

# Genesis 1-2

## The duration of creation

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An earlier exposition examined Jesus' reading of Genesis 1-2 and discovered his handling of these chapters reveals that we should take them as harmonised in meaning and that they are distinctive records of the same creative acts of God<sup>1</sup>. In particular, it was argued that they should not be read, according to the claims of *theistic evolutionists* or *evolutionary creationists*, as disparate records which are not literal descriptions. In this essay we shall examine the first of eight reasons Peter Enns proposes<sup>2</sup> as reasons why we should not read Genesis 1 and 2 as harmonised in meaning or as literal descriptions.

Peter Enns asks how long it took God to accomplish his creation, asserting that Genesis 1 represents this as a six-day event whilst Genesis 2:4 signals that the second creation account "happened either in one day or a continuous series of events not marked by the passing of days"<sup>3</sup>. This is a commonly adopted position by those who argue for *theistic evolution* or *evolutionary creationism*. We shall examine the spirit's purpose in Genesis 2:4 and discover that *theistic evolutionary* handling reads into this verse more than is there whilst simultaneously not taking from it the great deal that is there!

### marking days

First we shall consider Peter Enns' second alternative, which is that Genesis 2:4 speaks of "a continuous series of events not marked by the passing of days". Momentarily accepting this characterisation of Genesis 2 for the sake of analysis, would such a portrayal of things indicate we have a creation record that is not in harmony with a series of events that, according to Genesis 1, take place across six separate days?

Within this characterisation, it is clear that the absence of any mention of passing of days in Genesis 2 makes this record different from that which we find in Genesis 1. But the kind of difference Peter Enns identifies here, that Genesis 1 is marked by the passing of days and that Genesis 2 is not thus marked, does not render these records to be either contrary or contradictory. For them to be contrary or contradictory would require, for example, that Genesis 2 states explicitly that creation did not take place across a number of days. And, of course, Genesis 2 contains no such statement. Consequently, for Peter Enns to claim Genesis 1 and 2 "cannot be harmonized"<sup>4</sup> on the basis of this alternative is to reach a conclusion that has not been demonstrated. On the contrary, the characterisation of Genesis 2 considered here is sufficiently "open" in meaning to accommodate and harmonise with another testimony about these events which states they took place across six days.

### *in the day of the making*

Having removed the second alternative naturally leads to a consideration of Peter Enns' first proposed alternative, that Genesis 2:4 speaks of the Genesis 1 creation taking place in "one day", since this would certainly set up conflict between the two records. The Hebrew lying behind the opening expression of "in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens" (Ge 2:4<sup>5</sup>) is, as Peter Enns points out, *bywm* ("in (the) day") and it is on this basis that he proposes the record speaks of *one day*.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Heavyside, *Genesis 1-2, Jesus' reading* ([www.globalorient.com/pdf/Ge-1-2-JesusReading.pdf](http://www.globalorient.com/pdf/Ge-1-2-JesusReading.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> <http://biologos.org/blog/series/israels-two-creation-stories> [referenced Mar 9, 2015].

<sup>3</sup> <http://biologos.org/blog/israels-two-creation-stories-part-1> [cited Aug 3, 2015].

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> Scriptures quoted are from ESV unless otherwise stated.

Of course, there isn't any Hebrew for *one* which, had scripture wished to emphasise such a sense, could readily have been employed to do so<sup>6</sup>. Nevertheless, it is clear that "in (the) day (*bywm*)" could be read as speaking of a *day*; that is of *one day*. But the problem doesn't lie here, it resides in reading it this way in isolation from the rest of Genesis 2:4. Closer examination of this verse reveals an internal chiasmic structure, partly evident in English versions which, however, simultaneously obscure part of the chiasm that exists in the Hebrew. The following rendering of Genesis 2:4 (AT<sup>7</sup>), carefully following the Hebrew syntax, and shown together with the transliterated Hebrew, illustrates this<sup>8</sup>:

*these (are) (the) generations of the heavens and the earth*

*'lh twldwt hšmym wh'rs*

*in their creation*

*bhbr'm*

*in (the) day of making*

*bywm 'šwt*

*(by) the Lord God of earth and heavens*

*yhwh 'lhym 'rs wšmym*

The opening and close of this chiasm, highlighted by the repetition and reversal of "the heavens and the earth" in "earth and heavens", draws out a correspondence between *generations* and *the Lord God* – notably when scripture historically for the first time refers to God by his name. This is something we shall consider before concluding. There is also an obvious correspondence established at the centrepiece of the chiasm between *creation* and *making* which picks-up the Genesis 1 creation context in a manner which we shall shortly explore.

But the first aspect we should note and contemplate is how this chiasmic structure highlights that the second part of the verse doesn't speak of "in (the) day" but rather of "in (the) day of making". That this is how this should be read is illustrated by the pairing of "in", which is employed in both phrases, and through the correspondence between "create" and "make", with "day" positioned between "in" and "make" in the second phrase thus rendering it part of this literary unit.

Such a reading is also confirmed by scripture's use elsewhere of the phrase "in (the) day of making"; a use which also helps interpret the phrase's significance. With a couple of small variations<sup>9</sup>, the Hebrew of Genesis 2:4 for "in (the) day of making" is found in only one other place: Ezekiel 43:18. The topic from Ezekiel 43:13 onwards is of the construction of the altar in the house which Ezekiel saw in vision. From Ezekiel 43:18 onwards, the prophet's revelation turns to the altar's use for burnt offerings. Barring miraculous intervention, for which there is no reason any more than was needed in the making of the sanctuary's *altar* (Ex 38:1-7), the *making* of Ezekiel's large *altar* would have taken several days. This points to *in (the) day of the making* (Ez 43:18) speaking not of a single day taken to construct the altar but of *the day* in which the *making*, which was commenced several days earlier, being completed so that the altar could now be used. Indeed, Ezekiel's altar couldn't be used until it was completed and it is its use that the narrative in Ezekiel 43:18ff proceeds to describe. Thus the

<sup>6</sup> Cf "in one day (*bywm 'hd*)": Le 22:28; 1 Sa 2:34; 1 Ki 20:29; 2 Ch 28:6; Est 3:13; 8:12; Is 10:17; 47:9; 66:8; Ze 3:9.

<sup>7</sup> AT = Author's translation.

<sup>8</sup> The infinitive construct forms of the Hebrew verbs "to create (*br'*)" and "to make (*'sh*)" found at the centrepiece of this chiasm are quite challenging to render in English. The translation offered should not be taken as a literal rendering of the Hebrew.

<sup>9</sup> These variations from Genesis 2:4 are as follows: (a) unlike Genesis, the infinitive construct of the verb "to make (*'sh*)" in Ezekiel has the definite article; (b) unlike Genesis, Ezekiel's infinitive construct carries the third person singular possessive pronoun. Since in both Genesis 2:4 and Ezekiel 43:18, the verb *to make* (*'sh*) is the infinitive construct form, we otherwise have an accurate syntactic and semantic relationship between these two phrases.

nature of the case requires a sense of completion: a half-finished altar could not serve an altar's purpose.

This indicates that in Genesis 2:4 the subject matter following "in (the) day of making" has to do with the completion of the Lord God's creative acts, the completion of his *making*. *The day of making* of heavens and earth was not reached until this *day*. Before this day, God's creative work was incomplete. It was only on this day that the *making* was completed. The way Genesis 2 moves on to say "there was no man" (Ge 2:5) pinpoints what was needed in the Lord God's creation of the heavens and earth to complete it. And the way Ge 2 also then moves on to say "for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him" (Ge 2:20) further indicates that even having created the man, *the day of making of heavens and earth* was not yet accomplished, that is, the Lord God's creative acts were not yet complete, until there was both *man* and *woman*.

### ***creation and making***

The pairing of *creation* and *making* in Genesis 2:4's chiasmic structure reinforces this conclusion. This pairing, something which has been seen before, serves to focus the narrative on the *creation* of man, of male and female. Prior to Genesis 2:4, other than in Genesis 2:3 which cannot currently occupy our attention, it is only in the context of the *creation* of man that *creation* and *making* have been paired:

"God said, Let us make man in our image... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Ge 1:26-27)

The narrative's use of this *creation* and *making* pair about *the heavens and the earth*, having previously used this pair about *man*, highlights that the principal purpose of all other aspects of creation in Genesis 1, summarised inclusively by *the heavens and the earth*, was for *man's* habitation and dominion (Ge 1:26b; cf Ge 1:28). Thus Genesis 2:4 functions to show, *inter alia*, that the order of creation in Genesis 1 is not reflective of the principal role that *man* has to play in God's purpose. Genesis 2 ensures that we understand *man*, though not first created, is the pinnacle of God's creation and his purpose in it. The Lord God now uses the language of *man's creation* and *making* about the summary of all that was created to position man at its centre. "The heavens and the earth" are presented as being for *man* and in *man*.

### ***the generations of the heavens and the earth***

Finally, having seen one of the functions of Genesis 2:4 is to position *man* as the centrepiece of God's purpose in *creation*, leads to a consideration of the way the chiasmic structure of this verse draws out a correspondence between *generations* and *the Lord God*. This is because, as we shall now see, this aspect of the chiasmic structure relates closely to *man's* position. And such a consideration needs also to account for the fact this is when scripture, historically for the first time ever, uses God's name.

Following on from this first historical use of the expression, "these are the generations" (Ge 2:4), every other use in scripture speaks of lifetimes and genealogical fathering of children (Ge 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:19; 36:1,9; 37:2; Nu 3:1; Ru 4:18; cf Ge 5:1). This is not surprising since the Hebrew lying behind *generations* derives from the usual verb for the bearing of children (first used in Ge 3:16; 4:1). And so against this background, why its use in Genesis 2:4 about the heavens and the earth?

As is obvious from the fact of Genesis 1 being about God's creation, the chiasmic structure makes it plain that *the Lord God* has a *generational* relationship to *the heavens and the earth* which he *created*. But that it is a *generational* relationship, in particular, clearly pertains to this historically first use of God's name, *yhwh*, and to the detail that *man* is the centrepiece of God's purpose – "the heavens and the earth" being for *man* and in *man*. In the language of later scripture, God creates *man* to be a people for his name, a people who, as his children, manifest the characteristics of their father. And since the creator God is now introduced as the *generational* father whose children shall bear his name, scripture now speaks of the creative act by using *formed* and *breathing into man's nostrils* (Ge 2:7) to depict a greater degree of

personal and tactile involvement than the *make* and *create* of Genesis 1:26,27. In Genesis 1, the picture we have is of God speaking and things becoming so; in Genesis 2, there is more than speaking, there is an intimate tactile involvement as a father to his child.

### **an ironic conclusion**

In seeking to demonstrate that Genesis 1 and 2 are not to be read literally historically, Peter Enns and others attempt to read Genesis 2:4 in a strictly and purely historical sense and consequently miss the rich literary meaning upon which the historicity of *the Lord God's* creative purpose in *man* is established.

When we read Genesis 2:4's literary structure and function intra-textually, contextually and inter-textually, we see there is no disparity or disharmony between Genesis 2:4 and the six days of creation in Genesis 1. Rather, Genesis 2:4 portrays a profound revelation of *the Lord God's* special and *generational* relationship to *man*, in whom God's purpose in *creating the heavens and the earth* finds its fullness. Genesis 1-2 are a wondrously harmonious record of God's creation. As Jesus testifies in a context which speaks of God's manifestation in his children, "scripture cannot be broken" (Jn 10:35).