

How Scholars' Perceptions of the Semantic Range of יום Have Affected Their Discussions of the Age of the Universe: Part 1

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Abstract

Before the Enlightenment, most theologians believed the earth was created in the space of a literal week, a notable exception (among others) being Augustine, who interpreted the days of creation figuratively. Most believed that the universe began sometime between approximately 3600BC and 7000BC. However, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries—with the growing acceptance of geological uniformitarianism and, later, Darwinian evolution—an increasing number of eminent scholars advocated a multi-billion-year-old universe and questioned the validity of the biblical account. In order to accommodate billions of years into the Genesis account of origins, theologians proposed a range of new interpretations. Some, such as the Gap Theory, sought to retain a literal understanding of יום. Others, particularly the Day-Age Theory, maintained that the term had a broad semantic range that could include a sense of vast periods of time. Over the past two centuries, the issue of the meaning of יום in relation to the age of the universe has been vigorously debated by many scholars, though ignored as irrelevant by others.

Following an introductory survey of the biblical, historical and theological, and linguistic contexts of this issue, the study looks at delineations and definitions of יום in Scripture, and in lexical and other sources. The central analysis examines how the semantic range of יום has been discussed in the context of the creation account and in relation to the age of the universe, both historically, and, more particularly, by 40 scholars (or teams of scholars) over the past 50 years. It is evident that a great variety of opinion exists regarding the semantic range of יום. It is also clear that there is a considerable disconnection between lexicography regarding יום and the formation of creation theology. Most respected lexical sources do not allow for a broad semantic range for יום, yet many theologians believe it to be rather flexible.

Keywords: יום; age of the universe; biblical hermeneutics; connotations of yom; Creation account; Darwinian evolution; days of Creation; denotation of yom; the Enlightenment; figurative meaning; Genesis 1:1; Genesis 1:1–2:4; linguistic context of Genesis 1; literal meaning; Masoretic text; metaphor; origins; paragraph structure of Genesis 1; semantic range of yom; syntax; the traditional view of Creation; uniformitarianism; yom; וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ("and God said") units.

Prologue

I am very thankful for having had the opportunity to do this study, which was facilitated through the guidance of Drs. Richard E. Averbeck and Eric J. Tully at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

I acknowledge with gratitude the kind granting of permission by the Israel Antiquities Authority for the inclusion of its infrared image of the 4QGen^g Dead Sea Scroll fragment of Genesis 1 (fig. 3).

Hebrew Bible quotations are taken from the text of the 1997 2nd ed. of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (based on the Leningrad Codex B19^A), as found in *Accordance* and *BibleWorks*, "which has been edited over the years to bring it into greater conformity with the Leningrad Codex" (*BibleWorks*, WTT Version Info). Both the *Accordance* and *BibleWorks* versions of *BHS* include the 2010 *WTM* Release 4.14.

Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture translations into English are my own rendering.

Unless stated otherwise, all instances of emphasis within a quotation are those of the cited author.

I have indicated wherever I have added my own emphases, except in the case of Scripture quotations. My preferred means of emphasis is italics. If the quotation already contains italics, then I resort to underlining (and specify so). Additionally, even where the quotation does not contain italics, I sometimes still use underlining for the sake of consistency with underlining in other nearby quotations.

Introduction

This work examines how scholars' perceptions of the semantic range of יום have affected their discussions of the age of the universe. While each of the key elements in this relationship—the semantic range of יום and the age of the universe—have indeed been studied before, I am not aware of any other study that specifically focuses on the interaction between the two, across a range of scholarly works.

The subject of creation and origins is popular and is often vigorously debated. A key element of enquiry and discussion within this topic is the age of the

universe. Some scholars feel that the Bible does not speak to the question of the age of the universe. Certainly, the Bible does not make any outright statement like, “The universe was created by God x thousand or million or billion years ago.” However, other scholars believe that the biblical text does indeed give indications concerning the age of the universe. In their interactions with the text, many such scholars make reference to the Hebrew word יֹם , usually translated “day,” which occurs 15 times in the 35 verses of the Genesis creation account (Genesis 1:1–2:4). This paper examines (1) how scholars have understood the semantic range of יֹם —whether as always having a narrow, restricted sense, or as having a broad range of meanings across different contexts, or as somewhere in between these two extremes—and (2) how these perceptions have affected their discussions of the age of the universe. Must the word יֹם always indicate a normal day, or can it refer to a longer period of time? Does its flexibility or inflexibility of meaning have anything relevant to say regarding the age of the universe according to the Genesis account of creation?

There are several reasons why this subject might be viewed as important. Within the Christian church there has been much discussion, sometimes heated and confused, on the issues of creation and, in particular, the age of the universe. It is often asked what the word יֹם could potentially mean in Genesis. It would be helpful to gain a degree of clarity on the breadth of views regarding the semantic range of יֹם —including those of lexicographers, theologians, and other scholars—and the kind of reasoning employed in their discussions of יֹם with respect to the age of the universe. All of this could potentially aid people in making better-informed decisions about how they see the place of יֹם within the creation debate, and in better understanding those with different opinions from their own.

Outside the Christian church, many people view the Bible as irrelevant or unreliable, especially when it comes to science. Even some biblical scholars believe that the Genesis account of creation has little,

if anything, that is pertinent or authoritative to say regarding modern science. The biblical word יֹם in the creation account can be seen as irreconcilable with the prevailing view of origins. This paper may help people understand the various ways that some biblical scholars, by engaging with the semantic range of the word יֹם , have explained the Genesis account of creation as being relevant to the issue of the age of the universe.

This first part of the larger work gives an introductory survey of the biblical, historical and theological, and linguistic contexts of this issue. It concludes with the anticipated contributions that the larger work will attempt to make to biblical scholarship and the methodology that will be utilized in the core analysis of data.

Contextual Issues

Biblical Context

Biblical scholars’ discussions of יֹם and the age of the universe focus primarily upon the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:4. We will examine and comment upon two interrelated interpretive issues arising from this passage that are particularly pertinent to this work.

Syntax of Genesis 1:1–3

One important interpretive issue arising immediately in the Genesis creation account is how to understand the flow of the narrative in the first few verses. Although the primary focus here is on the first three verses, the first five verses of Genesis 1 are reproduced in Table 1 in order to include the first instance of יֹם in v. 5.

Immediately we are faced with several questions. Does Genesis 1:1 start straightaway with the beginning of Day 1? Or does v.1 begin with a title? Is there a possibility of a lapse of considerable time somewhere in the first few verses? It is important to identify where the first day begins, because, if it does not connect directly with the “beginning” in 1:1, then the six-day time frame of creative activity has little, if any, impact upon the determination of the age of the

Table 1. Genesis 1:1–5 in the Hebrew Masoretic text, with my own English translation.

¹At first, God created the heavens and the earth.

²Now the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. ³And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God divided between the light and the darkness. ⁵And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening, and there was morning—one day.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת
הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:² וְהָאָרֶץ
הַיְתוּמָה תְהוֹ וְכֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי
תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-
פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:³ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי
אוֹר וַיְהִי-אוֹר:⁴ וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-
הָאוֹר כִּי-טוֹב וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין
הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:⁵ וַיִּקְרָא
אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קִרְיָ
לַיְלָה וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר יוֹם
אֶחָד: פ

universe. If the six-day account is independent of the beginning, then it only tells us the length of time that God took in creating the universe, and not the length of time since the beginning (see fig. 1).

Gordon J. Wenham (1987) and Richard E. Averbeck (n.d.) have described and analyzed this complex and protracted debate about the correct interpretation of Genesis 1:1–3.¹ According to Wenham (1987, 11–13), four possible understandings of the syntax of these verses have been defended (see Table 2):

1. Genesis 1:1 is a temporal clause, subordinate to the main clause in v.2;
2. Genesis 1:1 is a temporal clause, subordinate to the main clause in v.3, with v.2 being a parenthetical comment;
3. Genesis 1:1 is a main clause, summarizing all the events described in vv.2–31, and acting as a title to the whole chapter;
4. Genesis 1:1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation on the first day.

The fourth view is the traditional one. Wenham (1987, 11) comments, “Theologically these different translations are of great consequence, for apart from #4 [the traditional view], the translations all presuppose the existence of chaotic preexistent matter before the work of creation began.”

Two of the four views discussed by Wenham interpret Genesis 1:1 as a temporal clause. The main argument posited in favor of this relates to the Masoretic pointing of בראשית as בְּרֵאשִׁית. Had the word been vocalized differently as בְּרֵאשִׁית, it would have stood unequivocally as an independent prepositional phrase, hence, “*In the beginning*, God created . . .” The Masoretic pointing, בְּרֵאשִׁית, makes it possible (though not imperative) to interpret the form as being tied with what follows, hence, “*In the beginning of* God’s creating . . .” However, in Hebrew, a construction such as “God’s creating” (lit., “the creating of [i.e., performed by] God”) is most commonly achieved using the *infinitive* construct form of the verb, hence, בְּרֵאשִׁית אֱלֹהִים; yet the Masoretes pointed בראשית with a *finite* form of the verb, viz., בְּרָא (perfect, third person, masculine, singular). Thus, while the pointing of בראשית as בְּרֵאשִׁית could be seen as favoring the

interpretation of v.1 as a temporal clause, the vocalization of ברא as בְּרָא works against this view. Proponents point to Hosea 1:2, in which a temporal form that is unambiguously in the construct state precedes a finite verbal form, תְּחִלַּת דְּבַר יְהוָה בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ. But this is extremely unusual, as is evidenced by the Greek and Syriac variants, both of which mean “word of” (equivalent to the Hebrew construct noun דְּבַר), in place of the MT’s finite verb דְּבַר (“He spoke”). Moreover, the whole argument is weakened by the fact that “the absence of the article in בראשית does not imply that it is in the construct state. Temporal phrases often lack the article (e.g., Isaiah 46:10, 40:21, 41:4, 26; Genesis 3:22, 6:3, 4; Micah 5:1; Habakkuk 1:12). Nor can it be shown that בראשית may not have an absolute sense” (Wenham 1987, 12).

For these and other reasons, most modern interpreters view v.1 as an independent clause. “However, within this consensus there is still dispute as to the relationship between v1 and vv2–3. The majority . . . adopt the view that Gen 1:1 is essentially a title to what follows” (Wenham 1987, 12), including, for example, Richard E. Averbeck (2013, 10).

I take it to be an independent clause serving as a title announcing the subject of Gen 1, not the actual beginning of God’s creation work in the chapter. It does not fall within the “and God said” units as do all the other action units in the chapter. Instead, it offers a first glimpse at the whole of creation as the starting point for the account, and around which the story is shaped so that the ancient Israelites would know that their God, and their God alone, created their world. The expression “the heavens and the earth” at the end of v. 1 is a merismus; that is, the two opposite parts refer to the whole of the created order.

Averbeck (n.d., 3) views “the disjunctive *waw* beginning plus the verb ‘to be’ in v.2 . . . [as] the most difficult part of the Hebrew grammar for the traditional interpretation to deal with.” He explains, “The first standard past tense narrative form is found in v.3, ‘And (or “Then”, see NASB) God said, . . .’” Averbeck suggests that, like Genesis 1:1, 2:4a should be taken as a title for what follows. He concludes, “This approach to 1:1–3 and 2:4–7 sees an

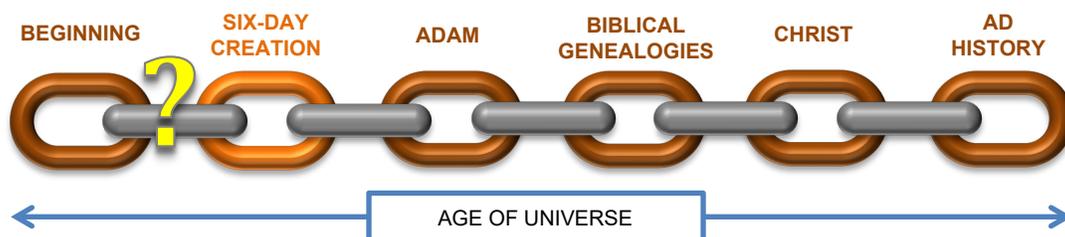


Fig. 1. Pictorial representation of how a determination of the age of the universe, via an unbroken chronological chain, critically depends upon a direct link between the six-day period of creation and the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1.

¹ Richard E. Averbeck interacts with Wenham’s analysis in Averbeck (n.d.).

Table 2. Four views on the syntax of Genesis 1:1–3, based on Gordon J. Wenham’s analysis, and Richard E. Averbeck’s discussion.

#	View	Translation	Advocates	Bible Versions
1	V. 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v. 2	“In the beginning when God created . . . , the earth was without form”	Gross, Ibn Ezra	possibly <i>NAB</i> and <i>NEB</i> (or #2)
2	V. 1 is a temporal clause subordinate to the main clause in v. 3 (v. 2 is a parenthetical comment)	“In the beginning when God created . . . (now the earth was formless) God said”	Bauer, Bayer, Herrmann, Humbert, Lane, Loretz, Rashi, Skinner, Speiser	probably <i>NAB</i> and <i>NEB</i> (unless #1), <i>NJPS</i>
3	V. 1 is a main clause , summarizing all the events described in vv. 2–31. It is a title to the chapter as a whole. What being creator of heaven and earth means is then explained in more detail in vv. 2–31.	“In the beginning God was the creator of heaven and earth.”	Averbeck, Beauchamp, Cassuto, Driver, Eichrodt, Gunkel, Procksch, von Rad, Schmidt, Steck, Westermann, Zimmerli	<i>NIV</i>
4	V. 1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation. Vv. 2 and 3 describe subsequent phases in God’s creative activity. This is the traditional view.	“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”	Childs, Gispén, Hasel, Heidel, Kidner, König, Notter, Ridderbos, Wellhausen, Wenham, Young ²	MT and the versions, <i>KJV</i>

overall similarity between the manner in which each of these two narratives begins; that is, a title (1:1 and 2:4a), followed by a circumstantial (1:2) or a temporal plus circumstantial (2:4b–6) introduction, followed by the beginning of the narrative action (1:3 and 2:7)” (Averbeck n.d., 3).

Accordingly, Averbeck believes, “The age of the earth is not determined by the length of the days in Genesis 1, only the length of time God took to do the creating.”³ He notes, on the one hand, “‘Day’ in Gen 1 does refer to literal days—morning and evening, etc.”; but, on the other hand, “It is the 6/7 pattern that indicates that the literal days are being used figuratively.”⁴ Andrew J. Brown (2014, 13) explains,

There are numerous indications both within Scripture, for instance in Exod. 24:15–18, where Yahweh summons Moses to meet him on Sinai, and in ANE narratives such as the *Gilgamesh Epic*, that a sequence of six days followed by a climactic seventh day is an understood convention in ANE storytelling, suggesting that here in Genesis we are not dealing with historical reporting so much as with an ancient literary convention.

In Averbeck’s (2013, 31) view, “The seven days are not to be taken literally and are not intended to tell us how long God took in actually creating the cosmos or how old the earth is, nevertheless there is

a necessary structure and sequence through the six days.” The seven days are “snapshots” (8), and “the seven-day structure is an analogy” (31).

Indeed, there are many eminent scholars, like Averbeck, who, in expounding the creation account, make no mention of the semantic range of יָמֵי with reference to the age of the universe.⁵ Such works are necessarily excluded from the core writings collated in Appendix 1 (appearing in the part 3 paper of this study), though a number of them are cited at various other points. The remit of this study restricts the central analysis to a subset of scholars who discuss the semantic range of יָמֵי in the context of the days of creation, and who also comment on the age of the universe.

In the traditional view, “V1 is a main clause describing the first act of creation. Vv2 and 3 describe subsequent phases in God’s creative activity” (Wenham 1987, 11). In this case, there is a direct connection between the days of creation and the beginning of the universe—Genesis 1:1 begins on Day 1. Some of those who hold to this traditional view, therefore, believe it is possible to determine the age of the universe from biblical data, especially from the length of the creation days, from the fact that Adam was created on the sixth day, and from the genealogies, beginning with Adam. While there has been much debate over the integrity and historicity

² Wenham does not specify to which scholar named Young he is referring, but it is likely that he means E. J. Young since later (19) he lists an article by that author.

³ Richard E. Averbeck, personal email correspondence with the author, November 8, 2017.

⁴ Richard E. Averbeck, note to the author, February 28, 2018.

⁵ For example, the following major works could not be included among the core writings analyzed in this study, because the authors appear to have made no mention of the semantic range of יָמֵי with reference to the age of the universe: Alter (1996), Brueggemann (1982), Cotter (2003), Garrett (1990), Gunkel ([1901] 1997), Henry (1983), Horton (2011), von Rad (1972), Ross ([1988] 1996), Sailhamer (1996), Waltke and Fredricks (2001), Wenham (1987), Westermann (1994), and Zlotowitz and Scherman (1995).

of the biblical genealogies, James Barr (2003),⁶ in a letter written on April 23, 1984, to David C. C. Watson, suggests that they were intended to be taken literally: “The writer(s) of Gen. 1–11 intended to convey to their readers . . . that . . . the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provided by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to later stages in the biblical story.”

Wenham (1987, 13), an advocate of the traditional view, comments, “The antiquity of this interpretation is the greatest argument in its favor: those closest in time to the composition of Gen 1 may be presumed to be best informed about its meaning.” With this assertion in mind, we will turn our attention below to the paragraph structure in the Masoretic text of Genesis 1.

But before doing so, it is worth noting that the traditional view (#4) does not necessarily preclude entirely the idea (foremost in #3) that v. 1 has a titular function. While the primary function of v. 1 may be to describe the initial events of Day 1, those creations may set the scene for all that follows. The first three words (בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים יום), even without the object

complements of the verb (אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ), are meaningful, and are foundational, not only for the chapter, or even the book of Genesis, but arguably for the entire canon of Scripture.

Paragraph Structure of Genesis 1

A second important interpretive issue for the subject of this work, the paragraph structure of Genesis 1, is interrelated to the first (the syntax of Gen 1:1–3). The choice of paragraph breaks is a matter of interpretation, because it indicates to an extent how the six days of creative activity are being viewed in relation to the “beginning,” and in relation to the entire first chapter of Genesis.

Medieval manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible, such as *Codex Leningradensis*, were divided into paragraphs (see fig. 2), following a tradition that dates back even to the time of the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, the DSS fragment 4QGen^g, dated to the first century BC, has paragraph breaks after יום אֶהָד in v. 5, and יום שְׁנִי in v. 8 (see fig. 3). As is the case in modern English, “An open paragraph . . . had to commence at the beginning of a new line, with the

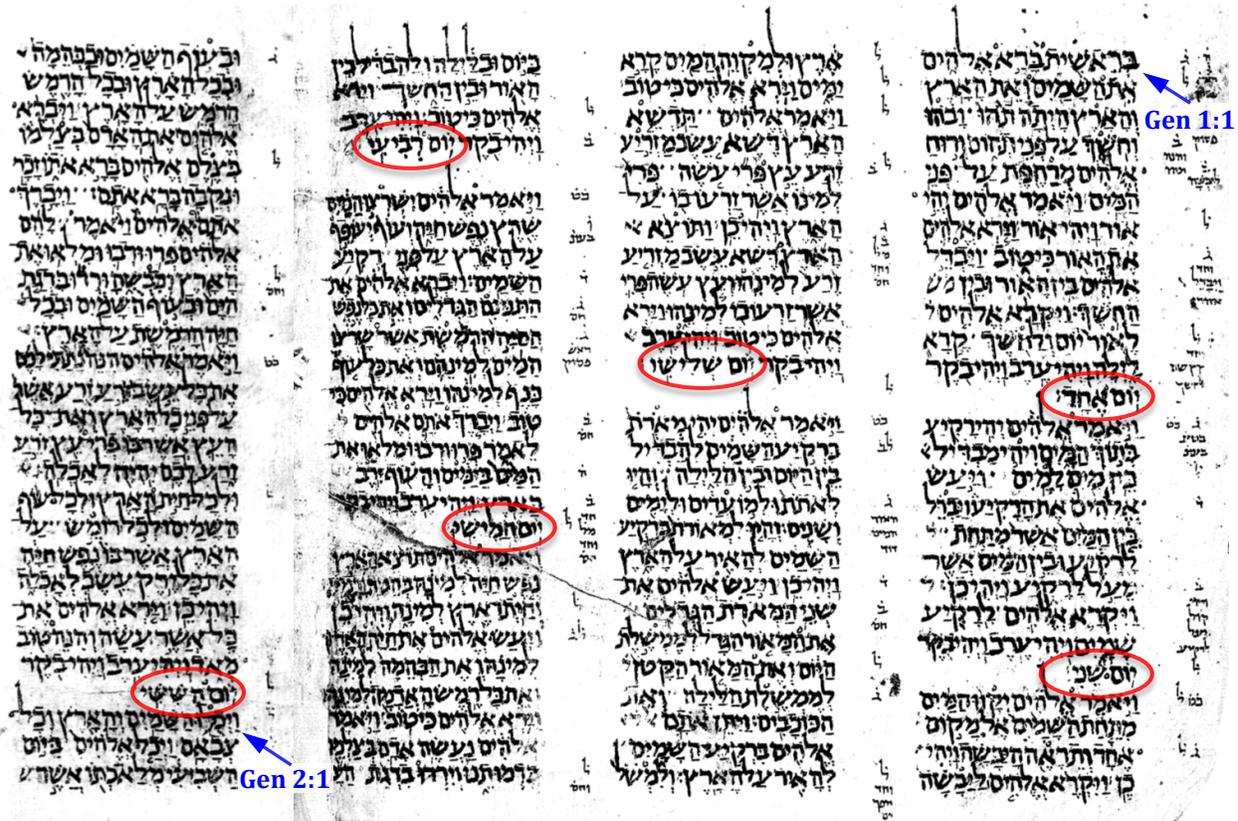


Fig. 2. The first four columns of biblical text in *Codex Leningradensis*, dated to AD 1008, constructed from images of the manuscript, accessed October 6, 2016, https://archive.org/details/Leningrad_Codex (public domain). I have indicated with arrows the extent of the first chapter, and have circled the six days of creation, each of which is clearly followed by a paragraph break.

⁶ Barr’s letter is reproduced in full in Collins (2003, 364–365).

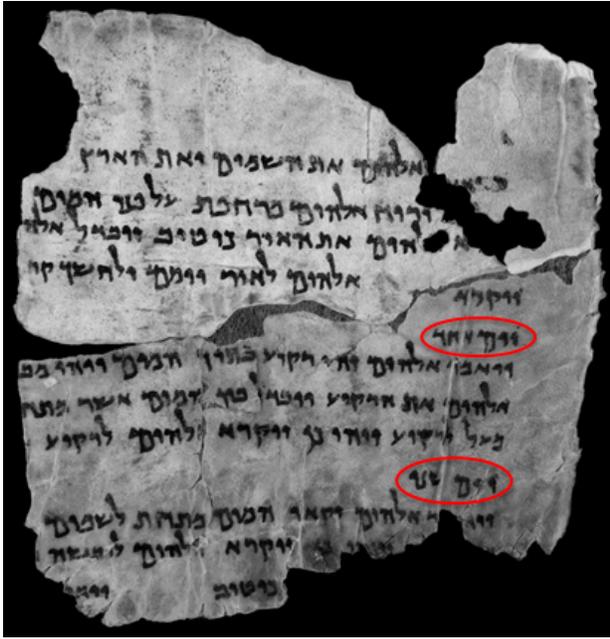


Fig. 3. Infrared image of 4QGen^a Dead Sea Scroll fragment of Genesis 1 from The Leon Levy Dead Sea Scrolls Digital Library, © Israel Antiquities Authority, used with kind permission; accessed December 28, 2017, <http://www.deadseascrolls.org.il/explore-the-archive/image/B-295662>. The fragment, dated to the first century BC, has paragraph breaks following יום אָהָד (v. 5) and יום שְׁנַיִ (v. 8), both of which I have circled.

preceding line left partly or wholly blank” (Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford 1998, 167).⁷

Such a paragraph break occurs in Genesis 1 after יום אָהָד, between verses five and six. Thus the choice in some modern EVV to keep the first five verses of Genesis 1 together as a single paragraph is in keeping with an ancient tradition that predates Jesus’ incarnation. Examples of EVV that follow this custom include the *ASV*, *CJB*, *GNB*, *JPS*, *NASB*, *NJPS*, *NRSV*, *REB*, and *RV*. Other versions split the section

into two or three paragraphs, normally vv.1–2 and 3–5 (e.g., *ESV*, *LB*, *MSG*, *NIV*, *NJB*, *NKJV*, *RSV*, *YLT*); or vv.1–2, 3–4, and 5 (e.g., *NLT*); or v.1 and 2–5 (e.g., *HCSB*, *NET*).

The division of paragraphs is not merely cosmetic, but is itself an important act of interpretation. This is evident, for example, in the reading of the creation account of John C. Lennox (2011, 52–53), who divides Genesis 1 differently to the Masoretic paragraphing. He argues,

Gen.1:1–2...is separated from the six days of creation that follow it....This means that, according to the text, day 1 begins in verse 3 and not in verse 1....This implies that ‘the beginning’ of Genesis 1:1 did not necessarily take place on day 1 as is frequently assumed. The initial creation took place before day 1, but Genesis does not tell us how long before. This means that the question of the age of the earth (and of the universe) is a separate question from the interpretation of the days.

Lennox believes that there is a major division between v.2 and v.3. He observes that Days 2 to 6 “each begin with the phrase ‘And God said,’” and it is from this pattern, together with the closing formula, that he concludes that “day 1 begins in verse 3 and not in verse 1” (Lennox 2011, 52). Averbeck (2013, 10) writes, “All the major units in Gen 1 begin with ‘and/then God said’ (1:3, 6, etc.). Days 1 and 2 as well as 4 and 5 have only one such unit. Day 3 has two units, and day 6 has three.” The relationship between these nine וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים units and the six days of creation is shown in Table 3.

In contrast with Lennox’s bipartite structure (1:1–2, and 1:3–2:1), the Masoretes divided the first chapter of Genesis into six paragraphs corresponding to the six days of creation, each paragraph ending with the words וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם followed by a

Table 3. The relationship between the formula וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם, the positioning of the Masoretic open paragraphs (פ), and the phrase וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים in Genesis 1.

<p>¹At first, God created the heavens and the earth.... <i>And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening, and there was morning—one day.</i></p>	<p>בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ: ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד: פ</p>
<p>⁶<i>And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening and there was morning—a second day.</i></p>	<p>... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁנַיִ: פ</p>
<p>⁹<i>And God said... And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening and there was morning—a third day.</i></p>	<p>... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי: פ</p>
<p>¹⁴<i>And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening and there was morning—a fourth day.</i></p>	<p>... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם רְבִיעִי: פ</p>
<p>²⁰<i>And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening and there was morning—a fifth day.</i></p>	<p>... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי: פ</p>
<p>²⁴<i>And God said ... And God said ... And God said...</i> <i>And there was evening and there was morning—the sixth day.</i></p>	<p>וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים ... וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר יוֹם שֵׁשִׁי: פ</p>

⁷ In printed Bibles, such as *BHS*, these paragraph divisions are “indicated by פ [an abbreviation for Aramaic פתוחא, ‘open’] placed between two verses” (Kelley, Mynatt, and Crawford 1998, 167). A second type of paragraph “could begin on the same line with the concluding word of the previous paragraph (separated by a brief space), or written after an indentation on the next line. A ס [an abbreviation for Aramaic סתומא, ‘closed’] in the body of the text indicates that the following paragraph is closed” (155).

number, either cardinal (one) or ordinal (second through sixth). The positioning of the Masoretic paragraph markers emphasizes the centrality of the six-fold temporal structure in the creation account, and hence draws attention to the significance of the word **יְהוָה**.

Historical and Theological Context

The first section of part 3 comprises an historical survey of biblical interpretation, showing how the semantic range of **יְהוָה** has been understood since biblical times, particularly in relation to the age of the universe. Here, we will focus only upon those historical developments in recent centuries that gave greater prominence to the issues of the age of the universe and the semantic range of **יְהוָה**. Such developments stimulated the kind of theological debates that are pertinent to this work. Elucidating these developments will help us to understand better some of the potential motives that may have led scholars to write the type of discussions recorded in Appendix 1 (appearing in the part 3 paper of this study), and analyzed in part 3.

The Enlightenment and Its Repercussions

“Up to the year 1750 a general consensus existed among Protestants that God created the universe *ex nihilo* in six solar days some six millennia ago” (Lewis and Demarest 1990, 23). But the Enlightenment was shaking traditionally held beliefs. Increasingly bold voices raised major doubts and objections concerning the Bible. From Baruch Spinoza’s seventeenth century challenge to the authority of Scripture,⁸ into the eighteenth century with Wilhelm M. L. de Wette’s assertion that it contains myths that need not be taken literally,⁹ to J. K. Wilhelm Vatke’s claim that events did not occur as the Bible portrays them,¹⁰ eminent scholars were disputing the historical reliability of God’s Word.

One of the most pivotal issues of contention, vigorously debated among geologists during the first half of the nineteenth century, was the age of the universe.¹¹ “The idea that the earth was much older than the Bible teaches slowly replaced the traditional view during the late 18th and early 19th centuries” (Mortenson 2007, 121).¹² Moreover, “old-earth geology paved the way for Darwinism,” because vast eons of time were essential to the theory of evolution (Mortenson 2004b, 25). “On his famous voyage around the world Darwin studied the first volume of Lyell’s *Principles of Geology* and then applied the same naturalistic assumptions to his interpretation of the biological evidence” (Mortenson 2004b, 25).¹³

The tide was turning. According to the theologians Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest (1990, 23), “The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries produced considerable evidence from the fields of geology, astronomy, and paleontology to suggest that the earth was of great antiquity.” Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, the twin philosophical pillars of old-earth uniformitarianism in geology and Darwinian evolution in biology have not only become firmly established in nearly all of the scientific community, but have been widely accepted among the general population, have been taught in schools and colleges, have been promulgated in the media, and have often been strenuously defended to the exclusion of all competing views. Even “by the year 1900...many people had been educated to believe that the Bible’s statements about creation were neither accurate, inspired, nor consistent” (Payne 1964, 5).

All of this created a tension, even a predicament, for Christians. “Owing to the intellectual shift by the early nineteenth century to the assumption of vast ages of the earth, first in geology, and then in biology, and soon in history and every other field, those who

⁸ In his 1670 *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) maintained that whereas religion is concerned with morality, it is philosophy that deals with truth, claiming “Scripture teaches only piety, not philosophy” (Spinoza [1670] 2001, 165). Indeed he asserted that “the mind [is] the true handwriting of God’s word,” whereas the Bible is “the letter, a mere shadow of God’s word” (167).

⁹ De Wette (1780–1849) attempted to bridge orthodoxy and rationalism, explaining biblical “myths” as being poetic means of expressing feelings about God. Rather than taking them literally he encouraged traditionalists to look for the deeper expression of religious feeling. See de Wette ([1813] 1831, vi–x), as referenced in House (1998, 21).

¹⁰ With this assertion in his 1835 *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt* (see House 1998, 21), Vatke (1806–1882) opened the floodgates of liberal interpretation. Rather than being the basis upon which the Hebrew state was founded, he argued that Torah was its product. Later, Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918) was to follow Vatke—“from whom indeed I...learned best and most”—in adopting evolutionary concepts and hence applying a developmental approach to the study of Hebrew religious institutions (Wellhausen [1885] 1994, 13).

¹¹ Terry Mortenson (2004a, 12) notes that the British “scriptural geologists,” as they were commonly labeled, believing the earth to be roughly 6,000 years old, “opposed with equal vigor both the ‘uniformitarian’ theory of earth history propounded by James Hutton and Charles Lyell, and the ‘catastrophist’ theory of Georges Cuvier, William Buckland, William Conybeare, Adam Sedgwick, etc.”

¹² Mortenson (2007, 121) explains, “Geologists such as the Frenchmen Jean Elieue Guettard (1715–1786) and Nicholas Desmarest (1725–1815) and the Italian Giovanne Arduino (1714–1795) denied the Flood and advocated a much older Earth.”

¹³ David F. Payne (1964, 5) lists “three serious attacks” against the authority attributed to Genesis 1 by “orthodox Jew and Christian alike”: the challenge of “Darwin’s findings,” Wellhausen’s “literary criticism,” and “the discovery and examination of ancient myths from various parts of the Near East” that “revealed a number of points of similarity between them and the biblical statements.” These “points of contact” raised “the question whether the Old Testament account was in truth divinely inspired, or whether it was merely the Hebrew version of a Near Eastern folktale.”

took the Scriptures seriously faced difficult questions in interpreting the days of creation week” (Kelly 2017, 149). As far back as 1876, G. H. Pember (1837–1910) had bemoaned,

How great a contest has it [the orthodox Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1] provoked between the Church and the World! How ready a handle do the geological difficulties involved in it present to the assailants of Scripture!...How many young minds have been turned aside by the absolute impossibility of defending what they have been taught to regard as Biblical statements! (Pember [1876] 1975, 28)

For Pember the fault lay with what he perceived to be the traditional Christian interpretation,¹⁴ but, regardless of who is to blame, his words still resonate in the wider context of the origins debate.

In 1950 Edwin K. Gedney (1904–1980) observed, “The students of the last century put much study upon the uses of the word [‘yom’], for it was the basis for the chief difficulty in the controversy between the Biblical and scientific accounts” (1950, 51). How could Christians account for the prevailing scientific perspective in light of the opening paragraph of Genesis? Should they oppose the majority worldview, like the scriptural geologists of the nineteenth century, and, if so, how? Should they doubt the reliability or relevance of the Bible, at least with regards to historical issues such as origins? Or was a compromise possible, which somehow reconciled Scripture with mainstream science?

Twentieth Century Developments

These conundrums surrounding the debate over the biblical account of origins persisted into the twentieth century. James Barr (1924–2006), a Scottish Old Testament scholar, and an outspoken opponent of evangelicalism and inerrancy,¹⁵ recognized how much of a dilemma the age-of-the-earth controversy caused for many conservative scholars. In his attack on fundamentalism, Barr ([1978] 1981, 42) provided the following synopsis of a profound shift in the interpretation of the Genesis creation account, as well as identifying what he saw as its root cause:

It is now only very extreme fundamentalists who assert that a literal interpretation of the six days of creation is obligatory, or even desirable.... What has

happened is that *the scientific evidence* for the long duration of the beginnings of the world *has become too strong to withstand*. A literal interpretation would mean pitting the Bible against scientific truths which fundamentalist intellectuals now themselves accept; *this would in turn force the admission that the Bible in this respect had been wrong*. In order to avoid this, the conservative interpreter moves over into a non-literal exegesis; only this will save the inerrancy of the Bible. A hundred years ago, probably less, most fundamentalists would have insisted on a literal interpretation...As the scientific approach came to have more and more assent from *fundamentalists* themselves, they *shifted their interpretation of the Bible passage* from literal to non-literal in order to save that which for them was always paramount, namely the inerrancy of the Bible. (Emphasis added)

Not everyone agreed with Barr’s severe assessment. For example, in commenting on *Fundamentalism*, Bernard Ramm (1916–92), whose work Barr discussed at various points in his book,¹⁶ asserted, “Barr is out of line with evangelical views...Whatever mistakes he makes in interpreting different evangelicals are partly due to his severe limitation in reading the full round of them” (Haas, Ramm, and Ramm 1979, 182). For sure, Barr is making generalizations. For instance, there may be some discrepancy between his assertion about most fundamentalists insisting on a literal interpretation in the latter part of the nineteenth century, and George M. Marsden’s (1991, 160) observation, “Belief in the inerrancy of Scripture did not entail that it always be interpreted as literally as possible, as demonstrated by the allowance for long ‘days’ of creation by most Princetonians.”

Notwithstanding such caveats, even Ramm saw some value in Barr’s appraisal. “What comes through to me is that here’s a guy who’s blowing the whistle. We ought to hear those things that he has to say” (Haas, Ramm, and Ramm 1979, 182).

Regardless of the reason, at the end of the twentieth century, Norman L. Geisler (1999, 273) observed, “Many orthodox, evangelical scholars hold the universe is millions or billions of years old, including Augustine, B.B. Warfield, John Walvoord, Francis Schaeffer, Gleason Archer, Hugh Ross, and most leaders of the movement that produced the famous ‘Chicago Statement’ on the inerrancy of the Bible (1978).”

¹⁴ Pember ([1876] 1975, 28) viewed as erroneous the orthodox opinion that Genesis 1:1 signified “the creation of a confused mass of elements, out of which the heavens and earth were formed during the six days.” Rather, he saw a gap “between creation and...ruin” (32) during which the earth was empty, rendering Genesis 1:2a, “And the earth became desolate and void” (32). He reasoned, “Age after age may have rolled away, and it was probably during their course that the strata of the earth’s crust were gradually developed” (32). Such an interpretation appears to contradict the words of Isaiah, “For thus says YHWH, ... Who formed the earth and made it (He established it; *He did not create it empty, He formed it to be inhabited!* [לֹא־תָהוּ בְרֵאשִׁית לְשִׁבְתָּהּ יְצָרָה])” (Isaiah 45:18a, *ESV**). The use, here in Isaiah, of the same word, תָהוּ, found in Genesis 1:2, indicates that the emptiness at creation was fleeting. Cf. Weston W. Fields (1976; especially 42–43) regarding Pember’s position.

¹⁵ For example, Barr ([1978] 1981, 84) asserts, “The entire attempt of conservative evangelicals to derive their position [on inerrancy] from ‘the Bible’s view of itself’ is a waste of time.” “The inerrancy of the Bible, the entire Bible including its details, ... seen from outside, ... distorts and deranges all sorts of relations which to the student of the Bible seem quite obvious” (53).

¹⁶ Cf., for example, Barr ([1978] 1981, 94–97, 244–247).

Some More Recent Observations

The ripple effects of the Enlightenment's shaking of traditional biblical interpretation have become so widespread that today, 40 years after Barr's critique of what he saw as an about-face among many fundamentalists regarding the creation account, it is easy to lose sight of the fact that a key turning point in the debate over the authority of Scripture, and consequently the role of God in society, concerned the specific issue of the age of the universe. D.F. Payne (1964, 6) concedes, "The tremendous antiquity of the universe can scarcely be denied, and Ussher's proposed date for the creation, 4004BC, was one of the first casualties in the battle between science and faith." This issue remains an integral, even central, part of the quandary that many Christians face in trying to reconcile the Bible with science and the secular world. The Bible speaks *prima facie* of creation in terms of days—immediately following the beginning, and dovetailing into the biblical genealogies—whereas uniformitarianism and Darwinian evolution require an account of origins that reaches back millions and billions of years.

If the numbered days—along with references to "evening" and "morning," and the institution of the day of rest (Genesis 2:3)—were removed from the initial creation account (Genesis 1:1–2:4), the result would be relatively innocuous to secular science. The inclusion of יום ("day"), however, poses for many people a major, pivotal dilemma.

Archer (1982, 58) wrote, "To be sure, if we were to understand Genesis 1 in a completely literal fashion...then there would be no possibility of reconciliation between modern scientific theory and the Genesis account." He asked, "Can such an enormous time interval [for the age of the world] (five billion years or more, according to some estimates—made, of course, on uniformitarian assumptions) be reconciled with the six creative days of Genesis 1? This all depends upon the significance of the Hebrew word *yôm* ('day')" (Archer 2007, 157). John H. Walton (2001, 80) maintains:

It can be properly claimed that the seven-day structure and the meaning of the word *yom* serve as the nucleus around which the theories and problems of Genesis 1 revolve. The idea of creation in seven days serves as one of the main sticking points in the attempts to harmonize science and Scripture. As

various harmonizing scenarios are constructed, the amount of flexibility (or lack of it) in the word *yom* gradually become the major issue.

Linguistic Context

This paper does not attempt an in-depth study of lexical semantics. However, a certain level of understanding and clarity is necessary in order to avoid confusion when analyzing scholars' discussions of the semantic range of יום, and of how the word is being used in the creation account. We will, therefore, briefly address the interrelated issues of (1) semantic range, and (2) the relationship between literal and figurative meanings.

Semantic Range

Semantic range is a term employed particularly in biblical studies, and is equivalent in linguistics to scope of both denotation and connotation.¹⁷ The former refers to the literal or primary sense(s) of a word; "many lexemes have rather clear denotative meaning" (Cotterell and Turner 1989, 45). The latter refers to additional ideas invoked in association with a word, which can be somewhat elusive (47). Grant R. Osborne (2006, 100) explains, "The semantic range of a word is . . . a list of the ways the word was used in the era when the work was written." Strictly speaking, the semantic range is not "a list"; rather the list of meanings of a word in a dictionary, describing the extent of its usage, delineates its semantic range. Thus, the semantic range of a word is an abstract entity, which dictionaries and lexicons attempt to describe as best they can, and about which scholars may disagree. This work examines how scholars have viewed the semantic range of יום, as a result of their interactions both with biblical lexicons, and with the text of the Bible itself.

Walton (2001, 80) advises, "We must begin with a common-sense lexical assessment of *yom*." He continues, "The meaning of a word must be established from its usage. But lexical methodology is more complex than that. When words have more than one meaning, the semantic range (the range of possible meanings) must be classified into logical categories" (Walton 2001, 80).¹⁸ Osborne (2006, 100, 102) explains,

The person doing frontline semantic research will trace the occurrences, . . . and organize the data into

¹⁷ The *New Oxford American Dictionary (American English)*, hereafter abbreviated *NOAD*, defines 'denotation' primarily as "the literal or primary meaning of a word, in contrast to the feelings or ideas that the word suggests." It further defines the term as, "the action or process of indicating or referring to something by means of a word, symbol, etc.," and, in philosophy, "the object or concept to which a term refers, or the set of objects of which a predicate is true. Often contrasted with connotation." 'Connotation' is defined as "an idea or feeling that a word invokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning." Additionally, in philosophy, it refers to "the abstract meaning or intension of a term, which forms a principle determining which objects or concepts it applies to."

¹⁸ Cf. John H. Walton (1996, 161). Categorization is a mixed blessing in lexicography: on the one hand it can help to clarify the various applications of a lexeme in different settings; on the other hand, it can create a false impression of semantic fragmentation.

primary, secondary, and metaphorical meanings....

The primary level is the common meaning that the word carries when it stands without a context and in most cognate terms....

Secondary meanings are specific meanings that often share an aspect of the primary sense but occur only in some contexts....

Finally, figurative meanings are based on 'associative relations with the primary Sense' (Beekman and Callow 1974:94).... Under this category the term is used metaphorically to depict a word picture.¹⁹

Relationship Between Literal and Figurative Meanings

Already we can see that the semantic range of a word includes its literal senses, together with any figurative or metaphorical meanings. We now need to explain what is meant by 'literal,' 'figurative,' and 'metaphorical,' and what is the relationship between them. To be clear, this is not going to be a linguistic analysis of biblical Hebrew; rather, it is an elucidation of how the English terms 'literal,' 'figurative,' and 'metaphorical,' might be used in scholarly discussions of the semantic range of **דבר**, and how I am understanding them in my analysis of the data in this paper. We will also define what is meant by 'referent.' The definition of such terms becomes all the more pressing in light of their different understandings among linguistic theorists.

'Literal'

G.B. Caird (1980, 133) comments, "Literality is easier to illustrate than to define, but provisionally we may say that words are used literally when they are meant to be understood in their primary, matter-of-fact sense" (underlining added). In *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, David Crystal (1995, 455) defines literal meaning as "the usual meaning of a word or phrase" (underlining added).²⁰ Osborne (2006, 122) writes, "Literal meaning comprises the first two levels"—by which he means the primary or most common meaning and the secondary or less common uses of the semantic range—"and identifies the basic thrust of a term" (underlining added). The twenty-volume edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary: Second Edition*, or *OED*, has a "Theology" sub-category for the word 'literal,' which reads as follows:

Pertaining to the 'letter' (of Scripture); the distinctive epithet of that sense or interpretation (of a text) which is obtained by taking its words in their natural or customary meaning, and applying the ordinary rules of grammar; opposed to *mystical, allegorical, etc.*.... Hence, by extension, applied to the etymological or the relatively primary sense of a word, or to the sense expressed by the actual wording of a passage, as distinguished from any metaphorical or merely suggested meaning. (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 8:1026; underlining added)

The consensus here seems to be that 'literal' refers to the primary or basic sense of a word, as distinct from any figurative meanings such as allegory or metaphor. It is in this widely accepted conception that I will employ the term 'literal' in this work, though acknowledging that others, such as Kevin J. Vanhoozer (1998, 304), use it with a different understanding.²¹ Gavin Ortlund (2017) makes reference to Vanhoozer's "good/soft literality" as being consistent with the way that Augustine used the word 'literal':

For Augustine, the term "literal" was concerned with historical referentiality, not with the particular literary genre or style in which that history is recounted. For instance, Augustine did not employ the term "literal" to exclude the possibility of language that is metaphorical, figurative, pictorial, dramatic, stylized, or poetical. This is consistent with how the word "literal" is often used today—for instance, Kevin Vanhoozer describes a good/soft literality, distinct from a hard/bad literality, as an interpretation that is "sensitive to the way language works, and acknowledges intended figures of speech as part and parcel of the literal sense."²²

Robert B. Strimple (1999, 262) perceives a similar approach among the Protestant Reformers. "A reading of the Reformers reveals that they were certainly not 'literalists' in their reading of the Old Testament prophets... For them the literal sense of the Scripture is simply the *true* sense, the intended sense, whatever that sense is (historical or figurative)." In a book about the French theologian and humanist, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, who "blazed the trail that led from Renaissance to Reformation" (Hughes 1984, ix), Philip Edgcumbe Hughes (1984, 62–63) suggests, "The pattern of exegesis that was common to Lefèvre and the Reformers of the sixteenth century, and for

¹⁹ Citing John Beekman and John Callow (1974).

²⁰ A caveat is required with this definition, since, in certain contexts, a word may more frequently be used with a figurative sense than with its literal sense. For example, in church settings, words such as 'sheep' and 'flock' may more often be used metaphorically of the congregation than of literal domesticated ruminant animals with thick woolly coats. Nevertheless, Crystal's definition is valid as a general observation.

²¹ Vanhoozer asserts, "For too long the literal sense has been identified with 'the sense of the letter,' which in turn has been identified with the objects to which individual words refer. I propose that we instead define literal meaning as 'the sense of the literary act.' On my view, literal interpretation is less a matter of identifying objects in the world than it is specifying communicative acts—their nature and their objects."

²² Vanhoozer (2016) as quoted in Ortlund (2017).

which the latter were much indebted to the former,” included the notion that the “literal-spiritual sense may be historical, allegorical, tropological, or anagogical—or, more simply, historical or figurative—in accordance with the meaning proper to the text.” However, the Reformers’ approach was not the same as the fourfold interpretive paradigm common in the Middle Ages. Timothy George (2013, 348) notes, for instance, that William Tyndale “strongly criticized the medieval exegetical pattern of finding four possible meanings in every text of the Bible.” There was a “revival of interest in the literal sense of Scripture...Tyndale and the other reformers were heirs of a hermeneutical shift that was well under way by the sixteenth century” (349). One of the key figures in this development was Thomas Aquinas. “Aquinas did not abandon the multiple senses of Scripture but declared that all the senses were founded on one—the literal—and this sense eclipsed allegory as the foundation of all sacred doctrine” (349). Later, the classical dispensationalists would insist that “the biblical text must be interpreted ‘literally wherever possible,’ where the literal is opposed to the figurative, poetical, symbolical, or typological” (Strimple 1999, 262). All of which goes to show that the term ‘literal’ has been (and continues to be) employed in several different ways.

‘Figurative’

Cotterell and Turner (1989, 294) define ‘figurative’ as “non-literal...meaning” (underlining added). Crystal (1995, 452) explains ‘figurative’ as “an expressive use of language when words are used in a non-literal way to suggest illuminating comparisons and resemblances” (underlining added). Osborne (2006, 121–122) comments, “Figures of speech form the third level of the ‘multiple senses’ of meaning, following the primary or most common meaning and the secondary or less common uses of the semantic range. Figurative expressions associate a concept with a pictorial or analogous representation of its meaning in order to add richness to the statement.” The relevant sub-category in *OED* defines ‘figurative’ as “based on, or involving the use of, figures or metaphors; metaphorical, not literal” (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 5:896; underlining added).

Caird (1980, 133) notes that the distinction between ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ may be misleading, since, technically, “Figurative language covers all uses of the classical figures of speech, and in several of these (simile, chiasmus, oxymoron, tmesis) every term may be intended literally.” Though acknowledging Caird’s technical observation, in this work I am taking ‘figurative’ in its commonly understood sense, viz., non-literal meaning.

‘Metaphorical’

A metaphor is generally understood as being a type of figurative language. *OED* defines ‘metaphorical’ as “not literal; figurative,” and ‘metaphor’ as “the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable” (Simpson and Weiner 1989, 9:676; underlining added). Similarly, Crystal (1995, 452) states that metaphor is “a figurative expression in which one notion is described in terms usually associated with another” (underlining added). Donald Davidson (1978, 33) comments, “A metaphor makes us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things.”

In his *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, John Lyons (1968, 406) explains,

In their attempts to demonstrate the ‘natural’ origin of language, the Greeks introduced a number of principles to account for the extension of a word’s range of meaning beyond its ‘true’, or ‘original’, meaning...The most important of these principles was *metaphor* (‘transfer’), based on the ‘natural’ connection between the primary referent and the secondary referent to which the word was applied. Examples of ‘metaphorical’ extension might be found in the application of such words as *mouth*, *eye*, *head*, *foot* and *leg* to rivers, needles, persons in authority, mountains and tables, respectively.

However, Davidson is uncomfortable with speaking of metaphors only in terms of “extended” meanings. He emphasizes that a metaphor draws upon some element in the basic sense of a word: “Whether or not metaphor depends on new or extended meanings, it certainly depends in some way on the original meanings; an adequate account of metaphor must allow that the primary or original meanings of words remain active in their metaphorical setting” (Davidson 1978, 34).

It seems that this may boil down to how one understands and uses the term ‘extension.’ Metaphors are indeed extensions in the sense that the word is being employed in a way other than its primary, basic use—the mouth of a river does not have lips, nor does it contain teeth and a tongue. However, they are not extensions if by ‘extension’ we mean that they have a sense that is completely beyond or alien to the word’s literal meaning—the mouth of a river and of a person both signify a point of opening. Perhaps, therefore, it would be more apt to speak of a metaphor as utilizing in some way a sub-category of meaning, or an association therewith (whether actual or perceived), that is applied in a different, often unusual or striking, setting. Cotterell and Turner (1989, 299–301) describe metaphor as

comparative language...used so that what is unknown may be understood in terms of what is known.... All comparisons hold only to a limited extent...

Metaphor, like all comparisons, consists of two parts, the imprecise element which is to be explained, and the alien, surprising, incongruous, or unexpected element which is used to supply the explanation. The unexpectedness lies in the transfer of a linguistic label from a context where it is well understood to an alien context....

So then metaphorical language draws attention to some feature shared by two terms, a feature not usually recognized as common to the two, but a feature which, when once presented, commends itself to the hearer of the metaphor as appropriate and illuminating.

Osborne (2006, 124–125) states, “A metaphor is an implied...comparison.... A metaphor or simile has three parts: the topic or item illustrated by the image, the image itself and the point of similarity or comparison (the actual meaning of the metaphor or simile in the passage).” So, for example, when Jacob says, “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil” (Genesis 49:27), ‘Benjamin’ is the topic, ‘wolf’ is the image, and the point of similarity is perhaps ruthless, savage, yet successful, behavior.

An implication of this is that “a ruthless, savage, yet successful, man” may be regarded as a figurative sense within the semantic range of the term ‘wolf.’ D.A. Carson (1996, 57) observes, “Metaphors... must also be included in any word’s total semantic range.” Indeed, there are plenty of examples of dictionary definitions that incorporate metaphorical senses (see tables 4 and 5). Yet, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980, 115) observe, “Students of meaning and dictionary makers have not found it important to try to give a general account of how people understand normal concepts in terms of systematic metaphors,” mostly likely because “metaphor pervades our normal conceptual system” and deals with “concepts that are...either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience.” In other words, on account of the ubiquitousness and somewhat obscure nature of metaphors, they are often absent from dictionary definitions.

Caird (1980, 66) describes metaphors as progressing from being “living” to “faded” and ultimately “dead,” explaining that it is only at the second stage that metaphors enter into dictionary definitions.

A metaphor is the transference of a term from one referent with which it naturally belongs to a second referent, in order that the second may be illuminated by comparison with the first or by being ‘seen as’

the first. It continues to be a living metaphor just as long as speaker and hearer are aware of the double reference, and while this is still the case the connotation or sense of the word remains unchanged.

Many such metaphors are ad hoc literary or poetic innovations that serve a temporary purpose.

But by repeated use it becomes a stock or faded metaphor, and at that point the dictionary will list the new reference as part of its sense, labeling it as figurative. The final stage is the dead metaphor, when users are no longer conscious of the word’s origin, and the label (fig.) drops from the dictionary definition. (Caird 1980, 66)

However, even though such “dead” metaphors may formally lack the label ‘figurative’ in dictionaries, they nevertheless, functionally, continue to be figurative, non-literal denotations (at least, in the way that ‘figurative’ has often been understood, and in which I am understanding it in this work), because they convey a meaning that is distinct from the word’s literal sense. Caird (1980, 66) observes, “We are not normally conscious of using a metaphor when we speak of the eye of a needle or the mouth of a river,” but the lack of consciousness does not alter the fact that such uses of ‘mouth’ and ‘river’ are distinguishable from the primary sense of each word.

Davidson (1978, 35) observes, “In the metaphorical context we do not necessarily hesitate over its meaning. When we do hesitate, it is usually to decide which of a number of metaphorical interpretations we shall accept; we are seldom in doubt that what we have is a metaphor.” Certainly, there are plenty of instances in the Bible where metaphor is readily identifiable (e.g., “We are His people, and the *sheep* of His pasture,” Ps 100:3). But in other places, especially the Book of Revelation, it is not always immediately clear if a word is being employed literally or metaphorically. The identification of a pericope’s genre (whether narrative, poetry, apocalyptic, etc.) can help to narrow down the interpretive possibilities: metaphor is more common in poetry than narrative, but in apocalyptic literature metaphorical and literal senses sometimes interweave. However, these are generalizations. Metaphorical and literal language can potentially occur in any setting. With regards to the creation account, the task of biblical scholars is to attempt to ascertain, in light of the genre of Genesis 1 and their own understanding of the semantic range of רָאָה , whether the author is likely to have intended רָאָה to be read literally or metaphorically.

‘Referent’

Cotterell and Turner (1989, 84) state, “The *referent* of a word or expression in an utterance is the *thing in the world which is intentionally signified by that word or expression*. The *thing* in question may be an

object, an event or a process.”²³ Lyons (1981, 168) explains,

There is an important difference between denotation and reference: the latter, unlike the former, is bound to the context of utterance. For example, the expression ‘that cow’ may be used, in the appropriate context, to **refer** to a particular cow—its **referent**. It may be used in different contexts to refer to different cows, its reference on any particular occasion being determined partly by its inherent meaning (including the denotation of ‘cow’) and partly by the context in which it is uttered.

The question behind the thesis statement is, what referent do scholars believe the author of Genesis had in mind when using the word יום? What they believe the referent could have been (and could not have been)—whether a literal day, a longer period of time, or some other figurative entity—will depend, to an extent, upon how they read the context of Genesis 1, in addition to how they view the semantic range of יום, or how old they believe the universe to be.

In any given occurrence of a word, the author or speaker normally has a single referent in mind. Exceptions to this general observation include parables, allegories, puns, and double entendres. Parables or allegories, such as Jesus told, comprise two parallel sets of referents: alongside the literal denotations lies an additional, secondary series of figurative connotations.²⁴ A parable is entirely coherent and makes sense at the superficial level with its literal referents (e.g., a sower, seed, soil, birds, thorns, etc.); yet, the deeper, ultimate meaning in a parable lies with the figurative referents (e.g., the word of God, different people’s responses to God’s message, the devil, the cares and riches and pleasures of life, etc.). Jesus’ ultimate intention was to convey truths about the kingdom of heaven to those seeking after God wholeheartedly (see Matthew 7:7–8 and Luke 11:9–10; cf. Deuteronomy 4:29), but He hid these secret referents in the metaphorical meanings of words that also made sense as a sequence of literal referents (Matthew 13:10–14; cf. Mark 4:10–12 and Luke 8:9–10).²⁵

Summary

In summary, while some scholars understand

‘literal’ more loosely, in this work I am using it to refer to the primary or basic sense of a word; and though ‘figurative’ is occasionally used in linguistics in a technical sense to refer to some entities that are literal, in this work I am using it, as many do, to refer to all non-literal senses of a word, including metaphorical meanings. The semantic range of a lexeme (see table 4) includes its ‘literal’ denotations (its normal, usual, most basic senses) together with any ‘figurative’ connotations (including metaphorical and allegorical senses, though these are not always specified in lexicons or dictionaries). For example, the semantic range of יום includes the literal, physical entity of “water(s)” (e.g., Genesis 21:14), along with figurative senses such as “abundance” (e.g., Amos 5:24), or “instability” (e.g., Genesis 49:4).

As I understand it, any given referent of a word can only be ‘literal’ or ‘figurative’ (including ‘metaphorical’), but not both at the same time; thus, for example, ‘rock’ is literal (not figurative) in Exodus 17:6, but metaphorical (not literal) in Deuteronomy 32:4 (see fig. 4). However, a parable or allegory may have two sets of referents, one ‘literal’ and the other ‘figurative’ (see table 5); thus, for example, ‘seed’ in Luke 8:5 has literal sense on one level, while on another level it has metaphorical sense (as explained by Jesus in v. 11).

Finally, we may note that ‘poetic’ and ‘literary’ are terms that relate to styles of writing, and may apply either in literal or in figurative contexts. Contrary to how the debate is sometimes presented, literal interpretations of Genesis 1 do not preclude an acknowledgement of, even an appreciation for, its literary stylistic features.

The Study

Limitations and Delimitations

The core data of this work, presented in Appendix 1 (appearing in the part 3 paper of this study), includes only those scholars whose works were published in, or translated into, English over the past 50 years who mention the semantic range of יום with reference to the age of the universe. In the majority of cases included in the analysis, the position and argumentation are those advocated by the author; however, other discussions (such as Timothy Munyon’s

²³ On the one hand, they acknowledge that other works use ‘reference’ more loosely (103, endnote 9). On the other hand, they note that some would deny referential status to entities that do not exist in the real world (87). So, “to avoid the endless philosophical haggles,” and “without getting bogged down each time in metaphysical questions,” they advocate speaking of ‘reference’ as appears to be indicated within the particular context of any given universe of discourse (87).

²⁴ Like parables and allegories, puns and double entendres also share two (or more) sets of referents. The joke is achieved because one referent is usually immediately obvious in the context, whereas the second referent dawns upon the listener or reader a split-second later as they realize another possible meaning. The difference between puns and double entendres on the one hand, and parables and allegories on the other hand, is that the former normally stand in isolation (though a comedian may attempt to string together several occurrences on a related theme) whereas in the latter there is usually a connected series of parallel referents in logical sequence.

²⁵ As a matter of fact, at least one commentator, Claus Westermann (1994, 90), likens the seven days in the creation account to a parable.

Table 4. A small selection of examples of semantic range in Hebrew and Greek from among the many words that can have figurative (non-literal) applications in addition to literal uses.

word (main source of definition)	← Semantic Range →	
	Literal Denotation (normal, usual, most basic senses)	Figurative Connotation (including metaphorical, allegorical senses)
מַיִם (DCH, 5:255)	water(s)	abundance; refreshment; weakness; instability; tempestuousness; etc.
פִּנֵּה (DCH, 6:708–9)	corner; corner-stone, i.e., foundation stone; capstone; battlement; Corner (Gate), a gate in Jerusalem	chief, leader
מִרְדָּן (DCH, 6:755)	mule	a stubborn and foolish person
צוּר (DCH, 7:108–9)	rock, cliff, crag, rocky hill or mountain; block of stone, boulder; stone; monument in stone; small rocks, stones; stumbling-block	YHWH (as just, eternal, creator, protector, supporter, vindicator, and savior of His people); false god(s)
שׁוּפָן (Buth ²⁶)	fox (<i>Canis vulpes</i>)	a crafty person; an insignificant, inferior, or inept person, a small-fry, a scoundrel
σκολιός (BDAG)	bent, curved, crooked	unscrupulous, dishonest
ὑπογραμμός (BDAG)	model, pattern, stencil (used for copying in writing or drawing)	example (of behavior)

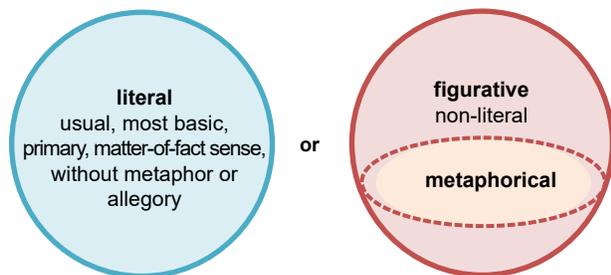


Fig. 4. Pictorial representation of the relationship between literal or figurative, including metaphorical, senses for any given referent. A word with a single referent may be employed either literally or figuratively.

1995) are also included where they present a viewpoint of יוֹ in the absence of any significant counter-argument, thereby providing tacit support (or, at least, a certain level of credibility) for the position.

A plethora of literature exists on the theology of creation, sometimes including lengthy deliberations regarding the age of the universe. This current work neither attempts to examine these debates in depth nor to present the various creation theologies in depth, but is anchored primarily to discussions of the semantic range of יוֹ, particularly as scholars relate it to the age of the universe. Thus, for instance, while J. Daryl Charles (2013) contains valuable discourse on the meaning of “day” in Genesis 1 and the age of the universe, it is excluded from the core analysis of this study since very little, if any, reference is made specifically to the semantic range of יוֹ.

Furthermore, while creation studies often examine

texts throughout the biblical canon (e.g., Psalm 104), this current work is restricted by its focus on discussions of the word יוֹ. The primary text that scholars reference in this regard is Genesis 1:1–2:4.

Most scholars would agree that יוֹ is primarily used in a literal sense in the majority of its

Table 5. Examples of literal and metaphorical referents. Any given instance of a word normally has a single referent, either literal or metaphorical (figurative). However, parables and allegories have a dual set of referents.

Examples of Single Referents		
Literal	or	Metaphorical
'rock' (Exodus 17:6)		
		'Rock' = YHWH (Deuteronomy 32:4)
'foxes' (Judges 15:4)		
		'fox' = Herod (Luke 13:32) ²⁷
Examples of Parabolic/Allegorical (Dual) Referents		
Literal (superficial referent)	and	Metaphorical (ultimate referent)
'seed' (Luke 8:5)	+	'seed' = the word of God (Luke 8:5, explained in v. 11)
'birds' (Luke 8:5)	+	'birds' = the devil (Luke 8:5, explained in v. 12)
'thorns' (Luke 8:7)	+	'thorns' = the cares and riches and pleasures of life (Luke 8:7, explained in v. 14)

²⁶ Randall Buth (1993, 7–9, 14). Similarly, Cotterell and Turner (1989, 47) note, with reference to *Pirke Aboth*, 4.15, “There is the... possibility that Jesus had in mind the pretensions of Herod to the lordly status of a lion when he was in reality no more than a puppet king, better compared to a cringing fox.”

²⁷ Buth (1993) suggests that in Luke 13:32 Jesus is using “fox” metaphorically of an insignificant, inferior, or inept person, a small-fry, a scoundrel.

approximately 2,300 occurrences in the Old Testament.²⁸ Consequently, this study focuses particularly upon the degree to which the semantic range of אֶלֶף is viewed by scholars as extending beyond its primary, literal sense into figurative meanings.

In engaging with the discussions of scholars, the aim in this work is not to attempt an exhaustive coverage of, or interaction with, each pertinent secondary issue, such as the creation of the sun on the fourth day, or the nature of the seventh day in light of New Testament teaching about God's rest. Rather the priority is to present the breadth of scholarly opinion, including the kinds of argumentation, found in discussions of the semantic range of אֶלֶף and the age of the universe. Notwithstanding this caveat, some secondary issues require a degree of elaboration, for the sake of clarity and overall balance, including the brief mention of views not represented among the 40 scholars (or groups of scholars).

Anticipated Contribution

This study attempts to contribute to biblical scholarship

1. by
 - a. delineating the scope of scholarly perceptions regarding the semantic range of אֶלֶף ;
 - b. discerning links between those perceptions, and discussions regarding the age of the universe;
 - c. documenting the types of argumentation employed in these discussions;
2. thereby
 - a. bringing some measure of clarity to the function of אֶלֶף in the range of creation theologies;
 - b. emphasizing the critical nature of semantics in biblical hermeneutics.

Methodology

Data sources for the core analysis include monographs, creation theologies, Genesis commentaries, contributions to creation debates, and other scholarly works. In each case, the following data are recorded in Appendix 1 (appearing in the part 3 paper of this study):

1. source;
2. key argumentation employed, and any supporting evidence (e.g., biblical references and citations), for the positions espoused by the authors regarding
 - a. the semantic range of אֶלֶף ,
 - b. the corresponding value (or potential range of values) of אֶלֶף in Genesis 1 (whether explicitly stated or implied),
 - c. the suggested age (or potential range of ages) of the universe.

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²⁸ However, William Wilson ([1870] 1990, 109) maintains, " אֶלֶף ... is frequently put ... for a long time; a whole period."

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Abbreviations

ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)	NAB	<i>New American Bible</i> (2010)
ASV	<i>American Standard Version</i> (1901)	NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i> (1995)
BDAG	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature—Third Edition</i> (2001)	NEB	<i>The New English Bible</i> (1970)
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> (2nd ed., 1997)	NET	<i>New English Translation</i> (2005)
CJB	<i>Complete Jewish Bible</i> (1998)	NIV	<i>New International Version</i> (2011)
DCH	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> (1993–2011)	NJB	<i>New Jerusalem Bible</i> (1985)
DSS	Dead Sea Scrolls	NJPS	<i>New Jewish Publication Society Tanakh</i> (1985)
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i> (2016)	NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i> (1982)
ESV*	<i>English Standard Version</i> (2016; but substituting “YHWH” for “the LORD,” and capitalizing the first letter of divine pronouns)	NLT	<i>New Living Translation</i> (2015)
EVV	English Versions	NOAD	<i>New Oxford American Dictionary (American English)</i> (2016)
GNB	<i>Good News Bible</i> (1976)	NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i> (1989)
HCSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i> (2017)	NT	<i>New Testament</i>
JPS	<i>Jewish Publication Society Tanakh</i> (1917)	OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary: Second Edition (20 Volume Set)</i> (1989)
KJV	<i>King James Version</i> (1769 Blayney Edition)	OT	Old Testament
LB	<i>Living Bible</i> (1971)	REB	<i>Revised English Bible</i> (1989)
lit.	literal(ly)	RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i> (1971)
MSG	<i>The Message</i> (2002)	RV	<i>Revised Version</i> (1885)
MT	Masoretic Text	WTM	<i>Groves-Wheeler Westminster Morphology and Lemma Database</i> (v. 4.14, 2010)
		YLT	<i>Young's Literal Translation</i> (1898)

