

What about the Framework Interpretation?

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Professor Arie Noordzij of the University of Utrecht initially outlined the framework hypothesis in 1924. However, the current popularity of the framework view is largely a result of the work of Reformed scholar Meredith G. Kline. His initial entry was an article in 1958, “Because It Had Not Rained.”¹ Since Kline’s initial article, other reputable Christian scholars have attempted to provide defenses of the framework interpretation (see Bibliography).

The framework view asserts that the creation “week” of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a literary device intended to present God’s creative activity in a topical, non-sequential manner, rather than a literal, sequential one. Kline supports the framework theory with three primary arguments. First, he contends that the figurative nature of the creation account demonstrates that it is arranged topically rather than chronologically. Second, he asserts that ordinary providence governed the creation account. Third, he maintains that the unending nature of the seventh day indicates that the six days of the creation week are not normal days. The following briefly outlines each thesis and provides a concise evaluation.

The Literary Nature of the Creation Account

The framework interpretation argues that God uses the imagery of an ordinary week to serve as a rhetorical structure for God’s acts of creation. Using the literary metaphor of a “week,” the author of Genesis uses a semi-poetic account where Days 1–3 find a parallel in Days 4–6. Both triads are subordinate to God’s eternal Sabbath rest on the seventh day. Framework advocates use the following chart to reflect this scheme.

Creation kingdoms		Creature kings	
Day 1	Light	Day 4	Luminaries
Day 2	Firmament: sky & seas	Day 5	Inhabitants: sea & winged creatures
Day 3	Dry land Vegetation	Day 6	Land animals Man
The Creator King			
Day 7	Sabbath		

As this chart shows, the structural arrangement of both triads indicates that the literary arrangement of the creation account reflects a topical arrangement rather than a chronological sequence and it emphasizes divine creative activities that culminate with the Creator King’s Sabbath rest. Further, the luminaries of Day 4 control Day 1, the creatures of Day 5 govern Day 2, and the creatures of Day 6 have jurisdiction over Day 3.

However, there are at least two problems with interpreting the creation account as a semi-poetic account. First, while Genesis 1:1–2:3 reflects a somewhat stylistic use of Hebrew narrative because of its repeated phrases, the 55 uses of *waw* consecutive (a Hebrew verbal form that is predominantly used in Hebrew sequential narrative literature) strongly argues that the creation account is a sequential, chronological narrative and not a

¹*Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (May 1958): 145–57. See also Kline’s subsequent article, “Space and Time,” pp. 2–15.

semi-poetic account. Second, the supposed parallels between the two triads are strained. For instance, the framework argues that the luminaries of Day 4 are an intentional replication of the light created on Day 1. However, this overlooks the important point that the luminaries of Day 4 are placed in the expanse created on Day 2. Thus, the luminaries of Day 4 presuppose the creation of the physical phenomenon of light on Day 1 and the expanse on Day 2. Consequently, there is nothing significant in Genesis 1:1–2:3 to undermine the traditional view that maintains this is a historical, sequential account affirming that God created the heavens, the earth and all things therein over the course of six literal, sequential days.

The Creation Account Controlled by Ordinary Providence

With the second major argument of the framework view, Kline presents the case that God used ordinary providence (God’s non-miraculous operations in sustaining and directing all creation) to control the creation “week.”² This argument, according to Kline, is predicated on interpreting “because it had not rained” in Genesis 2:5 as presupposing that God would not have created plants until he first created an environment with the necessary rain to sustain the growth of those plants. Based upon this “unargued presupposition,” it is inferred that God used ordinary providence to control the creation “week.” In addition, if ordinary providence, as opposed to extraordinary providence (God’s miraculous intervention in the created order), controls the period of creation, then Genesis 1:1–2:3 cannot be a sequential account because, for example, vegetation was created on Day 3 before the Sun was created on Day 4.

What works against Kline’s “unargued presupposition” in Genesis 2:5 is the context in which this verse is located. As commentators consistently note, v. 5 is part of a series of six nonsequential clauses in vv. 5–6 that provide circumstances associated with the primary proposition in v. 7: the formation of man (“Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground...”). This initial proposition of v. 7, a *waw* consecutive that initiates a narrative sequence that is advanced by a series of 21 *waw* consecutives in Genesis 2:4–25, introduces a narrative description of the state of the created order on Day 6 of the creation week when God formed his image bearers, Adam and Eve, to rule as vice-regents from the Garden prepared on the same day. Additionally, Genesis 1:1–2:3 works against Kline’s interpretation because the creation account provides no evidence that God worked exclusively in this week through ordinary providence. In fact, the evidence is to the contrary. In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit’s presence over the surface of the deep pictures his provisions for the creation. On Day 3 (vv. 9–13), the only works described are those of extraordinary providence. By divine fiat, the waters of the earth are gathered into one place, the dry land appears, and the earth produces full-grown plants along with its seed and fruit trees with seed in its fruit. The formation of man and woman on Day 6 (vv. 26–28) also involves God’s miraculous intervention. Therefore, Genesis

²In this brief overview, I use Kline’s view of the framework interpretation as the basis for my critique. It should be noted, however, that not all framework advocates would use all three of the arguments that I outline in this paper. Some framework advocates use Gen 2:5 to support the creation week being controlled by ordinary providence, while others do not. The chief advocate using Gen 2:5 to support the framework has been Meredith G. Kline, “Because It Had Not Rained,” pp. 145–57. A well-known evangelical scholar who does not use Gen 2:5 to support his understanding of the framework view is Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), pp. 56–58, 73–78. For a listing of evangelical scholars following both forms of the framework, see my “Critique of the Framework Interpretation of the Creation Account (Part 2),” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 64, n. 4.

2:5 does not establish a principle that God exclusively controlled the creation week by ordinary providence. A closer reading of the creation account in Genesis 1:1–2:3 reveals that it is more accurate to say that the creation week is governed by extraordinary providence while God is concomitantly establishing the conditions in the created order so that it could begin to operate according to normal providence. Therefore, rather than assuming that the “unargued presupposition” of Genesis 2:5 is that normal providence governed the creation period, the context of this verse describes the state of the created order on Day 6 of the creation week when God formed his image bearer to rule on earth as his vice-regent.

The Unending Nature of the Seventh Day

The third argument supporting the framework position is that the seventh “day” of the creation “week” is an unending period. Two items are alleged to support the unending nature of Day 7. First, while each of the six days of the creation week are concluded by the evening-morning formula, the description of Day 7 in Genesis 2:1–3 omits the evening-morning formula implying that it is an ongoing period. Second, Hebrews 4 confirms this understanding of Day 7 with the motif of an eternal Sabbath rest.

In response to this argument, it is necessary to notice how “evening” and “morning” are used in the creation account. The clauses “there was evening” and “there was morning” have a function in the creation narrative of marking a transition from one day of creation to the next. This is to say, an “evening” denotes the conclusion of a period of light when God suspends his creative activity of one day and the “morning” marks the renewal of light when God resumes his work. Just as the fiat and fulfillment expressions used on each day of creation are not needed on Day 7 because God’s creative activities are finished, so there is no need to use the evening-morning conclusion because God’s work of creation is concluded. Thus, the omission of the evening-morning formula on Day 7 neither proves nor implies that this day was unending. In addition, Hebrews 4 provides no substantive evidence indicating that Day 7 is an eternal day. The eternal rest presented in Hebrews 4 is based on an analogy with God’s creative rest in Genesis 2:1–3. The author of Hebrews uses the Mosaic omission of the evening-morning conclusion as a type patterned after God’s eternal rest. We should further note that the actual kind of rest in Genesis 2:2–3 is completely different than the rest in Hebrews 4:3–11. The rest of Genesis 2:2–3 is a cessation from divine creative activity. Only the Creator can cease from that activity. It is absolutely impossible for the creature to experience that cessation. However, the Sabbath-rest of Hebrews 4:3–11 is a rest that the people of God actually experience. Therefore, the “rest” in both contexts cannot be identical. The framework position assumes that the “rest” of Genesis 2 is identical with Hebrews 4. However, instead of assuming that the “rest” of Genesis 2 and Hebrews 4 are identical, framework advocates need to demonstrate this identity.

In conclusion, the framework view poses more exegetical and theological difficulties than it solves and it does not provide any solid evidence to abandon the traditional, literal reading of Genesis 1–2 which provides the most consistent interpretation of the exegetical and theological details in both chapters.

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