

Good approach misapplied to get ‘analogical days’

A review of
*Genesis 1–4: A
Linguistic, Literary,
and Theological
Commentary*
by C. John Collins
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Professor Collins articulates ‘A Discourse-Oriented Literary Approach’ (chapter 2) to the task of discerning the author’s intended meanings in ‘Genesis 1–4 in Its Literary Context’ (chapter 3). This is ‘a set of tools to evaluate competing views with sound critical thinking’ (p. 2).

I found his approach fascinating. It formalizes what any astute reader uses to get the truth from biblical texts. Dr. Collins applies these rules to Genesis 1–4 in chapters 4–7. I can endorse ~95% of the statements in the book, but the 5% are, in my judgement, critical errors that lead to wrong conclusions. If only he had applied his rules consistently, he would have gotten much closer to the author’s intents in Genesis 1:1–2:3, in particular.

Here are the four critical inferences that put Collins’ interpretation off track: (1) verses 1:1–2 are a preface, (2) the days fit a framework model, (3) the 7th day is still on-going, and (4) verses 2:4–6 imply a western Levant and dry climate of several seasons between days 3 to 6. All four of these imply that the days are not ordinary but ‘analogical’ days. And, in my judgement, it is easy to show that all four are at odds with the flow of the story.

First, let me mostly allow Collins to speak for himself regarding his proposed methodology. Then I will

show how, in my judgment, he failed to apply his rules to the above four key issues.

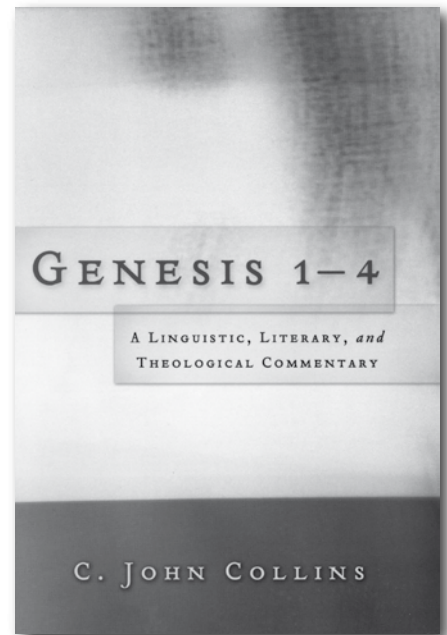
Reader competence

Admirably, Collins seeks ‘to read the text the way a competent reader in the original audience would have done, to the best that we can reconstruct that competence’ (p.5). He says, ‘what I think to be the plain meaning of the text may be plain to me, but I may be wrong if a competent reader sees otherwise’ (p.32). ‘The methodology that we are using here might bring us the literary competence needed to read this [Genesis 3] story well’ (p.149). And ‘olden days are described in terms of the experience of the [original] audience’ (p. 231, footnote 13).

Discourse analysis

Collins proposes a ‘communication model’: ‘The field of discourse analysis [also called text linguistics] starts from the notion that a text is an act of communication’ (p. 6). The author ‘might be only partially successful [at getting across his intent/message], depending on his own ability or on the level of overlap between his world and that of the audience’ (p. 6; I would add preconceptions about the message, for later audiences). ‘Do we respect the author enough to make the effort to listen to him *on his own terms*? But also, does his intention have any bearing on what I ought to believe?’ (p. 6). ‘This means understanding their genre and their *information structure*, as well as their rhetorical features’—including ‘*grammatical structures*’.

‘But we receive this [Genesis 2 account] properly if we recognize the yawning gap between our present experience and life in the garden, and this is a major clue to the *communicative purpose* of the chapter. If we believe the account has any connection with



reality, we will ache as we recognize this gap, and insist on an explanation’ (p.135). (I would add that we receive the first account of Genesis properly if we recognize that time is important to the author: 23% of the text is time words, repetition of the time refrain six times, and many other hints. That is not the focus of the story, but it is essential to its proper understanding.) ‘I do not believe that the message from the author to the very first audience necessarily exhausts the meaning, but I do think it is the right place to start’ (p. 237). I agree, if we correctly identify the first audience.

Author-audience communication

‘... the speaker and audience have a *picture of the world* that to some extent they share between them: that picture includes, for example, knowledge, beliefs, values, experiences, language’ (p. 6) and they ‘also share linguistic and literary conventions’ (p. 7). ‘We are keeping our focus on the *act of communication* between the author and his audience and aiming to reconstruct their literary competence; that alone is our criterion for finding the sense of Scripture ... ; my goal is to follow the text’ (pp.124–125). Amen to that!

Reader cooperation with the author

‘For an audience to interpret a text properly, they must *cooperate* with the author as he has expressed himself in his text’ (p. 7). In regard to later Scripture and other writings, Collins says it is also important to observe ‘the ways in which people close to the audience’s culture have responded to the text’ (p. 7). ‘We all have our own world pictures, interests, [preconceptions] and agendas, and these affect how well we cooperate with any author, ancient or modern’ (p. 7). So ‘we have to be careful, honest, and humble’ (p. 7). Amen again.

Misapplication of Collins’ rules

The above rules of hermeneutics are good: (1) cooperate with the author based on a valid reconstruction of the competence of the original audience, (2) analyse the discourse as an act of good-faith communication by the author to the audience, and (3) recognize the use of grammatical and literary structures to tell the story. Of course this assumes we have correctly identified the author and the audience, hence the time of original composition and any later editing. This is area in which I disagree with Collins. But first, let’s consider his four key errors as I see them.

(1) Verses 1–2 a preface?

‘Thus a basic distinction is between what is on the storyline [events] and what is off the storyline [background information]’ (p. 9). Collins points out that Old Testament narratives typically start with a preface using a perfect verb (*qatal*), and then proceed to the main storyline of events. Those events are typically expressed using *wayyiqtol* verbs (in Genesis 1:1–2:3, the ‘He said’s’; p. 42). On the basis of that typical verb pattern, he concludes that the first two verses are a preface that gives background information about an indefinite past, and that the main storyline starts at verse 3. This is yet another, more sophisticated variation on the gap theory of ca. AD 1830.

This seems to me *not* to be cooperating with the author. In verse 4 God separates the light from *the* darkness and in verse 5 God calls *the* darkness ‘night’—both with the definite article. Therefore, to which specific darkness is the narrator referring? The only darkness mentioned so far is in verse 2, *the* darkness that was over the face of the deep. Hence, any reader without preconception to the contrary, including the original audience, must conclude that verse 2 is describing the state of the ‘earth’ during (or at the beginning of) the first night. Indeed, verse 5 brackets that first night between evening and morning as it defines the notion of (a full) ‘day’.

Collins himself gives an example of an exception to this grammatical rule, where the leading perfect verb (*qatal*) is obviously a part of the main storyline rather than a preface (Exodus 19:1–2; p. 52). But here he inexplicably insists on the rule overriding the clear flow of the story, in particular the repetition of and reference to the key word ‘darkness’. This results in Collins’ day 1 being only a half a day. It starts in the morning when God said, ‘Let there be light’. Collins’ first day, the prototype day, has no evening and night, contrary to the story’s explicit statement!¹

(2) Days of a Literary Framework?

To his credit, Collins refutes the framework hypothesis of Kline, who claimed Days 1 and 4 are the same day seen from two perspectives (p. 73). (Of course that is easy. A chain of events with a later event claimed to be identical to a former event constitutes an infinite loop!) However, Collins buys into the framework idea as represented by the following associations (p. 73):

Location	Inhabitants
1. light and dark	4. lights of day and night
2. sea and sky	5. animals of water and air
3. fertile earth	6. land animals (incl. mankind)
	7. rest and enjoyment



Figure 1. Told to look at the old woman’s large nose on the left, we tend to see only the old woman. Told to look at the young woman’s chin on the left, we tend to see only the young woman. In either case it can even be difficult to get our brains to switch to the other. This illustrates the power of suggestion or preconceptions. The picture also illustrates how one scientist looks at the data and sees an old earth, while another looks at the same data and sees a young earth. <www.grand-illusions.com/woman.htm>

This is a convenient re-characterization of the days, but it hardly cooperates with the author!²

Let’s work bottom up. On Day 3 God forms and *names* the dry land ‘earth’ and the gathered waters ‘seas’. Only then is the dry land ready for birds and the seas for fish. The birds fly above the earth (verse 20), were made from the ground (verse 2:19), and multiply on the earth, not in the air (verse 22). The seas are not ready for the fish on Day 2 as needed by this version of the framework scheme. Hence, Day 5 relates to Day 3, not Day 2.

The author does not even mention ‘sea’ on Day 2. Indeed, the term ‘seas’ is not defined until Day 3. The waters of Day 2 are not the seas! Rather the focus of Day 2 is the expanse or firmament into which the lights are placed on Day 4 (verse 17). Hence, the expanse is what we today

call outer space. This was God making the large-scale structure of the universe, not yet focussing on planet Earth. A confirmation of this is that the birds are said to fly ‘in the face of the expanse of the heavens’ (verse 20)—only the surface of the expanse is the air! Hence, in this location-inhabitants scheme day 4 relates to Day 2, not to Day 1.

Finally, light and dark are not locations but conditions. (And contrary to (1) above, Collins is now contradicting himself by acknowledging that day one had a dark period.) There *is* a correlation between Days 1 and 4, however: light itself and objects that emit light.

Hence, if we consider the focus of God’s work each day, we see that the proper structure of the days is more a chiasm than a parallelism, to wit:

1	light in the physical darkness
2	expanse between waters above and waters below
3	dry land and seas: the surface of planet Earth
4	light on the earth from lights in the expanse
5	fish and birds to fill the dry land and seas
6	man between God above and Earth below
7	worship of the God who is light in spiritual darkness

Note that Day 4 relates to both Days 1 and 7: the focus in each case is light, though of the spiritual kind on Day 7. Days 2 and 6 both focus on something in *between*: the expanse is between the waters above and the waters below; similarly, man as steward is between God above and Earth below. Days 3 and 5 correspond in that the fish and birds of Day 5 fill the land and seas formed on Day 3 (verses 20, 22, and 2:19 again).

If this analysis is correct,³ Collins’ framework model is profoundly incorrect. Furthermore, the concept that the days should not be considered ordinary because there is a structural correspondence to God’s foci on the days seems profoundly wrong. There is no need to pit logical structure against clear time indicators. Let’s cooperate with the narrator. God’s glory is apparent when we see the structure in which he does things, especially extraordinary feats in ordinary days.

For thoroughgoing refutations of

the framework scheme, see Kulikovsky⁴ and Pipa.⁵

(3) Long Sabbath?

Based on Hebrews 4:3, Collins argues that the 7th day is still on-going because God is still resting from His creating and making activities. If the 7th day was long, it follows that the other days were probably not ordinary days either.

The author of Hebrews starts a line of reasoning in v. 3:7 that goes through v. 4:13. The gist is that the participants in the Exodus failed through disobedience to enter their ‘rest’ that God intended for them, i.e. the Promised Land. They died in the wilderness instead. Therefore, the author admonishes his (then) modern audience to

be sure they do not fail to enter their ‘rest’, i.e. heaven, due to their disobedience. The author is abbreviating ‘place of rest’ with just ‘rest’.

Now heaven was finished as of the end to the creation-and-making workweek, as stated in Genesis 2:1. The point is that his audience does not have to wait for their place of rest to be completed. It has been done since that beginning week. They can enter ‘today’. It is not that the first Sabbath, the 7th day, is still going on. Yes, God is still resting from his activities of creating and making the physical universe, but that has nothing to do with the length of the 7th day.

If I start a vacation on Saturday, and 10 days later I am still vacationing, it does not mean it is still Saturday. God rested on the 7th day and is still resting (from creating and making the cosmos), but it is *not* still the 7th day. Kulikovsky⁶ has treated this subject in depth.

A second line of reasoning that Collins suggests is that the refrain that appears at the end of each workday’s description is not found at the end of the 7th day’s description. Thus the day

must not have ended. Now, all seven days were unique in history, but the text uses special ways to emphasize the most special.

Day 1’s description ends with an appositive, ‘one day’, thus defining (the full) ‘day’. The next four days end without an article, hence the indefinite is indicated: a second day, a third, a fourth, and a fifth. Then the focal point of the Making is man’s day, *the* sixth day—the definite article is used for emphasis. And finally, *the* most unique day, when God did not work as on the other six, has *the* definite article applied to it three times: *the* seventh day.⁷

And that day’s description also emphasizes its uniqueness by *not* having the refrain of the workdays. It is *not* a workday. Nor is the refrain needed. By then it should be abundantly clear to the reader that the days are ordinary in length, although certainly not by content. Furthermore, no terminator is needed for the day’s description anyway. It is the last day described and what comes next is the terminator of the story itself, the *toledoth*.⁸

These reasons for the refrain not ending the 7th day’s description seem to me to be far superior to the idea that it is a subtle hint that the day is still on-going.

(4) Dry years?

Collins observes that the author of Genesis is inviting us to read the two ‘pericopes’ (stories), Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–25, together, for a complete account, and that the second is a more detailed explanation of Day 6. Hear; hear! From Genesis 2:5–6 he argues that it was many seasons between Days 3 and 6. Here’s how his argument goes.

Verses 2:5–6 in the ESV read: ‘When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground...’ (Collins notes that some say it could read, ‘and a mist *was beginning* to arise from the land and *was beginning* to water ...’, i.e. it was just starting. Footnotes 7, 8, p.104).

Two reasons were stated as to why there were no bushes or small plants in the field/land: (1) it had not rained, and (2) there was no man to cultivate the ground. The main point of chapter 2 is that God corrected the latter issue by making man from the ground. What about the lack of rain? Collins inexplicably argues that this arid condition must have arisen because of a series of dry seasons, i.e. many years, between Days 3 and 6. His rationalization is that Moses' audience, the exodus Israelites, were familiar with the western Levant, the west coast along the Mediterranean where the summers are void of rain. He argues that there must have been several years of arid conditions for the land to be void of plants (without suggesting a reason for dry winters).

I can think of a much simpler solution that is more in harmony with the text. It is telling us that by Day 6 the hydrological cycle had not yet begun, but was in fact just beginning. We have bushes 'not yet in the land' and small plants 'not yet sprung up', due to the LORD God 'not yet having caused it to rain' or yet made man, but the rain cycle was just starting. Again the flow of the story leads us readers better than word or grammar studies.

There is no hint of multiple years or dry seasons in the text, and clearly they are not needed. The reader must only infer that on Day 3, God did not make plants sprout everywhere. There was still at least some land without plants. Nor did He start the rain cycle on Day 3, but when the rain cycle started, apparently on Day 6, they would begin to spread rapidly.

Author-audience

Collins cogently argues against the source criticism of the Documentary Hypothesis. It assumes Davidic-Kingdom authors of the Pentateuch based on literary style issues. He argues effectively instead for Moses compiling and editing patriarchal sources. See also Holding.⁹ 'Such tales were no longer composed after 1600 [BC],' and thus 'it is logical to assume that

the framework and basic content of Genesis [1–11] goes back to the patriarchal period' (p. 234).¹⁰ He says, 'literary and grammatical considerations supply a better explanation [of the author's intent] in terms of the overall flow of the narrative [better than source criticism]'. And 'Do these pericopes [stories] come from separate sources or not? There is no way to answer this question, since the putative sources no longer exist [well, we have not found them if they ever did]' (p. 231). However, he never identifies his supposed patriarchal sources. Instead, he inappropriately argues several points based on the assumed post-exodus Israelite audience. An example is his 'western Levant' invention in point (4) above.

Consider the authors of the Bible excluding Genesis. A little reflection indicates that they were almost all eyewitnesses of the events reported, or careful interviewers of eyewitnesses, or careful historians compiling such accounts. Why would Genesis be any different? Who knew all the details reported there other than the participants in the accounts? Furthermore, didn't the patriarchs need to know the events that happened to their fathers? Didn't Noah need to know about the Adamic covenant and Abraham about the Noachic covenant, for example? Certainly they did. And there is evidence in Genesis of that some of the patriarchs authored the stories included in Genesis, namely the *toledoths*: 'These are the generations of ...'

Collins thinks the *toledoths* are headers. But in my view there is a stronger case that they are Moses' source citations and mark the ends of the accounts.¹¹ They are likely the colophons written on the edges of tablets, much as we print a book's title and author on the spine of the book. Many such tablets have been found in Hittite libraries. This is the tablet

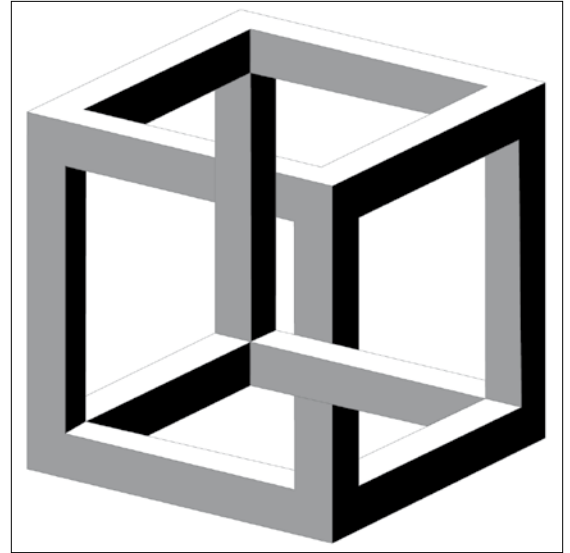


Figure 2. Analyse each corner and its emerging legs. Taken alone they look fine. All together they form a 2D picture of an impossible 3D object—no such structure can exist. Similarly our 'scholars' analyse biblical texts individually and never look at the big picture once the interpretations of the texts are put together.

theory of authorship.¹² It cannot be proven unless we unearth the tablets, but then, neither can any other such theory. It is, however, in my judgment, the most likely, consistent with the rest of the Bible, and God-honouring, author theory. (Still others hold that grammatically, *elleh toledot* is a link between the sections, taking the result of the previous section and propelling it forward in the narrative (again see Holding⁹); this is certainly the case for the first and second *toledoths*, which are both incorporated into a more complex structure, as shown below for the first, which is in verse 2:4.)

If the tablet theory is at least close to correct, then it is likely Genesis 1:1–2:3 (or 4a) was the first Sabbath lesson. Didn't Adam and Eve, and those following, need to know where they had come from, who did it, and their purpose for being? Of course, they did. Hence, it is likely either God Himself wrote that first account and gave it to Adam and Eve, or God dictated and they wrote it down. Hebrews 4:4 actually attributes Genesis 2:2 to God, hence likely the whole story. In either case, if true, this nullifies Collins' argument that Moses

significantly edited the text to fit the much later Israelite notion of a western Levant. Moses probably regarded the text as so sacred that he would have been unlikely to change it significantly except to insert explanatory comments (there are indeed comments that are consistent with Moses working from a much older document and explaining it to Israelites that have recently come out of Egypt).¹³ In the case of Genesis 1:1–2:3, however, the text is so highly structured; it is unlikely Moses changed it at all.

Verse 2:4 a hinge?

Still, I agree with Collins that it may have been Moses who converted the *toledoth* that ends the first account into a hinging chiasm:¹⁴

These are the generations of	
A	the heavens and
B	the earth
C	when they were created;
C'	in the day that the LORD God made
B'	the earth and
A'	the heavens.

As Collins points out, this chiasmic literary structure glues the two accounts together, inviting the reader to see that they are complementary, not competing creation accounts. It harks back to verse 1:1; bridges into the next account; and implicitly equates the God of the first account with the LORD God of the second.

Indeed, this is, as Collins rightly calls the whole first account, ‘exalted prose narrative’. It has some literary structure that makes it easy to remember, emphasizes points, and gives it amazing depth. Nonetheless, it is intended to tell of real events in real history involving real objects and real beings, as suggested by the flow of the story and confirmed by the many clues therein. Again, we must cooperate with the narrator.

Unfortunately and surprisingly Collins fails to bring out many other literary structures in the first account.¹⁵

Overall effect of (1)–(4): analogical days?

Note that in each of the above four cases, the main effect is to cast doubt on the days being ordinary. But that doubt evaporates if we (1) see verses 1–2 as part of day one, as the text indicates by explicit reference to *the* darkness, (2) reject the idea of pitting literary structure against the abundant clues that ordinary days are meant, (3) recognize that a day is still a day even if it does start a many-day rest and even if its description ends with the end of the story rather than with a refrain that is repeated for the six workdays, and (4) accept that the first account does not state when it first started to rain or that plants were on every part of the land by the end of Day 3, but that the second account fills in the detail that there was not *yet* rain or man early Day 6.

No, the days are not ‘analogical days’. They are not merely analogous to ordinary days, but really God-days of indeterminate length (p.124). Nowhere does Scripture even hint at such days. So now we have seen the errors of half days, metaphorical days, figurative days, analogical days, exponential days, gaps between days and in the middle of days, and days as ages. No, the days are not at all compatible with the length nor the ordering of events required by materialistic theories whose key purpose is to explain away God. And why would we want to compromise with such?

That a conservative evangelical scholar would work so hard to cast doubt on the days being ordinary would seem possible only if he started with a preconception. See figures 1 and 2. It seems to me there is no doubt in the text itself at all. Still, most of Collins’ work is very good. If he would correct these four glaring errors (as I see it) and their many minor corollaries, he would have an outstanding book that would help reveal the majesty of God as Creator and Maker—first to pastors, then to lay Christians, and then to the world.

References

1. See my review of Gorman Gray’s book for the same problem produced by imagining a gap between verses 2 and 3: Gray, G., *The Age of the Universe: What are the Biblical Limits?* *Journal of Creation* 19(2): 51–57, 2005.
2. For more, see Grudem, W., *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, 1994, p. 302.
3. It is certainly plausible, because the Flood account is a huge chiasm, as shown in Holding (reference 9 below).
4. Kulikovsky, A., A critique of the literary framework view of the Days of Creation, *Creation Research Society Quarterly* 37(4):237–244, 2001.
5. Pipa, J.A., From chaos to cosmos: a critique of the Framework Hypothesis, 13 January 1998, <capo.org/cpc/pipa.htm>, 20 Mar. 2007.
6. Kulikovsky, A., God’s rest in Hebrews 4:1–11, *Journal of Creation* 13(2):61–62, Nov. 1999; <www.creationontheweb.com/content/view/1680>.
7. Sarfati, J., The numbering pattern of Genesis, *Journal of Creation* 17(2):60–61, Aug. 2003; <www.creationontheweb.com/content/view/1670>.
8. Collins sees the *toledoths* as headers (wrongly, I believe) but in any case the context indicates that the story is ended and the next story is about to begin. We both agree on that point.
9. Holding, J.P., Debunking the Documentary Hypothesis, *Journal of Creation* 19(3):37–40, Dec. 2005; <www.creationontheweb.com/content/view/4249>.
10. Quoting Kitchen, K.A., *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, Eerdmans, 2003. By patriarchs he probably means only as far back as Abraham. I mean back to the beginning.
11. Except for those for the two brothers not in the line to Jesus: Ishmael and Esau. They are included in their brother’s stories so the marker is placed at the head.
12. Sewell, C., *The Tablet Theory of Genesis Authorship*, originally published by the archaeological magazine *Bible and Spade* 7(1), Winter 1994, <www.trueorigin.org/tablet.asp> (Last Modified: 9 Mar. 2006).
13. It also explains why the description of the four rivers in Genesis 2:10–14 would still be retained even though it is about topology that was obliterated by the Flood. Adam was explaining to his descendants why there was an angel there guarding the entrance to the garden. Seeing that text, instead, as provided to the Israelites by Moses, Collins uses it to argue against the Flood. So he asks, why would Moses include something topologically irrelevant to them?
14. A similar phenomenon occurs at verse 5:1.
15. For more such literary structures in the account, see Jordan, J. B., *Creation in Six Days: A Defense of the Traditional Reading of Genesis One*, Canon Press, Moscow, ID, 1999.