

Science and faith: friends or foes?

In volume 21(3) 2007, Andrew Kulikovsky reviewed the book *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* by C.J. Collins and plainly refutes the deviations from the accepted biblical position of young-earth creationists.¹ My letter is about some items I noted in the section, ‘The initial creation event’ on page 38.

Kulikovsky writes, ‘This indicates that the first day began not with the creation of light but “in the beginning”, with God’s very first creative act in verse 1.’ Usually, a day² begins with a morning, but more on this later. The Bible does not say that light was created in verse 3; it merely says, ‘let there be light’. It is common to assume that light was created here but it need not be so. It was God himself who first divided the light from the first darkness (v. 4). I suggest that God was there and provided that light (Col. 1:16–17; 1 Tim. 6:16; 1 John 1:5). Sunlight was created on Day 4 and ever since, the sun takes over and divides the light from the darkness (v. 18) and rules over the day (v. 16). The first night³ is mentioned in verse 2 as ‘darkness upon the face of the deep’. Since verse 5 says,⁴ ‘and it was evening and it was morning’, there was a cyclical ‘evening–night–morning–day’. Therefore, light must have preceded the first darkness, but it was before anything at all was created. I suggest that the first night began about twelve hours before the light of day of verse 3.

Verse 1 likely is not ‘God’s very first creative act’ since there is no statement of intent or of work being done. God takes glory in declaring his intentions before hand and then justifying himself when they materialize. The creation account in Gen. 1, as a proper scientific report, has a premise or objective: ‘And God said let there be light’ (v. 3a). It has work done or a procedure: ‘and there was light’ (v. 3b); and it has a conclusion: ‘And God saw ... were the first day’ (vv. 4–5). This pattern,

except for verse 2, follows in the rest of Gen. 1.⁵ Therefore, there is no doubt as to what constitutes God’s creative activity when he made the heavens (vv. 6–8) and the earth (vv. 9–10). Verse 1, therefore, introduces us to some of this work God did in creating the heavens and the earth when he spoke it into existence, with the very first creative act not even recorded for us.

Before God begins this project, he gives the overview in verse 1; ‘In-beginning he-created God the-heavens and the-earth’.³ This statement is confirmed in Gen. 2:1a, ‘and-were-finished the-heavens and the-earth ...’—to which all are witnesses. But there is no statement here of work to be done or of work being done. Therefore, Gen. 1:1 forms the introduction of the account before the work report starts and Gen. 2:1 forms the conclusion or verification after the work was done. Verse one makes God-to-man contact a five year old child could understand, a point that begins on common ground that both sides understand and know plainly.

Verse 1 opens the account; verse 2 goes on to describe the initial created state of things, ‘And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness [was] upon the face of the deep’ (KJV). The completed state is confirmed in Gen. 2:1b; ‘and-were-finished the-heavens and the-earth *and all (the) host of them*’; that is, the things on earth, in the seas and in the heavens. Yes, God created the situation in verse 2 (Isa. 45:7), and maintained it by his Spirit moving on the face of the waters, but he does not elaborate.

Notice that in Gen. 1:1 the definite article (*ha*) is attached to both heavens (*ha-shamayim*, the heavens) and earth (*ha-’eretz*, the earth).⁶ This ties the words to their definitions in verse 8 and verse 10, in the days in which they were made, and also to what we still know them to be. ‘The article is, generally speaking, employed to determine a substantive wherever it is required by Greek and English.’⁷ ‘On the other hand, the article is always omitted when a person or thing is to be represented as indefinite (or indefinable) or as yet

unknown.’⁸ The article is not omitted, so there is little cause to expect these words to refer to anything but what we know as the heavens above us and the earth below.

The word *shamayim* (heavens) is a dual form noun and is usually used so (including v. 1) for the region between the earth and the bounds of the universe. All translations do not always show this, but this dual function limits how it might apply to a ‘pre-heaven’ as some suggest was created in v. 1.

Kulikovsky writes:

‘Note also that Gesenius’ Hebrew grammar states: “One of the most striking peculiarities in the Hebrew *consecution* of tenses is the phenomenon that, in representing a series of past events, only the first verb stands in the perfect, and the narration is continued in the imperfect.”’

However, this statement does not say that the perfect tense necessarily starts all narrations, or how a narrative sequence is ended, or even that the narrative tense is necessary for a narrative. The statement is a small part of *waw*-consecutive syntax; see sec. 111 and 112, where there are 14 pages on this subject.

Kulikovsky writes:

‘This is exactly what we see in Genesis 1:1–3. Verse 1 employs the perfect tense (or *qatal*) form of the verb (as do the three parallel circumstantial clauses in verse 2), whereas verse 3 employs the imperfect (or *wayyiqtol*) form. This is a clear and objective marker of historical narrative in Hebrew and indicates that the narrative begins in verse 1 not verse 3.’

But, this is not exactly what is written in Gen. 1:1–3. True, in verse 1, *bara*⁹ is Qal perfect. However, verse 2 has only one Qal perfect verb, *hayethah*,¹⁰ and it has one Piel participle verb, *me-ra-che-pheth*.¹¹

Verse 2 has no other verbs in the Hebrew text.³ A translation might insert a verb for continuity: ‘and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep’ (KJV). So the statement: ‘as do the

three parallel circumstantial clauses in verse 2', is incorrect.

True, 'verse 3 employs the imperfect¹² (or *wayyiqtol*) form', however, its 'continuing' perfect verb¹³ is in verse 2, *ha-ye-thah*,¹⁴ not in verse 1. And this is where the narrative tense would usually begin, except the connecting *waw* is separated from the verb to which it belongs by three *waw* insertions after this, which interrupts the sequence.¹⁵ Since the Grammar gives general observations of usage,¹⁶ more likely, the *waw*-consecutive of verse 3 begins according to the participle¹⁷ in verse 2, as is the case in verse 7 for verse 6. No doubt, Gen. 1 is a narrative; there are 49 *waw*-consecutive imperfect verbs, but they are interrupted and not continuous.¹⁸

Even so, syntax alone would not make a case that the creation account begins in verse 2; the text itself determines the meaning, with the grammar and syntax giving aids.

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References

1. Kulikovsky, A., Sloppy, lazy and dishonest: A review of *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* by C. John Collins, *Journal of Creation* 21(3):37-43, 2007.
2. 'And God called the light day' (v. 5).
3. 'And the darkness he called night' (v. 5).
4. The word order in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (BHS), Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Germany. Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Germany 15th ed., 1997.
5. Verses 6-8; 9-10; 11-13; 14-19; 20-23; 24-25; 26-31.
6. Also 'the earth' in v. 2.
7. Gesenius, H.F.W., Euting, J. and Lidzbarski, M., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (GHG), Kautzsch, E. and Cowley, A.E. (Eds.), Oxford University Press, USA, 2nd ed., sec. 126d, 1922.
8. GHG, ref. 7, sec. 126i.
9. 'He created'.
10. 'And she was', i.e. the earth.
11. 'She was moving' (or 'she moved'), i.e. the Spirit of God.
12. *Waw*-consecutive imperfect, *wayyo'mer* (and he said).
13. '... the first verb stands in the perfect, and the narration is continued in the imperfect ...' from GHG, ref. 7.
14. 'And she was', i.e. the earth.
15. And-void, and-darkness, and-Spirit. GHG, ref. 7, sec. 111c.
16. 'as a rule', GH, ref. 7, sec. 111a.
17. *me-ra-che-pheth*, 'she was moving'. GHG, ref. 7, sec. 111u.
18. GHG, ref. 7, sec. 111c. Interruptions in verses 5, 6, 10.

Andrew Kulikovsky replies:

I would like to thank Andrew Klassen for his letter and the opportunity to further explain and clarify my position. Klassen disputes my claim that the first day of creation actually begins at verse 1, and raises a number of objections to the grammatical arguments I have put forward in support of my view.

Klassen begins by stating that a day usually begins with a morning. However, according to the Hebrew understanding of a day, it begins at sunset (the beginning of darkness) and ends at the next sunset, approximately 24 hours later.

He also claims that 'the Bible does not say that light was created in verse 3; it merely says, 'let there be light'. In actual fact, the Bible says: 'And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.'¹ In other words, there is a divine command in the form of a Jussive ('Let there be ...'), immediately followed by a statement of fulfilment ('... and there was light'). This clearly indicates instantaneous creation.

Contra Klassen, the first night could not be that period of darkness when the Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters of the deep because the very notions of day and night had not yet been articulated. Rather, the first night was actually the period of time after light was created and when it was separated from darkness. Indeed, in verse 5 God named the light He had just created as 'day' and the darkness He had separated from this newly created light, He called 'night'.

Furthermore, Klassen's rendering of *wāyehi ʾereḇ wāyehi bōqer* ('and it

was evening and it was morning') is better rendered as 'and then there was evening, and then there was morning'. The *waw*-consecutive *wāyehi ʾereḇ* follows in time the creation of light, and the *waw*-consecutive *wāyehi bōqer* follows the period of darkness brought on by sunset (evening). The meaning of these clauses is not inherently cyclical either. Any cyclicity can only be inferred from this clause's repeated use in the account. Thus, Genesis 1:1-3 appears to be communicating that God first created the heavens and the earth; the earth having no form and surrounded by water and enveloped by darkness. God then created a directional light source to mark the boundaries between day and night. Therefore, Klassen's assertion that 'light must have preceded the first darkness' does not follow, and stands plainly against verse 2.

Klassen also argues that verse 1 is unlikely to be a description of God's very first creative act because, unlike subsequent creative acts, there is no statement of intent or of work being done. However, verse 1 is unique in that it makes an absolute claim about the origin of both time and all things material. In contrast, the other creative acts in chapter 1 describe God moulding and crafting the initially created raw material into something that met His purposes, hence the accompanying statements of intent.

Ultimately, Klassen seems to be saying that Genesis 1:1 functions as a title or summary to the rest of the account, but this is grammatically unlikely. Firstly, the connective conjunction ׀ (*w^e*) in verse 2 suggests a grammatical dependency. Secondly, taking verse 1 as a title sets up a contradiction between the first two verses: How can it be said that God created the earth when in fact it already existed in some form? Moreover, a survey of the usage of *et hāšāmāyim w^eet hā'āres* shows that in some cases it clearly does not refer to the complete and ordered cosmos.² The chief thrust appears to be that of 'totality' rather than that of organization.³

Klassen further argues that the presence of the article before both

‘heavens’ and ‘earth’ in verse 1 ties them both to their definitions in verses 8 and 10 respectively. While the article in Hebrew *generally* functions like the article in English and gives the following noun definiteness, it is unclear why Klassen believes the presence of the articles in verse 1 ‘ties them to their definitions in verse 8 and verse 10.’

As Waltke and O’Connor have pointed out, ‘the article is not consistently used even according to the best established patterns.’⁴ Indeed, although the article is used in Genesis 1:1, it is not used in the equivalent expression in Genesis 14:19. Nevertheless, the use of the article in Genesis 1:1 simply emphasises the inherent uniqueness of the corresponding referents: there is only one (or one class of) ‘heavens’ and only one ‘earth’. Yet, as stated above, Genesis 1:1 cannot refer to the heavens and the earth as we now know them because of the three grammatically subordinate circumstantial clauses in verse 2 that describe the state of ‘the heavens and the earth’ at that moment—the moment after they came into existence. While it is good to see Klassen making use of a standard Hebrew grammar, there is more to sound biblical exegesis than cherry-picking statements from *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar* (GKC). Like the Bible, statements in GKC need to be read in context. The absence of the article is only a necessary condition for indefiniteness, not a sufficient one. In other words, a noun can still be definite even if it does not have the article. It should also be noted that in verses 8 and 10, neither *šāmāyīm* nor *ērēs*, have the article, and yet they are both definitely definite. Both words stand in apposition to the preceding noun which *does* have the article: God called the expanse sky (*šāmāyīm*), God called the dry ground land (*ērēs*).

Appealing to the ‘dual form’ of *šāmāyīm* (שָׁמַיִם), Klassen suggests that this ‘limits how it might apply to a ‘pre-heaven’ as some suggest was created in v. 1.’ Putting aside the fact that it is difficult to see what Klassen means by this, whatever point he is trying to make is invalidated by the fact that *šāmāyīm*

is actually in the plural form! In fact, this word only ever occurs in the plural form. To someone unfamiliar with Hebrew morphology it does appear to be a dual because the root is שָׁמַיִם and when the plural ending פַּיִם is added, the final form is שָׁמַיִם, which has the same ending (פַּיִם) as would be expected for a verb in the dual form. It should also be noted that, because *šāmāyīm* only ever occurs in the plural form, it is not valid to use its plurality to make an exegetical point since there were no other options anyway.

Klassen also questions the legitimacy—or at least the applicability—of the statement I quote from GKC in relation to the use of the perfect (or *qatal*) verb form to begin the narrative and the subsequent use of the *waw*-consecutive imperfect (or *wayyiqtol*) form to advance the narrative. He notes that the statement does not necessarily imply that the perfect form must start a narrative, and that the pattern described does not exactly fit Genesis 1:1–3. But no one is saying that the perfect form must necessarily start all narratives. Rather, a narrative begun by a perfect verb form is merely the typical or classical situation.

Klassen also calls into question my claim that the parallel circumstantial clauses in verse 2 also employ Qal perfect verbs. He states that verse 2 contains only one Qal perfect verb, *hāyētāh*, and one Piel participle, and therefore my claim ‘is incorrect’. However, the verb *hāyētāh* has a grammatical relationship with all three circumstantial clauses, and is the governing verb for all of them. The verb is simply elided from the last 2 clauses, for stylistic reasons.⁵ Furthermore, *hāyētāh*, in governing the circumstantial clauses, does not move the narrative forward, but simply further expounds the meaning of the main clause (v. 1).

Klassen also appears to assume that the use of a beginning perfect and subsequent *waw*-consecutive imperfects amounts to an absolute and strict grammatical construction, and because neither Genesis 1, nor any other narrative passage, fulfils this strict grammatical construction, the presence

of a beginning perfect followed by a string of *waw*-consecutive imperfects is not a valid marker of historical narrative. But again, neither I nor GKC, nor any Hebrew grammarian that I am aware of, would argue that this is a strict grammatical construction. Rather, it is simply a pattern that objectively holds true for most Old Testament narrative texts.

Klassen also states that ‘syntax alone would not make a case that the creation account begins in verse 2; the text itself determines the meaning, with the grammar and syntax giving aids.’ But making distinctions between ‘the text itself’ and its grammar and syntax is nonsense. The ‘text itself’ is composed according to grammatical rules and using particular grammatical constructions. They are inseparable. Yes, the lexical meaning of words and their usage, and the historical context also help to determine meaning, but grammar and syntax are central and critical, especially when determining the genre of the text.

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References

1. Verse 3 (NIV), my emphasis.
2. Exod. 20:11; Hag. 2:6.
3. A GRAMCORD search reveals 12 occurrences outside of Gen. 1:1. Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28 all refer to heaven and earth (i.e. all creation) as witnesses. 2 Kgs 19:15 and Isa. 37:16 relate to the totality of God’s dominion. Jer. 23:24 refers to God’s omnipresence. See also Wenham, G., *Genesis 1–15*, 15.
4. Waltke, B.K. and O’Connor, M., *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Eisenbrauns, Winona Lake, Indiana, p. 250, 1990.
5. Note that the literal Hebrew reads ‘darkness over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovering over the waters’ and does not form a grammatically correct sentence. Thus, *hāyētāh* must be supplied in order for the two clauses to make sense. Indeed, this is what all modern translations do! See, for example, the NIV (my emphasis): ‘Now the earth was [*hāyētāh*] formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.’