

Word use patterns in Genesis 1: evidence against the Framework hypothesis

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A crucial feature of the Framework interpretation is that the putative ‘two triads of days’ pattern supports the non-historicity of the Genesis 1 ‘days’. However, the word use patterns of טוֹב (*tôb*: good) and בָּרָא (*bārā*: create) throughout Genesis 1 undermine the primacy of this ‘two triads’ pattern. Instead, they provide powerful evidence that the narrative flow of Genesis 1 is governed by the sequential progression of the six days of work followed by one day of rest.

The Framework Hypothesis posits that the structure of Genesis 1 is evidence that its depiction of God’s creative work is non-historical:

“The Framework Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 through 2:3 is the view which maintains that, while the six days of creation are normal solar days, the total picture of God’s completing His creative work in a week of days is not to be taken literally, but functions as a literary framework for the creation narrative; and that the eight creative historical works of God have been arranged according to other than strictly sequential considerations, and that where there is sequential order it must be determined by factors other than the order of narration alone.”¹

The major literary structure in Genesis 1 that it cites as evidence is that the main elements made on the first three days of Creation Week correspond with main elements in the second three days of Creation Week (table 1), termed the ‘two triads’ pattern by Framework proponent Meredith Kline.² For instance:

- light and darkness on Day 1 correspond to the celestial lights on Day 4
- waters above and below on Day 2 correspond to flying and swimming creatures on Day 5
- land and vegetation on Day 3 correspond to animals and humans on Day 6.

Framework proponents argue that this schema reflects a recapitulation of Days 1–3 on Days 4–6, which serves as the fundamental literary structure governing the meaning of Genesis 1.^{2,4} However, this indicates that the stated *sequential* 6-day schema of Genesis 1 was conformed to this more fundamental non-historical literary structure of the narrative. They argue that this supports a non-historical reading of the Genesis days.

In response, many have pointed out that there are difficulties for the ‘tightness’ of the correspondences.^{3–7} Nonetheless, such considerations are unlikely to persuade Framework proponents, since, even with those exceptions, the general ‘two triads of days’ pattern is still discernible. While the celestial lights on Day 4 were placed in the ‘expanse’ (*rāqîa’*), which was made on Day 2, their stated function in Genesis 1:18 links

them explicitly to Day 1. While the birds on Day 5 breed on the ‘earth’, which was made on Day 3, and the seas were not *named* until Day 3, the categorization of the animals made on Day 5 (water and sky animals) is a one-to-one correspondence with the elements first distinguished on Day 2. The text does seem to make substantive thematic links between Days 1/4, 2/5, and 3/6 respectively.

However, this pattern is of minor consequence by itself. God could have adapted His *works* in Genesis 1 to fit such a pattern as easily as Moses could have adapted his *words* to depict such a pattern. After all, Genesis 1 depicts God creating the world *supernaturally*. As such, there is nothing particularly *surprising* about such a structure for a *week-long supernatural event* that favours a thematic rather than lineal reading of the text’s depiction of God’s activities. So, the thematic pattern does not suffice to establish a non-historical reading by itself.

To make the case either way, we need to understand something of the *nature* of the correspondences. Is there anything that would make us think the text is non-historical? Framework proponent Meredith Kline cites the nature of the parallels of Days 1 and 4:

“Temporal Recapitulation. The non-sequential nature of the creation narrative, and thus the non-literal nature of the creation ‘week’, is evident from the recording of the institution of lower register time in both the first and fourth day-sections. ...

“The forming and stationing of the sun, moon, and stars are attributed to day four. Their functions with respect to the earth are also stated here, first in the fiat section (Gen. 1:14, 15) and again (in reverse order) in the fulfillment section (Gen. 1:16–18). They are to give light on the earth and to rule by bounding light/day and darkness/night, as well as by demarcating the passage of years and succession of seasons. These effects which are said to result from the production and positioning of the luminaries on day four are the same effects that are already attributed to the creative activity of day one (Gen. 1:3–5). There too daylight is produced on the earth and the cycle of light/day and darkness/night is established. In terms of chronology,

Table 1. Framework schema of the Genesis 1 days, as per Arnold³

Form	
Day	Object created
1	One work: light
2	One work: sea and expanse
3	Two works: earth and vegetation

Fullness	
Day	Object created
4	One work: luminaries
5	One work: birds, fish
6	Two works: land animals and humans

day four thus brings us back to where we were in day one, and in fact takes us behind the effects described there to the astral apparatus that accounts for them. The literary sequence is then not the same as the temporal sequence of events.”²

Kline argues that Day 1 and Day 4 describe the *same* event in different ways; Day 4 gives more detail than Day 1. So, if Day 1 and Day 4 refer to the *same* event, they clearly cannot be separated by three days with the creation of the whole cosmic structure and vegetation in between. As such, ‘Days’ 1 and 4 are non-historical. This is extrapolated to the other correspondent days by way of the ‘two triads’ pattern to infer that the Genesis ‘days’ are not a literal/historical sequence of events, but a topical framework of patterns that uses a six-day sequence as an ancillary literary device.⁸

Seen in this way, it shows that the divergences from the ‘two triads’ pattern are not as significant evidence against it as first may be thought. After all, if Kline is right about the *nature* of the correspondence between Day 1 and Day 4, a non-historical view of the Genesis 1 days plausibly follows *even though* the correspondences are not all exact and precise. Indeed, it may even be expected, given that the 6 + 1 day ‘work week’ sequential schema in Genesis 1 overlies the topical ‘two triads’ pattern. So long as the ‘two triads’ pattern is easy enough to discern, such ‘imprecision’ fails to provide a probative undercutting defeater for a non-historical reading.

But is Kline right about Day 4 *replaying* Day 1? I think Kline is right that a ‘two triads of days’ pattern is discernible in Genesis 1. However, he has ignored others that fatally undermine his ‘replay’ thesis. Specifically, the use of the words ‘good’ (*tôb*) and ‘create’ (*bārā*) in Genesis 1.

‘Good’ and the completion of God’s works in Genesis 1

The word ‘good’ is used seven times in Genesis 1 (Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). In every case, it coincides with the completion of some aspect of creation:

- light (v. 4)
- cosmology—heaven, earth, and seas (v. 10)
- vegetation (v. 12)
- day and night/separation of light and darkness (v. 18)
- sea and sky creatures (v. 21)
- land animals (v. 25)
- humanity/everything (v. 31; ‘very good’).

Concerning the first use of ‘good’ in Genesis 1:4, its precise placement is significant:

“And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was *good*. And God separated the light from the darkness [emphasis added].”

It is placed *before* God splits the light and darkness (figure 1). So, God does not call the split between day and night ‘good’ in v. 4, but only the *light* He made in verse 3.⁹ This is significant, in that (*contra* Arnold; figure 1) it divides Day 1 into *two* works—the creation of light, and the separation of light and darkness. Now, God does call the split between light and dark ‘good’, *but not on Day 1*. Rather, He calls it ‘good’ on Day 4 in vv. 16–18:

“And God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, *and to separate the light from the darkness*. And God saw that it was *good* [emphases added].”

Moreover, the separation of light and darkness is not mentioned at any point between vv. 4–5 and vv. 16–18. Instead, God engages in two other ‘good’ works—the creation of the basic cosmic ‘sky/sea/land’ structure and the creation of vegetation. As such, it appears God began the work of ‘separating light and darkness’ on Day 1, left it on hiatus during Days 2–3, and resumed it and completed it on Day 4 (as per the association of ‘good’ with the separation of light and dark in v. 18).

But why would there be such a hiatus? God intended for the celestial lights to govern the day and night (as mentioned several times in vv. 14–18). But where to put them? They were put “in the expanse”. However, the expanse didn’t exist on Day 1; it was created on Day 2. Therefore, the expanse had to have been created before the celestial lights could be put in it.

But how could there be day and night before God made the celestial objects? Precisely the way vv. 4–5 describes:

“... and he separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light ‘day’, and the darkness he called ‘night’.”

When God separated the light and darkness, He called the light ‘day’ and the darkness ‘night’. Day and night were thus established, which was sufficient to mark the passing of consecutive day–night cycles until such time as God put the lights in the sky to govern day and night. This comports with

v. 5, using the cardinal ‘one day’ rather than the ordinal ‘first day’; the separation of light and dark on Day 1 was enough to *constitute* a day–night cycle, and thus ‘one day’. However, the lack of the word ‘good’ for the separation of light and darkness in v. 5 signifies that, while the work done on Day 1 was sufficient to constitute a day–night cycle, the ‘good’ work of separating light and darkness was not *complete* until the lights that govern day and night were in the sky.

And while the separation of light and darkness is the only ‘good’ work within Genesis 1 that seems to have been put on hiatus, it is not the only time a creative work spans more than one day in Genesis 1. The formation of the cosmic structure begins on Day 2 and finishes on Day 3. God split the waters above and below on Day 2 (Genesis 1:6–8) but does not call it good. He does not call *anything* good on Day 2. But God begins Day 3 by bringing the land out of the sea (Genesis 1:9–10). It’s only once the heavens, earth, and sea are all established that He calls the work ‘good’ (Genesis 1:10).

But God calls a second work ‘good’ on Day 3: vegetation (Genesis 1:12). So, like Day 1, Day 3 includes *two* works. Days 4–6 do not replicate this pattern. As we have seen, no work is called ‘good’ on Day 2, but two works are called ‘good’ on Day 3 (vv. 10, 12). This pattern is not repeated in the second three days either. Like Day 3, ‘good’ is used twice on Day 6 (vv. 25, 31), but ‘good’ is used once on Day 5 (v. 21), while not being used at all on Day 2.

These factors indicate how the word ‘good’ functions in Genesis 1—it’s a word denoting appreciation of the *completion* of a creative work. Gentry agrees: “the appreciation formula [‘it was good’] follows the *completed* divine activity”.¹⁰ This is most obvious in Genesis 1:31: “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” Once *everything was finished*, He called it ‘very good’. Indeed, this is the seventh use of ‘good’ in Genesis 1, and the only time it is intensified with ‘very’. It is also supported in Genesis 2 (arguing for the literary unity of Genesis 1 and 2), as Gentry elaborates:

“Although the creation of man as male and female is ‘good’—actually ‘very good’ (Gen. 1:31)—this was not originally so. Genesis 2 informs us that at the moment when God first created Adam it was ‘*not good*’ for the man to be alone’ (Gen. 2:18, emphasis added). How does He correct this deficiency so that He may indeed declare man’s creation ‘good’? He *separates* woman out of the man (Gen. 2:21–22). *Then* once they both exist, He declares the final result ‘good’ (Gen. 1:27, 31). The creation of man is not complete, is not ‘good’, i.e., it is not what God wants as a final result *until* Eve is separated out of Adam later on day 6.”¹¹

These factors inform the other uses of ‘good’ in Genesis 1. Once God *finished* the light, He called it ‘good’ in the *middle* of Day 1 rather than the end. God started the cosmic structure on Day 2, but only finished it on Day 3, which explains why nothing was called ‘good’ on Day 2. And so, God began the separation of light and dark on Day 1 *and finished it* on Day 4. Only once the work was finished did He call it ‘good’. This,

however, refutes Kline’s contention that Day 4 *recapitulates* Day 1. Day 1 has *two* works on it, whereas Day 4 merely *completes* the *second* work God began on Day 1. Moreover, the ‘light’ God made on Day 1 is a separate ‘good’ work from the ‘lights’ God made on Day 4, which was a part of His ‘separation of light and dark’ work. Day 4 is not identical to Day 1.

‘Create’ and the thematic hinge of Genesis 1—Day 3 or Day 4?

What about the ‘two triads’ pattern? Do the correspondences still provide evidence that the event sequence should be read literarily rather than historically? No. First, the first ‘triad’ ends on Day 3. However, the use of ‘good’ in Genesis 1 shows that making the end of Day 3 the thematic hinge of the narrative fails because a work begun during Days 1–3 has not been completed by the end of Day 3: the separation of day and night. God had made a *fundamental* separation between them on Day 1, but had not yet *finished* the setup He was putting in place to demarcate day from night. Thus, Day 4 should not be separated from Days 1–3.

This comports with the pattern of use for ‘create’ (*bārā*) in Genesis 1. It is used five times for three different events: in Genesis 1: ‘the heavens and the earth’ in v. 1, the first ‘living creatures’ (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּיָה: *nēpēš ḥāyyāh*) in v. 21 (beginning Day 5—figure 2), and humanity in v. 27 (three times; ending Day 6). The time placement of those is significant: each time God began creating something *new*. Significantly, neither the vegetation on Day 3 nor the stars on Day 4 were called ‘living creatures’. This indicates Days 1–4 was all one class of thing God ‘created’—the cosmic ‘stage’ in which the ‘living creatures’ would live. The living creatures were another. We were another. Thus, both word use and the logistical structure

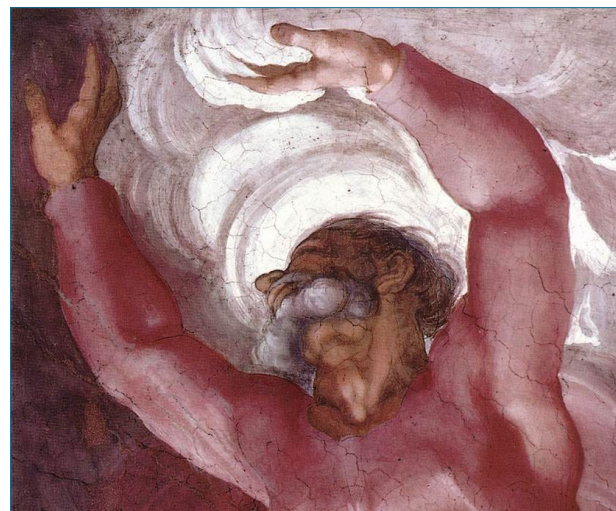


Figure 1. Michelangelo's "Separation of Light from Darkness" from the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. God's work of dividing the light and darkness was itself divided into two days: Day 1 and Day 4 of Creation Week.



Image: paulbr75, Pixabay / CCO

Figure 2. The word *bārā* suggests the narrative hinge of Genesis 1 exists between Days 4 and 5. The first time *bārā* is used for a specific class of object in Genesis 1 is for the first 'living creatures' God made, the sea creatures.

in the event sequence of Genesis 1 create a hinge at the end of Day 4 rather than Day 3.

Does this mean the 'two triads' pattern is *not* present in Genesis 1? Perhaps, but not necessarily. There is no problem with multiple divergent patterns existing in a text like Genesis 1. Indeed, it is suffused with literary devices and patterns. This makes Genesis 1 one of the most memorable pieces of literature in Scripture—even in translation, which is an impressive literary feat. However, the text's focus on hinging the narrative flow at the end of Day 4 rather than Day 3 suggests that, if the 'two triads' pattern is real, it *does not govern the narrative flow of Genesis 1*. Indeed, the structure of God's seven 'good' works and the three classes of things He 'created' is asymmetrical and quite *ad hoc*. God spans one 'good' work over 1.5 days, and another He leaves unfinished at the end of a day only to pick it up again *three days later*. This is highly unexpected if some symmetrical literary structure in Genesis 1 governed its narrative flow in a way that relativized the stated chronology. But if the stated '6 + 1 day' chronology governs the narrative flow of Genesis 1, this is unsurprising. Work conducted through a week often has precisely the sort of *ad hocness* and asymmetry we see in the progression of God's 'good' works through Genesis 1.

Conclusion

The pattern of 'two triads of days' employed by framework theorists may or may not be a genuine literary pattern in Genesis 1. However, it fails as an argument for the non-historicity of the Genesis 1 'days'. The arrangement of God's seven 'good' works and the three classes of thing God 'created' undermines the idea that Day 4 recapitulates Day 1, *in toto*, and the idea that the end of Day 3 is the primary thematic hinge of the narrative. Rather, the asymmetrical and *ad hoc* arrangement of these factors is strong evidence that the narrative flow of Genesis 1 is governed primarily by its stated seven-day chronology.¹² Genesis 1:1–2:3 is *primarily* a narrative that progresses sequentially from start to finish through a seven-day timespan. Whatever the function of the 'two triads' pattern, it does not relativize the stated seven-day

chronology of Genesis 1 in a way that evinces non-historicity in that chronology.

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10. Gentry, ref. 7, p. 105.
11. Gentry, ref. 7, pp. 105–106.
12. However, while I affirm that Genesis 1 refers to a literal-historical week, the fact that the narrative flow is governed by its sequential chronology does not necessarily imply that Genesis 1 is a literal-historical narrative. The *historicity* of the narrative must be established on independent grounds. For instance, I think God's assertion of six-day creation in Exodus 20:11 provides sufficient independent ground to believe Genesis 1 refers to a historical week.

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