each day, it took longer than a day for the water to run off whatever mega-continent or land formation originally came to exist (Day 3). Besides, if the water rushed off too quickly, it would make the original land mass rather unsuitable for flora to sprout out of the ground later that day or for the murky water to support marine life two days later. The land would presumably not be ideal for fauna to inhabit three days afterward, especially if the runoff produced the catastrophic effects thought to come from Noah’s flood that was responsible for the whole geological column with erosion features as extreme as great canyons. Avoiding such effects would require a “tranquil” reduction that violates the twenty-four-hour limit. In this case, the day must include the occurrence of what God commanded. But in addition, the day would include the vegetation yielding seed and bearing fruit—more like a season than a day. Added to all that, Genesis **2** says there were no plants or herbs of the field (1) because the man had not yet been created, and he was created (2) before the animals (2:19), (3) his naming them, and (4) the creation of Eve from him. Besides, there was no tilling of the ground (2:5) till after the planting of the Garden, caring for it for a while, the Fall, and the expulsion from the Garden. The incompatible sequences of Genesis **1** and **2** make the whole literal approach more than difficult.

An awful lot happens on Day 6 since the events of Genesis **2** combine with chapter **1**: God’s creating all the animals and creeping things and Adam’s naming all the birds and animals, which showed that nothing in the animal kingdom corresponded to him (2:19-20). An indeterminate amount of time followed in which God brought a deep sleep over Adam, took one of his ribs, formed Eve, and brought her to him; and Adam called her “woman” (אִשָּׁה) because she was taken out of man (אִישׁ). Creating both man and woman happened the same day (1:26-27) God gave them the

creation mandate (1:28). Nothing tells clearly whether God created the animals full-grown or growing or how many of each kind of both sexes he spoke into existence. It does say “*God made them after their kind,*” which can sound like it includes a generation of offspring as part of “*after their kind.*”

Omissions

- no statement of the origin of earth itself within the seven-day set; some interpreters include it from 1:1 as part of Day 1 to match the wording of Exodus 20:10, “*In six days Yahveh made earth and sky*” (cp. 31:17). But that gives creating the heavens a double entry (1:1 + 14-18); so was it in Day 1 or Day 4? If 1:1 does not belong within Day 1, the issue reverts to having no distinct statement of creation for the earth itself—something of a conundrum. See also “Addendum on Day 4.” It seems less complicated to regard 1:1 as a title for the following and thereby avoid the duplications and yet get a statement of creation for earth and sky.
- no statement about the origin of water within the seven-day set. God’s first creative act brought light onto a world covered by a worldwide ocean. The earth and its water mantle are givens at the start of creativity.
- no mention of a water cycle whether by falling rain or ascending mist (cp. 2:5-6) One of those systems had to be in place with the occurrence of plant life. Chapter 2:5 considers mist vs. rain important enough to list alongside the creation of vegetation. Besides, the creation of Eve follows the creation of Adam after he was placed in the Garden of Eden, which had four streams running out of it (2:10-14). Without rain or at least mist, there would not have been any rivers.
- no certain reference to the large insect population unless birds and “creeping things” cover insects along with flightless bugs, worms, and the like. Insects account for two-thirds of all animal species.
- no indication of the beginning of Day 1 parallel to the other five days
- no indication of an ending for Day 7 parallel to the other six; Yahveh’s rest comes across as unending. The Hebrew writer (3:7-4:13) uses God’s creation rest as something ongoing that people of faith will enter beyond the Canaan rest that Joshua gave (Psalm 95:7-11).
- no mention of food for the fish as there is with birds, animals, and people
- no mention of anything but trees in Adam and Eve’s Garden of Eden; no garden-variety plant life that they would have needed to live on: potatoes, berries, lettuce, and the like

Combinations, Overlaps, Divisions, and Inclusion

Combining fish and birds on the same day of creative activity seems unexpected. Being so different and occupying such different niches, they could have warranted separate entry—avian and marine life. A reader might consider it more likely that fish and land animals appear next to one another or birds and land animals. One explanation could come from the parallelism between Day 2 and Day 4. The separation of water in the expanse from water on top of the earth parallels where birds fly and fish swim. Days 1-3 parallel Days 4-6. That layout in turn looks like a feature of presentation instead of a creation sequence—perhaps for memory purposes. (See below.)

Why combine animals and people when chapter 2—and everywhere else—is so careful to distinguish them? They occupy the same niche, breathe air, and share several similar physical features and needs, but they are kept separate.

Yahveh's "rest" raises the question why it was included at all, much less assigned a separate day. God does not get tired, of course, or rest like people do; so there is no rationale in the nature of what was happening for assigning a day to his not doing something. He no more rested the next day after creating than he did at any time before or two weeks or millennia later. Besides, scripture treats God's rest as without end. The exodus and conquest were flip sides of the same coin and Moses/Joshua were a tag team in the same essential event: deliverance plus inheritance. That is why the Hebrew writer can connect God's rest from creation with Christians' rest, noting that Joshua's conquest did not give the rest Psalm 95:11 envisioned for God's people (4:1-13). Omitting Day 7's ending and including a day for God's "resting" seem curious.

Why even break down the overall creation into separate units? The format in chapter 2 makes an easier likelihood for what God actually did, because the creation does not readily break down into six parallel units in sequence. The hierarchical nature of reality, its interdependence of parts, cause-effect processes (including reciprocal causation in the biosphere), and compenetration make six an unlikely number of even major parallel units.

Questionable Realities in the Larger Context

A snake that talks and Eve's not seeing that as unusual

A tree whose fruit could enable people to live forever

A tree whose fruit could make people wise, knowledgeable about good and bad

A man does not lack one rib on either side of his chest

Can mist (springs) form rivers (Genesis 2:5-6)?

Connecting Genesis 1 with the features in 2-3 helps shape the character of Genesis 1 with its similarities and differences and with the nearby unreal elements that turn away any attempt to take chapter 1 as completely literal.

Interpretation in Light of the “Notables”

Some questions the “Notables” raise could individually have plausible explanations. Six twenty-four-hour days could eliminate the placement of vegetation ahead of the source of photosynthesis; the plants would not die in a day. Simple appeal to miracle and divine choice could address some sequences, unexpected combinations and separations like located light before the source of light (In a poetic section, Job 38:19 does mention both light and darkness as existing without sources). But the majority of these points do not easily disappear—like getting everything in Day 4 and Day 6 to occur within one set of daylight hours or explaining the different sequence of flora and fauna in Genesis 1 and 2. Furthermore, a different approach can explain them too and do so as a set while avoiding multiple special explanations to cover each “Notable” separately.

The Inclusive Title

The lead sentence, “*God created earth and sky,*” represents the summarizing reality Israelites were first to understand and believe:

Yahveh alone is God then (monotheism);
 he cannot be represented by a physical idol because he preceded physical reality;
 by creating the physical universe, he transcends it instead of being part of it;
 he is immanent with it by creating it and continuing to operate with it;
 he is all-powerful (omnipotent) as demonstrated by creating it and controlling it.

Moses even unaided could have categorized the specific acts within that framework and presented them in a structure analogous to the seven-day week God had him prescribe for Israel.

The Breakdown into Seven Parts

The writer divided the presentation into seven parallel units as a convenient analogy to the seven-day week he intended it to parallel. The completed creation does not have that set of natural divisions. The aspects that Genesis 1-2 note could have been arranged to make different totals. People and animals could have been separate, birds and fish could have made two parts, vegetation could have been awarded its own unit—instead of being combined with dry-land formation, two days could have been assigned to earth and sky, food for marine life could have been added. Those would have added four or five days to the seven. Light could have combined with the source of light, creating earth and sky could have been said once, birds and land animals could have gone together, or all biological entities could have come at once. That could have subtracted two or three units from the seven. We infer that the account aims at seven including Sabbath because that is what God intended to enjoin analogously for the Jewish week.

Topical presentation allows for analogy between creation presentation and the Jewish week as well as overlaps (light and sources of light), omissions, combinations, and duration matters. Interpreters distinguish literal and figurative by noting unreal elements in the picture. That is how we tell the difference between an account and a parable or analogy of any sort in the gospels and elsewhere. The clues appear in the parable itself or its context.

Currently at least, there are no four rivers in the Near East that issue or combine at one place (the Garden of Eden). Besides, if Noah's flood essentially laid down the whole geological column, how would such relatively superficial surface features like the Tigris and Euphrates River systems still exist? Reusing preflood river names is perhaps possible, but does that leave El Ghor—with its Jordan River—and the Nile (equal Gihon (around Cush/Nubia in 2:13) to make the other two? They do not converge with each other or the first two.

More notable is the Pishon, which encompasses the whole land of Havilah with its fine gold, bdellium, and onyx stone. The text presents that river and associated features in present time. Presumably Noah's flood would have obliterated and re-laid the whole geological column in the region. Reusing old names does not satisfy that aspect of the situation.

Items for the Analogous Approach to Clarify

Day refers to a unit for real activity. It can refer to an indefinite time like “when” in Genesis 2:4, “*These are the generations of earth and sky in the ‘day’ God made them,*” which would equal the six days of Genesis 1. It can indicate daytime, “*God called the light ‘day’*” (Genesis 1:5). Of course, יום can indicate a twenty-four-hour segment of time as well, “*The third day Simeon and Levi killed all the males*” (Genesis 34:25).

Everyone acknowledges those points, but an accompanying claim comes up in discussions of Genesis 1: יום with an ordinal always means a twenty-four period. While that is probably true, it does not show that the word needs to be limited to that. There would seldom be an occasion to talk about a set of indefinite times. Multiplication can occur with other time words used figuratively, as with Daniel's seventy hebdomads: seven weeks, thirty-two weeks, plus one week in 7:24-27.

Another response in that discussion uses 2 Peter 3:8 (“*One day is with the Lord like a thousand years*” and *vice versa*; cp. Psalm 90:4). But that observation need not become part of the discussion (cp. next ¶). Day-age or days with indeterminate periods between them do not work because the vegetation would die before the sun came into view. For now, we observe that there is a constant in how *day* is used: as a segment for real activity whether indefinite or specific in length. In the analogous reading, the word *day* comes into play because of the analogy the writer is making with the week-with-Sabbath that Yahveh enjoined for National Israel.

Ordinals accompany the seven “days” of that text. This essay takes the day references as topical. If so, the ordinals are not moving through a sequence but across a set, a set of topics. “Day-ness” and “six-ness” combine to obtain the desired total to match the enjoined week. The

translation is “a second day,” “a third day,” *etc.*, rather than “the fourth day,” “the fifth day.” The second wording sounds more like a sequence than a set. But except for Day 6, the Hebrew article does not appear on the noun and the adjective (יום שלישי, “a third day”) as it does in Genesis 34:25, where Simeon and Levi killed all the males of Shechem “on the third day” (בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי). (Note: Day 6 reads יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי, “the day of the sixth.”)

Finally, like “ordinals” and “day,” using the evening and morning expression reflects a comparison with the week-with-Sabbath Yahveh is enjoining for his people. The Jewish manner of speaking about a day plays out the analogy with God’s creative activity: the work starts in darkness and then brings in light.

So, all three items derive from the same explanation: they come from the analogy between creation presented and week-with-Sabbath enjoined.

Separation from Egypt

Separation from Egypt’s influence was important theologically because of its false gods and accompanying false beliefs and practices. God wanted Israel to be a separate nation instead of a subset in another one or scattered among several like Christians are: “*I’ve called my son out of Egypt*” (Hosea 11:1). That way National Israel could be a light to the other nations.

It was important, practically speaking, to disconnect from Egypt because the Israelites surely had a sense of that identity born into them even though they evidently lived as an enclave in the Goshen area. Scripture says variously how long they had been in Egypt: 400 years (Genesis 15:15 < Acts 7:6), four generations (Genesis 15:16); 430 years (Exodus 12:40 < Galatians 3:17). That is longer than most modern countries have even been countries.

The need for actual separation showed up when many of the people wanted to return to Egypt as experiences in the desert got tougher than they wanted to endure (Exodus 14:10-12; 16:2-3; Numbers 14:1-4). It shows up again, even after the giving of the Law when the people enticed Aaron, the second in command, to make a molten calf, “*This is your god that brought you out of Egypt . . . Tomorrow will be a feast to Yahveh*” (Exodus 32:1-6). It was a case of giving in to syncretism (Apis in form/Yahveh in name). That idea reared its head again centuries later after the conquest, the judgeship period, and the monarchy; Jeroboam I put golden calves in Bethel and Dan for the people to worship in the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:28-30).

Mechanics God Instituted

Beyond conquering Egypt with his plagues and destruction at the Red Sea, beyond making a separate nation of Israel at the exodus and putting them in a different location (Hosea 11:1), God instituted practices to distinguish Israelites from Egyptians. He forbade men to trim their beards especially, we might suppose, like the goatees seen on Egyptian statues (Leviticus 19:27). As an item of dress, throughout their generations they were to put tassels on the hems of their garments and fasten them with blue cords. Doing so was to remind them to obey all the commandments of

Yahveh who brought them out of Egypt (Number **15:37-41**; Deuteronomy **22:12**). It would have a self-identifying effect as well.

In that same vein, establishing a seven-day week helped contrast with the Egyptians and their ten-day week. The special Sabbath every week served as a lived-out memorial of the exodus from Egyptian slavery (Deuteronomy **5:15**). It was a sign between Yahveh and Israel (Exodus **31:17**; Ezekiel **20:20**). God even incorporated Sabbath into the Decalogue as its only non-moral requirement. Keeping it became a patriotic duty, and failure to abide by it was a capital crime akin to treason (Numbers **15:32-36**; Exodus **31:12-17**; **35:2**).

Specifying Nisan/Abib in March-April as the first month (Exodus **12:2**) contrasted with Egypt's year beginning at the summer solstice (June 21).

God initiated a system of laws centered around the Decalogue, requirements for citizenship—circumcision (Genesis **17:9-14**), a whole new festival cycle, a means of government support—the tithe (Deuteronomy **14:22-29**), a form of government, and all the other features required for a distinct national entity.

Conclusion

The rationale for the structure of Genesis **1:1-2:3** does not come from the manner of what had already happened, but from what was being instituted at the time of writing about the future; structure comes from purpose. Instituting the seven-day-week-with-Sabbath played a crucial role in the founding of Israel and in marking its self-perception and place among the nations. The creation materials established a worldwide perspective at the beginning of the Pentateuch, which served as the text of a suzerainty covenant between Yahveh and National Israel for all to see.

ADDENDUM ON HERMENEUTICS

The preceding essay applies authorial intent as the basic principle in interpretation. Any reading of the text needs to justify itself in contrast to other takes on the text. It looks for features that indicate what the author intended—the genre as well as any particulars within it.

Alternatively, a common approach to Genesis 1 uses literal-first interpretation. It requires any less-than-fully-literal reading to disprove the literal before it has a right to proceed. That means shouldering a negative burden of proof before offering another analysis. Often, a reader cannot meet that inappropriate requirement because the available information is not sufficiently replete. Besides, in the case of the Genesis presentation, it also means that foreign or unlikely elements can often be “bailed out” by invoking supernatural cause. As a result, the fully literal cannot easily be falsified—that is, corrected if it is wrong; virtually nothing can tell against it in reading scripture. The literal-first hermeneutic is not falsifiable; it has an *a priori* misleading advantage by not having to justify itself.

The literal-first premise fosters the inference that other readers disbelieve what the Bible says and are simply unwilling to submit to its authority; they are allowing personal experience,

imagination, or supposed “scientific” theories to set aside divine revelation. In practice, literalism also accompanies the tendency to think that a presentation is either literal or myth, a format without degrees between literal and non-historical. The pattern of thought takes a characteristic of truth itself and applies it to the character of a presentation about truth.

Not only, however, does authorial intent not have to disprove the literal-first approach; it can be satisfied with demonstrating that literal-first reading is not necessary. Ambiguity is itself a gain because the author may not have intended to address the issue so exactly, which leaves more than one viable interpretation or no clear conclusion at all. Interpretation only requires incorporating the features of the text and context into what seems preferable for what reasons. That gain means the reader of scripture is not obliged to defend what the text does not mean. In relation to extra-biblical beliefs, for example, we concluded in the body of this essay that Genesis does not address the issue of pre-Adamic deep time. So, Christians need not espouse some theoretical popular alternative about deep time, and they buy time to work out adequate proposals, if that proves to be possible. We do not have to have a detailed, deep-time understanding. Some current proposals for getting rid of deep time may stretch credulity more than the ones in popular vogue that they are designed to replace. Many biblical truths simply cannot be harmonized with non-Christian beliefs; there is no value in making apologetics more complicated than called for.

As an example about teaching points in scripture, The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus does not have to be interpreted literally to mean that the lost are tormented eternally in fire or that a drop of water would have anything to do with easing their suffering (Luke 16:19-31). A spirit does not have flesh and bones (Luke 24:39); if people are not in a physical condition during the intermediate state, feeling pain from fire may not even be possible anyway (cp. Judges 13:20). Elsewhere, the rejected state is pictured as “*outer darkness*” (Matthew 8:12; 22:13; 25:30). Presumably it cannot be both ways. We do not know enough about the human condition after death and before the general resurrection. We can depend on what the rest of the New Testament reveals about God’s character to postulate some kind of consistency in his treatment of the unfaithful in this life or the next.

A clearer example against literal-first interpretation comes from Jesus’ claim to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (John 2:19-20; Matthew 26:61 + 27:40 = Mark 14:58 + 15:29). At his trial the religious leaders brought that claim into their proceedings, having interpreted it literally. Jesus’ own disciples became aware of its figurative intent only after the rest of the picture had been painted—after his resurrection, an understanding then that may have come from revelation instead of personal interpretation (John 2:21-22). A literal meaning was conceivable because Jesus could have used miracle to rebuild the temple in that amount of time. Such a supposition would be comparable to importing supernatural into a more literal understanding of the creation at points that would not work otherwise.

A final observation is that authorial intent allows more appropriate flexibility in interpretation. That kind of imprecision fits our experience with human language generally.

ADDENDUM ON DAY 4

One idea for dealing with some of the “Notables” in Genesis 1-2 supposes that Day 4 refers to breaking up an original cloud cover so sun, moon, and stars became visible. Day 4 revealed the heavenly bodies rather than originated them. The notion would be something like draining the water off the continent to make it visible in Day 3 (1:9-10). The presentation would fit the creation account’s phenomenological character; the heavens had already come into existence in 1:2-3.

Such an arrangement would answer some of the “Notables”:

- double entry for “heavens” as part of Day 1 plus heavenly bodies in Day 4;
 - having at least diffuse light before the specified source of light;
 - even located light could exist for making “*evening and morning*” possible in days 1-3;
 - having vegetation before the source of photosynthesis;
 - the arrangement could directly accommodate Exodus 20, which speaks of God’s creating heaven and earth in six days;
 - birds and fish on the same day would correlate with “expanse” and “water” in Day 3 even as animals, creeping things, and people in Day 6 parallel dry land in Day 3.
- The biospheres in Days 2-3 would line up with their living occupants in Days 5-6. Such a feature in the presentation would enhance its explanatory power.

Reading Day 4 this way, however, is not as natural. That does not disprove the idea, of course; after all, our understanding of day in this material might not seem like the first way a reader should take it either. The text does say, though, that God “*made*” (עָשָׂה) sun, moon, and stars (1:16), not that he “*made them appear*.” A reader would expect a wording more like what the writer used for draining the water off the land: “*Let dry land appear*.” Comparably it could say, “*Let the clouds separate and the sun, moon, and stars appear*.” The general statement that God created the earth leads into a description about the dry land appearing, not that God “made” it as he did the expanse, animals, creeping things, and people (cp. 1:7, 25, 26).

In addition, why would the text say, “*Let there be light*,” if the sun and moon were already giving off light by being part of “*earth and sky*” in Day 1 (1:1a)? So, one advantage of the proposal is lost. We might also ask whether diffuse light through cloud cover could adequately accomplish photosynthesis. Appeal to a twenty-four-hour day would have to accompany the proposal so the vegetation would survive. And it would have to be a located light to correspond with the “*morning and evening*.” The appeal might bail out the notion, but an interpreter could bail out the surprise sequence without appealing to a less likely reading about Day 4.

These responses may not disprove the different way of interpreting Day 4. They ask whether the general treatment on the body of this presentation does not better explain this Notable in its place among the rest. Offering an explanation individually for each Notable loses the systematic advantage that a different composite picture provides: a topical presentation without exact concern for sequence, duration, parallelism, or completeness. The presentation intends to claim that Yahveh created the universe we see; it was not like the way Egyptian cosmology conceived of it.