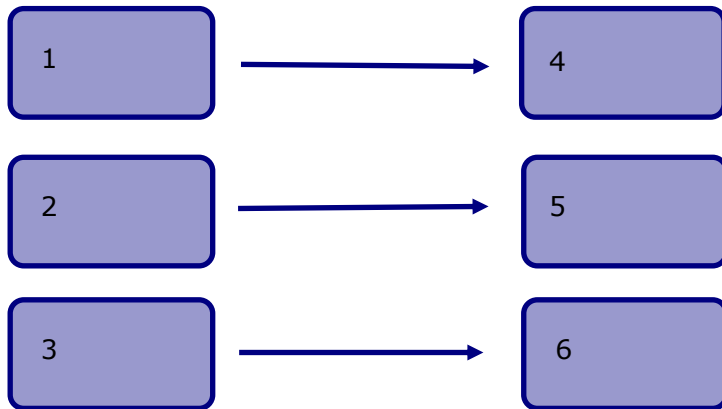


Feature Article



The Framework Hypothesis Interpretation Of Genesis 1

By Russell Baylis

I recall the first time I met the Framework Hypothesis (FH). I was about sixteen and not yet a believer. I was attending Crusaders, a weekly Bible class, and one of the leaders presented it to us enthusiastically. He claimed it showed how Genesis 1 fits with current (i.e. 1960's) scientific understanding. I was puzzled, partly because of my ignorance of the related debate. It simply struck me as being rather forced, an imposition on the text. That's all I remember about it and how I reacted.

I did not meet the FH at theological college, although I understand it has grown considerably in popularity in such places during recent years. Some church leaders teach it now.

So what is it? It is the idea that the six days of Genesis 1 are divided into two sets of three, or two triads. In the first three days, God creates three 'kingdoms' or spaces to be occupied. In the final three days, God creates the 'kings' or 'rulers' who will occupy and dominate these 'kingdoms'. It is a literary device by the author of Genesis.

	Days of Kingdom - Forming		Days of Kings - Filling
Day 1	Forms Night & Day Light and darkness separated	Day 4	Sun, moon and stars
Day 2	Forms Sky Sky and waters separated	Day 5	Fish and birds
Day 3	Forms Land Dry land and seas separated	Day 6	Animals and mankind

It certainly looks neat. For an unsuspecting Christian who is less informed about the clash between evolution and biblical history, it offers a sense of relief. "Ah, now I understand Genesis 1" may be a typical reaction. It appears not to diminish the claim that God is creator of all things, while presenting the details of that chapter to be arranged merely to teach truths about spheres of dominion.

So the idea seems to have great emotive appeal.

It is a small step, but not a logical one, to assume that the account is not historical. This is in spite of the fact that Genesis 1 sounds very historical and chronological. The claim to be literal is eroded in favour of a claim to be literary. In a subtle way it undermines the mainstream

interpretation of Genesis 1 as being an historical account, a view held by the church for 18 centuries and by Jewish scholars for even longer.

As Robert McCabe writes:

"Since the early 1800s, many Christians have accepted the idea that the Earth is billions of years old. This notion contradicts a plain reading of the biblical text so many have searched for a way to harmonize the early chapters of Genesis with the idea of long ages. Many theories have been proposed, such as the Gap Theory, the Day-Age Theory, and Progressive Creationism. However, as these views were promoted, it became apparent that each view was based on arbitrary methods of interpretation and forced contradictions with the biblical text. In 1924, a new view, The Framework Hypothesis, was developed by a Norwegian, Arie Noordtzij, which sought to eliminate these problems. Approximately thirty years later, Meredith Kline popularized the view in the United States...."

answersingenesis.org/creationism/old-earth/whats-wrong-with-the-framework-hypothesis/

Notice that no Christian commentator and no Jewish writer saw the FH until 1924. It is indeed a novel interpretation. If no one saw it for so many centuries, then we might well doubt whether it can claim much validity. A novel interpretation may be appropriate if some new discoveries shed light on known truths. But the FH utilises no new data at all. Its novelty is driven by a desire to side-step the most plain interpretation.

Kline was quite frank in his reason for promoting this view:

"To rebut the literalist interpretation of the Genesis creation week propounded by the young-earth theorists is a central concern of this article. . . . The conclusion is that as far

as the time frame is concerned, with respect to both the duration and sequence of events, the scientist is left free of biblical constraints in hypothesising about cosmic origins."

Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 48 (March 1996): 2.

One may wonder why a Christian, scientist or not, should want to be "left free of biblical constraints" when seeking to understand what God has revealed about his creation. It is telling to see such a candid admission of Kline's presuppositions.

One may well ask about the details of the Hypothesis. Is it actually coherent?

Systematic theologian Dr Wayne Grudem summarises it well:

'First, the proposed correspondence between the days of creation is not nearly as exact as its advocates have supposed. The sun, moon, and stars created on the fourth day as "lights in the firmament of the heavens" (v.14) are placed not in any space created on Day 1 but in the "firmament" ... that was created on the second day. In fact, the correspondence in language is quite explicit: this "firmament" is not mentioned at all on Day 1 but five times on day 2 (v.6-8) and three times on Day 4 (v.14-19).

'Of course Day 4 also has correspondences with Day 1 (in terms of day and night, light and darkness), but if we say that the second three days show the creation of things to fill the forms or spaces created on the first three days (or to rule the kingdoms as Kline says), then Day 4 overlaps at least as much with Day 2 as it does with Day 1.

'Moreover, the parallel between Days 2 and 5 is not exact, because in some ways the preparation of a space for the fish and birds of Day 5 does not come in Day 2 but in Day 3. It is not until Day 3 that God gathers the waters together and calls them "seas" (v.10), and on Day 5 the fish are commanded to "fill the waters in the seas" (v.22). Again in verses 26 and 28 the fish are called "fish of the sea", giving repeated emphasis to the fact that the sphere the fish inhabit was specifically formed on Day 3. Thus, the fish formed on Day 5 seem to belong much more to the place prepared for them on Day 3 than to the widely dispersed waters below the firmament on Day 2.

'Establishing a parallel between Day 2 and Day 5 faces further difficulties in that nothing is created on Day 5 to inhabit the "waters above the firmament", and the flying things created on this day (the Hebrew word would include flying insects as well as birds) not only fly in the sky created on Day 2, but also live and multiply on the "earth" or "dry land" created on Day 3. (Note God's command on Day 5: "Let birds multiply on the earth" [v.22].)

Finally, the parallel between Days 3 and 6 is not precise, for nothing is created on Day 6 to fill the seas that were gathered together on Day 3. With all of these points of imprecise correspondence and overlapping between places and things created to fill them, the supposed literary "framework," while having an initial appearance of neatness, turns out to be less and less convincing upon closer reading of the text.'

[Grudem, W., 1994. *Systematic Theology*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, USA, p. 302.]

Hebrew scholar Dr Steven Boyd has clearly shown that Genesis 1 is written as historical narrative rather than poetry as some claim. Boyd studied Hebrew verbs, noting that Hebrew poetry commonly utilises a high percentage of imperfect and perfect verbs. By contrast, Hebrew narrative is marked by a high frequency of waw-consecutive preterite verbs that indicate a sequence of events in past tense material.

Boyd gives a comparison of Judges 4 and 5 showing a clear example of these differences. In Judges 4, the account of Deborah and Barak defeating the forces of Sisera is explained in historical narrative. The following chapter is a poetical song describing the same event. The difference in language is readily apparent.

The same is true with the historical narrative of Genesis 1 and poetic descriptions of creation activities such as those found in Psalm 104. After studying and cataloging 522 texts, Boyd concluded that Genesis 1 can be classified as historical narrative with a probability of 99.9972604 %. That is equivalent to saying it is indisputable and certain.

The Framework Hypothesis may be popular but it is very misleading. Is God really such a poor communicator that this vital text has been misunderstood for so many centuries?

Russell Baylis

Further Bibliography:

Kenneth L Gentry (Master Books 2016)
[As It Is Written: Dismantling the Framework Hypothesis](#)

Article by Dr Don Batten, et al
creation.com/is-genesis-poetry-figurative-a-theological-argument-polemic-and-thus-not-history

For Dr Boyd's research in brief see
www.icr.org/article/biblical-hebrew-creation-account-new-numbers-tell-

Or for greater detail read
[Thousands ... Not Billions by Don DeYoung](#)
(Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2005), 158-70

Look out for more articles from the team in the future and for further info on our upcoming hosted events at

www.readingcreationgroup.org.uk



@readingcreationgroup