THE REFRAIN OF GENESIS 1:
A Critical Review of Its Rendering in the English Bible

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The refrain of Gen 1 (vv. 5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) is well known, and its sonorous repetition—together with its absence from the seventh day—is part of the literary effect of the passage. Its meaning has figured into the various ways of interpreting the "days" of the Genesis account and the vexing controversies fostered by such questions, and at times the proper way of rendering that refrain has been a factor in the disputes. The consensus of English Bible versions has changed since the sixteenth century; but recently, a scholar has argued for a return to the older position, along with a strongly worded insistence on "regular" days.

It is not my goal in this paper to address the "days" of Genesis; instead I will focus on the proper way to render the refrain into English. Of course, this will have its impact on what we think about those days.[1]

Here is how ESV has rendered it (see also NIV, NRSV):[2]

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1 For a discussion of the days, see C. John Collins, *Science and Faith: Friends or Foes?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), especially in chs. 4 and 5; and more technically, C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2006), 122-29.

2 With respect to the matters discussed here, NAB, NJB, and REB are similar. NET is also similar, with one difference at 1.5 (see below, n.28).

> [5] And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.
>
> [8] And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.
>
> . . .
>
> [31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

This rendering we may call the contemporary consensus. English Bibles have not always rendered the refrain this way, however, and the purpose of this essay is to assess the options offered, in the light of Hebrew grammar and literary conventions.

Traditional readers of the English Bible will be familiar with the way KJV has rendered the refrain:

> [5] And the evening and the morning were the first day.
>
> [8] And the evening and the morning were the second day.
>
> . . .
>
> [31] And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

In this rendering, it appears that the evening and morning together make up the day. This kind of interpretation goes as far back in modern English as Tyndale's version of 1530:[3]

> [5] And so of the evening and morning was made the first day. [etc.][4]

The Geneva Bible (1562), followed by the Bishops' Bible (1602), gives us the KJV form of the refrain.

The Revised Version (RV, 1884) was the first in this stream to give us something close to the contemporary consensus rendering:[5]

> [5] And there was evening and there was morning, one day.
>
> [8] And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.
>
> . . .
>
> [31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The way we read the refrain will affect what we think the refrain is doing in this account: does it "define" the days (and if so, how?), or does it mark their completion? This in its turn will affect what kind of days we think these were.

We will first examine the details of the Hebrew to see just what the interpretive issues are, and then the ways in which the ancient versions (Greek Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Syriac Peshitta) interpreted it. We will see that one way to describe the difference between the KJV family on the one hand, and the RV family on the other, is to say that the KJV family more closely follows the line of the Vulgate, while the RV family (and hence the modern consensus) more closely follows the line of the Septuagint (which doubtless influenced the Peshitta). We will then be

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3   Older versions such as Tyndale (1530), the Great Bible (1540), Geneva Bible (1562), Bishops' Bible (1602), and Douay (1609) are cited from Luther A. Weigle, ed., *The Genesis Octapla: Eight English Versions of the Book of Genesis in the Tyndale-King James Tradition* (London: Nelson, 1952), but with modern spelling.

4   The Great Bible (1540) "and the evening and the morning was made one day," etc., is similar, as is Douay (1609) "and there was evening and morning, that made one day." Compare the German Luther Bible (1964 edition) "Da ward aus Abend und Morgen der erste Tag," etc.

5   See also JPS (1917), RSV (1952), NASB (1975).

in a position to assess the modern consensus, which has recently been called into question.

The Hebrew

The Hebrew, at first glance, is peculiar. The first day ends with (v. 5):

<div dir="rtl">ויהי־ערב ויהי־בקר יום אחד</div>

whereas the second day ends with (v. 8):

<div dir="rtl">ויהי־ערב ויהי־בקר יום שׁני</div>

That is, Day One uses the cardinal number אחד "one," while Day Two uses the ordinal שׁני "second"; the remaining days also use the ordinal form. Neither uses an article; in fact, only on Day Six do we get an article (v. 31)—but only on the ordinal, not on the noun "day":

<div dir="rtl">ויהי־ערב ויהי־בקר יום השׁשׁי</div>

Day Seven (2.1-3) lacks the refrain altogether. We find its enumeration with the article on both noun and ordinal in 2.2 (ביום השׁביעי "on the seventh day"), and with the article on the ordinal only in 2.3 (את־יום השׁביעי "the seventh day," object of "blessed").

Note further that each instance of the refrain has two verbs, both ויהי (the *wayyiqtol* form), with ערב "evening" and בקר "morning" as the respective subjects: "and there was evening, and there was morning." That is, these are successive events.[6] The KJV-type rendering seems to have combined these into one without clear warrant (more on this below).

The simplest way to translate the refrain, then, seems to be the way RV has done. However, the modern consensus has gone farther and taken the cardinal "one" in v. 5 to be functioning as the ordinal "first"; it has also supposed that the natural way for English to convey the notion of entries in a list is to supply the definite article. The reference grammar of Waltke and O'Connor puts it this way:[7]

> The indefinite noun [יום] plus אחד has a definite sense in the opening chapter of Genesis: יוֹם אֶחָד "the first day" (Gen 1:5); this pattern is found nowhere else—even the rest of the account uses indefinite nouns with ordinal numbers (Gen 1:8, 13, etc.).

Commentaries point to other uses of the cardinal אחד (usually "one") as an ordinal ("first"): for example, Delitzsch mentions Gen 2.11, where האחד is "the first [river]."[8] Or we might compare Gen 8.5, where we find the idiomatic באחד לחדשׁ "on the first [day] of the month."[9]

From this we arrive at what is now the consensus rendering, reflected in ESV as given above.

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6 See Appendix 1 for further grammatical discussion of the *wayyiqtol* verbs here.

7 B. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 274 (§15.2.1a).

8 Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1899), 84. See also C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 50-51; V. P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 118 n.4.

9 This sometimes appears in its fuller form ביום אחד לחדשׁ "on the first day of the month."

We can see that the interpretive issues here are:

(1) How do we read the successive *wayyiqtol* verbs ויהי—as marking successive events, as enumeration, or as something else?

(2) What do we make of "evening" and "morning," and of the order in which they occur—are they a sequence, or are they components? (This is closely related to the first issue.)

(3) How do we treat the cardinal number אחד in v. 5—is it "one" or "first"?

(4) What do we make of the pattern of definite articles—does their presence or absence signify something?

The ancient versions

Here is how the Septuagint (LXX) translated the Hebrew refrain:

[5] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα μία

[8] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα δευτέρα

[13] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα τρίτη

[19] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα τετάρτη

[23] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα πέμπτη

[31] καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί ἡμέρα ἕκτη

Notice that LXX (like the Hebrew) has used the cardinal μία in Day One, and ordinals in the other days. Notice further that LXX has not used articles on any of the days—not even on the sixth. And finally, notice that LXX has rendered the two *wayyiqtol* verbs ויהי with two instances of καὶ ἐγένετο "and it happened/came"—that is, in a manner that keeps the event line going.

It is true that the use of μία in place of πρώτη fascinated Philo of Alexandria (ca. 20 B.C. to ca. A.D. 50). In his discussion of the creation account he said,[10]

When light had come into being,[11] and darkness had moved out of its way and retired, and evening and dawn [ἑσπέρα καὶ πρωῖα] had been fixed as barriers in the intervals between them, as a necessary consequence a measure of time was forthwith brought about, which its Maker called Day, and not "first" day but "one" [καὶ ἡμέραν οὐχὶ πρώτην, ἀλλὰ μίαν], an expression due to the uniqueness of the intelligible world, and to its natural kinship to the number "one."

The subsequent days, however, being designated with ordinals, draw no similar comment.[12]

It may have been that Philo felt a genuine semantic dissonance here; or it may be that the Jewish expression required a comment for Philo's Hellenistic readers. I suspect it is the latter, because we have good evidence that Jewish Greek used

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10 Philo, *De Opificio Mundi* (vol. 1 of *Philo: In Ten Volumes [and Two Supplementary Volumes]*; trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker; Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1929), §35. Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, 1.29) apparently follows this observation that μία is odd, but does not elaborate. The medieval Jewish commentator Rashi refers to *Genesis Rabbah* for something similar: "Why did he write 'one'? Because the Holy One, Blessed be He, was alone in his world, since the angels were not created until the second day" (Rashi text in Yehudah Kiel, *Sefer Be-reshit* [Da'at Mikra; Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1997], p. ט).

11 Or, *had come* (ἐγένετο). (My footnote.)

12 Josephus is similar in this lack of such comment on the other days.

μία for the first day of the week, in the expression ἡ μία [ἡμέρα] τῶν σαββάτων "the first [day] of the week." For example, in the LXX inscription to Ps 24 (LXX Ps 23.1), we find:

> ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ τῆς μιᾶς σαββάτων
>
> A psalm for/of David, of the *first day* of the week.

The ordinal δευτέρα "second" appears in the inscription of Ps 48 (LXX Ps 47.1), δευτέρα σαββάτου "for the *second day* of the week."[13] In the NT, we find the expression (or slight variants) in Matt 28.1//Mark 16.2//Luke 24.1//John 20.1; John 20.19; Acts 20.7; 1 Cor 16.2.[14] This echoes the expression in Aramaic, חד בשבא "the *first day* of the week," which is used in both Jewish Aramaic and the Syriac NT.[15]

All of this suggests that later Jewish usage—perhaps under the influence of Gen 1.5—found it natural to refer to the first day of the week using the cardinal "one" rather than the ordinal "first." This further suggests that the usage in Gen 1.5 is quite intelligible as "first." It follows, then, that the LXX translators rendered the text in a way that expresses the same idea as the consensus of contemporary English versions.[16]

The Syriac Peshitta—perhaps under the influence of LXX—agrees with this:

> ⁵ והוא רמשא והוא צפרא יומא חד
>
> ⁸ והוא רמשא והוא צפרא יומא דתרין

Here we see the repetition of "and there was" (והוא), the cardinal חד used for the sense "first,"[17] and the ordinals for the other days.[18]

The Vulgate, however, is different. It reads:

> ⁵ factumque est vespere et mane dies unus
>
> ⁸ et factum est vespere et mane dies secundus
>
> ¹³ factumque est vespere et mane dies tertius
>
> ¹⁹ et factum est vespere et mane dies quartus
>
> ²³ et factum est vespere et mane dies quintus
>
> ³¹ et factum est vespere et mane dies sextus

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13 Psalm 94 inscription (LXX Ps 93.1) has τετράδι σαββάτων "for the fourth day of the week," using the noun τετράς, which became a term for the fourth day (see H. G. Liddell et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon* [9th ed. with revised supplement; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 1782a).

14 See also Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 41.4, τῇ μίᾳ τῶν σαββάτων ἡμέρᾳ "on the first day of the week."

15 See Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of the Targumim, Talmud Babli, Yerushalmi, and Midrashic Literature* (New York: Judaica Press, 1985 [originally 1903]), 425a; and Matt 28.1 in the Peshitta. In Delitzsch's Hebrew NT at Matt 28.1 we find the Hebrew equivalent לאחד בשבת, while in the Modern Hebrew NT we find the ordinal construction, יום ראשון (which is what I have myself heard in spoken Israeli Hebrew).

16 The Latin of 2 Esd 6.38 (Vulgate 4 Ezrae) denotes day one of the creation week as *in primo die* "on the first day," using the ordinal. Unfortunately, the Semitic original (first century A.D.) and its Greek translation are lost.

17 As found, for example, in Matt 28.1 in the Peshitta, and in Jewish Aramaic as discussed above.

18 See J. Payne Smith, *A Compendious Syriac Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1903), 620a, for the numeral תרין "two"; used with the relative particle ד it expresses the ordinal. See also T. Nöldeke, *Compendious Syriac Grammar* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2001 [originally 1904]), §239.

This is perhaps best rendered[19] as in Tyndale's version, "and so of the evening and morning was made one day, . . . second day," etc.[20] This interpretation seems to lie behind the KJV family as given above.

The Vulgate is an ungrammatical rendering of the Hebrew, which was given above. The Hebrew has two *wayyiqtol* verbs (both ויהי "and it was/happened"), which advance the story line; their subjects are, respectively, "evening" (ערב) and "morning" (בקר), which are a natural sequence: "and there was evening, and there was morning."[21] These events bracket the nighttime, and end each of the six workdays. Further, there is no logic to the idea that a day was *made out of* an evening and a morning.

It is not hard to conclude from this discussion that the contemporary consensus, which resembles LXX and Peshitta, looks like it has better support from both grammar and logic than the interpretations based on the Vulgate. A recent challenge, however, has called for us to revisit the question.

The arguments of Andrew Steinmann

In an essay from 2002, Andrew Steinmann presented a strong case against the consensus.[22] In particular, he opposes two moves: first, treating the cardinal אחד in Gen 1.5 as if it were an ordinal ("first"); and second, supplying "the" in English for each of the days ("the first day . . . the second day . . . the third day . . .").

Steinmann acknowledges that most moderns suppose that אחד in Gen 1.5 is used as an ordinal, appealing to the way it is used in numbering the days of a month (as in Gen 8.5). Steinmann, however, argues that the parallel is not an exact one. That is, outside of Gen 1.5, we find אחד for "first [day]" only in the formula באחד לחדש "on the first day of the month" (sometimes in the fuller form ביום אחד לחדש). Likewise, there is a formula for numbering the years of a king's reign: בשנת אחת ל-X "in the first year of X." In both of these formulas the other cardinal numbers also appear, so it is not unique to אחד. Further, Steinmann thinks it significant that in both of these formulas the object of the -ל preposition is definite—from which, he thinks, "first" derives its definiteness.[23]

Outside of these two formulas, the numbering of time periods uses the ordinal ראשון. The other use of אחד as an ordinal is when the noun is a countable item. An example would be Gen 2.11, 13 where האחד "the first [river]" is contrasted to הנהר השני "the second river."

Thus, he concludes, we do not have any of these patterns in Gen 1.5, so אחד there must serve some other function. He proposes "אחד appears to be used as a cardinal number" (583), so that the end of the verse would be:

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19 The difficulty lies in *factum* being neuter, while *dies* is masculine. Possibly we should take *factum est* impersonally (as is common in the Vulgate for ויהי), "it came to pass": "It came to pass from the evening and the morning, one day," etc. Or perhaps *dies* is appositional to an impersonal subject of *factum est*: "It—namely one day—was made from the evening and the morning." This latter seems to lie behind the English tradition, and makes sense of the Latin.

20 See also the Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible (1560), Bishops' Bible (1568), Douay Bible (1609), and KJV (1611).

21 On the relation of these *wayyiqtol* verbs and sequence, see Appendix 1.

22 Andrew E. Steinmann, "אחד as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1.5," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45.4 (2002): 577-84.

23 He never explains just how he thinks this "definiteness" works; and though I do not accept this part of his analysis, I do not see that it has a crucial role in the overall question, and will save this part of the discussion for some other occasion.

There was an evening and there was a morning: one day.

He goes on to claim that "Genesis 1 is defining what a day is. . . . as something akin to a twenty-four hour solar period with light and darkness and transitions between day and night" (583). He is explicit: "Hence the following equation is what Gen 1:5 expresses: Evening + morning = one day."

He then reads the rest of the refrain in the same light: evening and morning constituted a second day, and so on.[24] Steinmann even confronts his readers with a choice: the Genesis account records creation in six solar days, but whether or not one believes in its veracity "is another matter altogether" (584 n.23).

Assessment of Steinmann's case

It is fair to say that Steinmann has offered the most thorough analysis of אחד as "first" that I have seen; and in this respect, his "not so fast" caution regarding the Gen 1 refrain is entirely warranted. Nevertheless, the flaws of this argument are severe.

First, where is the logic of the "equation" evening + morning = a day? "Evening"—as Steinmann himself acknowledges—"is the transition from light/day to darkness/night. Morning is the transition from darkness/night to light/day" (583). By this definition, evening + morning cannot equal day. Actually, the grammar of the Hebrew (successive *wayyiqtol* verbs) indicates that we have not an equation but a sequence of events: evening happened, then morning happened. And this sequence describes a night, not a day.[25]

Second, Steinmann cites Waltke-O'Connor §15.2.1a (quoted above) as favoring the standard analysis that Steinmann rejects. He does not point out that Waltke-O'Connor acknowledge that Gen 1.5 displays a pattern that is "found nowhere else—even the rest of the account uses indefinite nouns with ordinal numbers"; but this is a key qualification.

So we have a unique pattern here. We also have a context, Gen 1.1–2.3, not to mention the native-speaker reading found in Exod 20.11, to guide us in interpreting this grammatically unique pattern. But Steinmann pays no attention to any of this. If using the cardinal אחד in Day One "defines" a day as a solar day, what is the effect of using the *ordinal* שני in Day Two? Surely the effect of the ordinals in Days Two through Seven is to convey that we have a sequence of days? If that were not enough, we can appeal to Exod 20.11:

For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. (ESV)

כי ששת־ימים עשה יהוה
את־השמים ואת־הארץ את־הים
ואת־כל־אשר־בם וינח ביום
השביעי על־כן ברך יהוה
את־יום השבת ויקדשהו:

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24 This is quite close in effect to what we find in the Vulgate, as discussed above.

25 See Num 9.15, where we have "the appearance of fire" over the tabernacle from *evening* until *morning*; in v. 16 "the appearance of fire" was there *by night* (which is thus the paraphrase of evening to morning). Similarly, in Gen 30.16 Jacob comes in from the field "in the evening," and lies with Leah "that night." In Exod 18.13 Moses worked at judging "from morning till evening"—that is, during the *day*.

This interprets the Genesis creation account as describing God's work distributed over six sequential days.[26] This shows that the native-speaker reading of the creation account favors taking the refrain as marking the successive days— hence Day One is "the first day."

We note further that there is no refrain for the seventh day (2.3). Hence, for Steinmann (583-84) to claim without argument that Day Seven "also, the author is implying, was a regular solar day" is unwarranted.

Steinmann further appeals to the LXX rendering of Gen 1.5, ἡμέρα μία, arguing that it, too, supports his case for "one day." But, as we saw above, LXX actually supports the consensus position, both because the use of the cardinal μία can be explained as "first," and because the Greek accounts for the repeated *wayyiqtol* verbs.

We also saw that Philo drew attention to the presence of μία in place of πρώτη. However, whatever else Philo is doing in the passage cited, he is not finding a "definition" of the days.

Suppose, just for a moment, that Steinmann has made us cautious about reading the cardinal in v. 5 as an ordinal. Suppose then we were to read the refrain as RV:

[5] And there was evening and there was morning, one day.

[8] And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

[13] And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

[19] And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

[23] And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

[31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.[27]

What other way is there to read this but as an enumeration of the six workdays of a week, followed by the seventh-day Sabbath? We would take v. 5 as marking

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26 As P. Joüon and T. Muraoka note in *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 2006), the expression ששת ימים in Exod 20.9, 11 is an accusative of time, indicating "in the space of six days" (§126i).

27 Note that Gen 1.31 uses the form יום הששי (ESV "the sixth day"), while 2.2 (cf. Exod 20.11) uses ביום השביעי (ESV "on the seventh day"), and 2.3 (cf. Exod 20.10) uses יום השביעי (ESV "the seventh day"). The grammars do not agree on how to explain the article's presence or absence on יום: Joüon-Muraoka §138b suggests that originally the form יום השביעי was "the day of the seventh" (a construct with a genitive), while Gesenius-Kautsch-Cowley, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §126w, suggests that we have an appositional relationship, "a day, namely the seventh." Waltke-O'Connor §14.3.1d simply notes that "sometimes" this happens, without offering an explanation why (perhaps the safest option). Steinmann (583) calls the grammar of 1.31 "strange," but it is not: rather, the articles suddenly appearing on the sixth and seventh days draw attention to them—as noted in Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 104. That is, neither the syntax of Days Two through Five nor that of Days Six and Seven is, strictly speaking, odd; but the differences may have a literary effect, such as highlighting. In my judgment, this is a better way of accounting for the features than that offered by Frank Polak, "Poetic style and Parallelism in the Creation Account (Genesis 1.2–2.3)," in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (ed. Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 2-31. On page eight Polak finds the cardinal used as an ordinal to be exceptional and characteristic of "poetry," paralleled in Ugaritic (though his cited parallels, note 23, do not bear on this specific question). On pages six to seven he cites the lack of the article as further evidence of "poetic" style (though he does not account for the sixth and seventh days). The categories "prose" and "poetry" are notoriously difficult for the Bible, but Gen 1.1–2.3 is certainly narrative, as evidenced by the *wayyiqtol* verbs. The literary features lead me to call this pericope "exalted prose narrative," which recognizes the unusual character of this text that points to a high rhetorical level, while acknowledging that neither "poetry" nor "prose" is an adequate label.

the end of the first day of this extraordinary week, v. 8 as marking the end of the second day, and so on.[28] In other words we would say that the proper English for this is what we have in ESV:

[5] And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

[8] And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

. . .

[31] And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

I conclude, therefore, that Steinmann's argument against the consensus reading of the Gen 1 refrain cannot stand closer inspection, and that the consensus reading (as represented in ESV/NRSV/NIV) remains the best way to translate these verses into English.[29] The refrain, after each work period, marks the coming of evening, and then of morning, which brings that day to a close and prepares us for the next one. That returns us to the question of interpreting the days—but that is another discussion altogether.

Appendix 1: The *wayyiqtol* form ויהי (*wayĕhî*) in the refrain

In the body of this paper I have argued that the *wayyiqtol* form ויהי ("and there was") in the combinations with "evening" and "morning" designates sequential events. For the sake of grammatical precision, it is worth clarifying what I do and do not mean by saying this—especially since there are grammatical studies that, on the surface at least, would seem to call my claim into question.

Longacre has referred to the "special status" of the Hebrew verb היה "to be," claiming "The verb *hayâ*, 'be', even in its preterite form *wayhî*, 'and it happened', does not function on the storyline of a narrative."[30] Longacre prefers to describe the verb as "typically descriptive and depictive," and therefore it "does not figure on the backbone of a story."

While there are certainly places where this makes sense in the Joseph narrative that Longacre studies (e.g., Gen 35.22; 38.7; 39.5, 6, 20, 21), we must surely recognize that the way that Longacre has put it is an overstatement. Consider, for example, Gen 12.10:

Now there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt . . .	ויהי רעב בארץ וירד אברם מצרימה

In this context, the most likely implication is that a famine *came about*, and therefore Abram went down to Egypt. A similar implication comes in Gen 13.7:

and there was strife between the herdsmen of Abram's livestock and the herdsmen of Lot's livestock.	ויהי־ריב בין רעי מקנה־אברם ובין רעי מקנה־לוט

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28 The NET Bible at Gen 1.5 adds the word "marking," probably in an attempt to make this explicit: "marking the first day." However, NET lacks this addition for the other days, thereby losing something of the refrain-like repetition.

29 There is of course a judgment to be made about the repeated conjunction "and," especially at the beginning of a sentence. Some find it awkward and might prefer something like "And so." Native speakers will vary in their judgments; I find the simple parataxis sonorous in this particular context.

30 Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph, A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 64.

Again, in context this most likely implies that strife *arose* between the two parties.[31] In Gen 1, consider v. 3:

And God said, "Let there be light,"	ויאמר אלהים יהי אור
and there was light.	ויהי־אור:

The *wayyiqtol* verb here designates an event consequent to God's expression of his wish.[32]

Therefore it is better to say that the *wayyiqtol* form ויהי need not designate an event on the main story line, and one must infer from the context whether it does or does not.[33] An important feature of the context is the referential context: that is, what is the nature of the things being described in the immediate syntactical environment. I will come back to this point in a moment.

The recent work of John Cook may seem to raise a further objection.[34] The part of Cook's argument that is relevant here concerns his contention that the *wayyiqtol* verb form itself does not mark temporal sequence; the association between the verb form and temporal sequence is largely a result of the semantics of the verb form and the rules of narration, in which one normally tells events in the sequence of their occurrence. This point strikes me as a reasonable one, and my interaction with his detailed treatments need not detain us here. Cook's work serves to remind us to be careful about claiming that sequence is an inherent (i.e., explicitly marked) feature of the verb form. Nevertheless, the assumption of sequence for this verb form is a part of the cooperation between author and audience when the text is a narrative dominated by the *wayyiqtol*, as Gen 1.1–2.3 most certainly is.

We can bring these observations together by noticing that the subjects of the successive instances of ויהי in the refrain are "evening," and then "morning." These words refer to events, or time periods, that succeed one another: in Hebrew culture the evening follows the workday, and the morning follows the evening (with the nighttime in between).[35] This contributes to an anthropomorphic portrayal of God as a workman going through his workweek, each day consisting of labor, which is then followed by his daily rest during the night. In this literary pattern the refrain closes out each workday, and prepares for the next one. Then God enjoys his own Sabbath rest (2.1-3).

Appendix 2: Three non-traditional English versions (GNB, CEV, NLT)

In the main body of this essay I have focused on English versions that tend to be traditional, at least in this passage. Three versions that veer from this approach are

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31 See also Exod 19.16, where "there were thunders and lightnings" probably indicates that the thunders and lightnings *came to be*, which then caused the people of Israel to "tremble."

32 I leave for another discussion the way in which this form, in its familiar function "now it came to pass," serves to mark a new stage in a narrative. See the (admittedly dated) discussion in Gesenius-Kautsch-Cowley, §111 f-h. Further, when the verb uses the syntagm *hayâ lĕ-* "something became" (i.e., it came to serve as), it can clearly designate an event: cf. Exod 2.10.

33 Joüon-Muraoka §111*i* provides a more helpful analysis of this verb, observing that *hayâ* can function as a verb of action and as a verb of state.

34 John A. Cook, "The Semantics of Verbal Pragmatics: Clarifying the Roles of *Wayyiqtol* and *Weqatal* in Biblical Hebrew Prose," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 49.2 (2004), 247-73.

35 Compare Alviero Niccacci, "Analysis of Biblical Narrative," in *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. Robert D. Bergen, Dallas: Sumer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 175-98. On page 183 he ranks the refrain verbs on the mainline of the narrative, without comment.

the Good News Bible (GNB, 1976), Contemporary English Version (CEV, 1995), and New Living Translation (NLT, 1996).

GNB and CEV are very unclear which side they take. GNB has:

> [5] Evening passed and morning came—that was the first day. [etc.]

Similarly, CEV has:

> [5] Evening came and then morning—that was the first day.

I cannot from this wording discern whether the translators thought that the sequence of evening followed by morning marks the end of each day (my view), or that evening and morning together make up one day (the view of KJV and Steinmann).

NLT follows the KJV analysis (at least at v. 5):

> [5] God called the light "day" and the darkness "night." Together these made up one day.

> [8] This happened on the second day.

> [13] This all happened on the third day. [See also Days Four through Six.]

We could criticize this rendering on several fronts: It loses the refrain effect of the original; it drops Hebrew words out altogether; it fails to allow the English reader to think about what God was doing during these weeknights; and so forth. In the light of this paper, however, the point is that it fails in its analysis of the refrain.