

A Hebrew-Faithful Translation of Genesis 1:1-2:4

By Pastor Gary Jensen © May 24, 2014
Zion Lutheran Church, Snohomish, Washington

Why is this translation of the Genesis creation account necessary?

In my essay, “*The Biblical Demand to Take Another Look: Ten ‘Compelling’ Reasons the Days of Creation are Non-24-Hour*,”¹ I list and further address instances where the English Standard Version of the Holy Bible (ESV)² commits **ten clear consequential translational errors** pertaining to creation passages;³ seven of which appear in the first two chapters of Genesis. The availability of online Hebrew-English interlinear texts⁴ offers a standard for enabling any researcher to independently verify the biblical texts in the original language. What is especially troubling about the ESV inaccuracies just mentioned is the expressed assurance from the translators that “*each word and phrase in the ESV has been carefully weighed against the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, to ensure the fullest accuracy and clarity and to avoid under-translating or overlooking any nuance of the original text.*”⁵ To make matters more disturbing still, every one of these mistakes is biased in favor of one particular, peculiar, and controversial, position on the *duration* of each creation day (*yom*) in Genesis 1. The translation I lay before you does not *directly* address that question for the reason that the original Hebrew texts don’t *directly* address it (with the exception of footnote 3, below, items 3-6). My intention is to instead provide a translation which will correct *all* of the errors that I specifically listed in that footnote. Readers can then draw their own conclusions on this matter on the basis of a faithful and therefore reliable text.

Genesis 1:1-2:4 without notes

In the beginning God created the entire starry heavens and the earth. And the earth at that time was chaotic and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. And God called [to] the light Day, and [to] the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, day one.

And God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let there be a separating of waters from waters.” And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so. And God called to the expanse sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

And God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their kind, and fruit trees bearing fruit on the earth.” And it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees going through the entire process of maturing and bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

And God said, "Let there appear lights in the expanse of the sky in order to separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years. And let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth." And it was so. Yes, indeed God has made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and also the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth over expanse of the sky." And God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth." And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—live-stock and creeping things and beasts upon the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over fish of the sea and over birds of the heavens and over livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So, God created the man in his own image and in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that creeps on the ground." And God said, "Behold I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food." And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Thus, the heavens and the earth were finished with all of its variety. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim) made earth and heavens...

Genesis Chapter 1:1-2:4 with notes

1. In the⁶ beginning God created⁷ the entire starry heavens,⁸ and⁹ the earth.
2. And¹⁰ the earth at that time was chaotic and empty, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

3. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light.
4. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.
5. And God called [to]¹¹ the light Day, and [to] the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning,¹² day one.¹³

6. And God said, "Let there be an expanse¹⁴ in the midst of the waters, and let there be a separating of waters from waters."
7. And God made¹⁵ the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse¹⁶ from the waters that were above the expanse. And it was so.
8. And God called [to] the expanse Sky.¹⁷ And there was evening and there was morning, a second¹⁸ day.

9. And God said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear." And it was so.
10. And God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.
11. And God said, "Let the earth¹⁹ bring forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their kind, and fruit trees bearing fruit on the earth." And it was so.
12. And the earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees²⁰ going through the entire process of maturing and bearing fruit²¹ in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
13. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

14. And God said, "Let there appear²² lights in the expanse of the sky²³ in order to²⁴ separate the day from the night. And let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and years,
15. And let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light upon the earth." And it was so.
16. Yes, indeed God has made²⁵ the two great lights²⁶—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and also the stars.
17. And God set them in [the] expanse²⁷ of the heavens²⁸ to give light upon the earth,
18. and to rule over day and over night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.
19. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

20. And God said, "Let the waters²⁹ bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth over expanse of the sky."
21. And God created³⁰ the great sea creatures³¹ and every living³² creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.
22. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth."
23. And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

24. And God said, "Let the earth³³ bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts upon the earth according to their kinds."

25. And God made beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

26. And God said, "Let us make³⁴ man³⁵ in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over fish of the sea and over birds of the heavens³⁶ and over livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."

27. So, God created the³⁷ man in his own image and in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that creeps on the ground."³⁸

29. And God said, "Behold I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit. You shall have them for food."

30. And to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the air and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so.

31. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2:1 Thus³⁹ the heavens and the earth were finished with all of its variety.

1. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day⁴⁰ from all his work that he had done.

2. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

3. These⁴¹ are [the]⁴² generations⁴³ of the heavens and the earth when they were created,⁴⁴ in the day⁴⁵ that the LORD God (Yahweh Elohim) made earth and heavens...

¹ Visit my website at www.christianityontheoffense.com

² The Lutheran Study Bible. (Concordia, 2009).

³ **1)** In Genesis 1:2 the decisive conjunction, "*and*," is missing even though it is present in the Hebrew text. **2)** In Gen. 1:5, two errors are involved. First there should be no definite article since it is not present in the Hebrew. Also, the term "*first day*" should instead be translated "*day 1*" since it is a cardinal number, not ordinal. **3,4,5,6)** There should **not** be a definite article ("*the*") for days 2 through 5 since it is omitted in the Hebrew (implying that the creation days are indefinite rather than specific!). They should instead be translated as "*a second day..., a third day...,*" etc. **7)** In Gen. 2:4b the definite article ("*the earth and the heavens*..") is used twice even though it is **not** present in the Hebrew. **8,9)** Although the ESV translates Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 as "*For in six days*," the Hebrew text does not include the preposition "*in*" (as in "*within*"). It only appears in the *English* translation (of inter-linear texts) inside of brackets []. The Hebrew text literally says, "*Like as six days God made....*" While the author employs the *accusative of time* construct, the exclusion of the preposition just noted does suggest that the exact *duration* involved was not the *central* point of the statement. In any case the actual text cannot bear the weight young-earth creationists place upon it (see p.5, above). **10)** In Daniel 8:26, the Hebrew text does **not** employ plural nouns, but singular ones, thereby actually saying, "*the vision of the evening and the morning*" (note articles). This point is significant for the reason that young-earth creationists consistently argue that the "*evening...morning*" refrain signals the "*bound[ing]*" of expressly *24-hour* days (see **the** note on Genesis 1:5 from footnote 2). I reply to the contrary that in this instance the span of time recalled in the singular "*evening*" and "*morning*" vision in Daniel 8:26 actually spans several centuries, as implied earlier in 8:20,21.

⁴ e.g. www.scripture4all.org/OnlineInterlinear/Hebrew_Index.htm

⁵ Op.cit (2), p. XV.

⁶ No definite article accompanies the word “beginning” here. Yet concerning this passage Alexander Heidel states, “[Hebrew] terms like *reshith*, ‘beginning,’ *rosh*, ‘beginning,’ *qedem*, ‘olden times,’ and *olam*, ‘eternity,’ when used in adverbial expressions occur almost invariably without the article [even] in the absolute state.” (*Babylonian Genesis*. (U. of Chicago, 1969), p.96).

⁷ In Judeo-Christian faith God is the only subject of the verb *bara*, which means create out of nothing. Genesis 1:1 teaches the doctrine creation ex nihilo, which means creation out of nothingness. Humans can only refashion already existent material into a new form (that’s not a bad thing!). Only God can, as He did in Genesis 1:1, create the heavens and the earth out of nothing.

⁸ When the term *ha shama’im* (“the heavens”) stands alone it can mean either “heaven” as the abode of God, or the sky where the birds fly. When, however, it is combined with *veha’eretz* (“and the earth”) it stands for the totality of every created being (including the angelic hosts) and thing in the universe, including the celestial expanse (“the heavens and the earth”). Therefore, Genesis 1:1 stresses the creation of the entire created order, including the starry heavens. Radio host, Todd Wilkin’s description that the sky must have appeared as a “blank screen” at the beginning of creation contradicts the biblical description of God’s creative work on Day One (*Issues Etc.* on-line radio program, www.issuesetc.org, 07-11-2007).

⁹ Note that Earth is not mentioned first.

¹⁰ The suggestion that Genesis 1:1 should be isolated from the narrative by treating it as a summary heading is incorrect. The presence of the conjunction “and” (*vav*) at the beginning of verse 2 indicates decisively that verse 2 continues the narrative that was just begun in verse 1. Astonishingly the ESV (see my opening paragraph) mistakenly omits the *vav* at this vital place even though it employs that same word every other theologically-*non-consequential* time that it appears in the Hebrew Genesis text. Two consequences follow from incorrectly treating 1:1 as a summary heading. First, it implies that the creation of the heavens wasn’t God’s first creative *act*, but only an over-all *aspect* of His creative output. Second, that error completely removes the *act* of the creation of the earth (and the heavens) from the *narrative* altogether! Where else in the *narration* of events do we find reference to their actual beginning? One additional reason Genesis 1:1 should not be isolated as a heading is that such a designation does not fit into the grammatical form of a heading (cf. Genesis 2:4a, which indeed is in the form of a heading).

¹¹ I judge that the intention of this expression is to highlight the commanding power of God’s Word.

¹² By both the definition of the two key words in the “evening...morning” refrain, the grammatical phraseology of the same, this phrase cannot be understood to function as a bracket for enclosing 24-hour days. Ironically, if they were to enclose anything at all, it would be the nighttime.

¹³ *echad* (“one”) is a cardinal (not ordinal), number. Because Day One has no definite article (the) it is of indefinite duration.

¹⁴ *raqia* means the locale of the heavens that earthlings experience when looking upward.

¹⁵ *ayseh* (“made”), as opposed to *bara* (“created”).

¹⁶ Though “expanse” lacks the definite article in Hebrew, the context demands its translation into English.

¹⁷ Op.cit. (14).

¹⁸ Days 2-7 are all designated by ordinal (“a second day”...“a third day, etc.”) numbers. Because days 2-5 lack the definite article (“a second day...a third day, etc.”) they are all indefinite.

¹⁹ Notice that “the earth,” not God, is the subject of this sentence. God chose to bring about certain aspects of His creative work through natural processes. Note the similarity of Genesis 1:11 with verses 20 and 24 in this matter.

²⁰ That the Hebrew word “tree” is singular and without a definite article, designates it as a class. Hence my translation “trees.”

²¹ The term “bearing,” is a qal fientive participle, implying the ongoing process toward fruit-bearing maturity.

²² *yehee* as opposed to *bara*.

²³ See note 8, above.

²⁴ Causal words such as “to” (in order to) and “for” (for this purpose) are repeated eight times in the Moses’ treatment of the fourth day. This indicates that the appearance of the lights was for a definite purpose!

²⁵ Dr. Gleason Archer states that the Hebrew verb, “*wayya ’as*” (made) can legitimately point back to Day One as the time that God “**had made**” [or **has** made]...the two lights. The fact is, Hebrew tenses are ambiguous with respect to chronology since they serve a different purpose from English by dealing with the status of the completion (or non-completion) of the action at hand, as opposed to as a time-frame (past, present, etc.).

Oswald Allis sheds further light on this aspect of time with his observation that the sequence in which events in the Bible are recorded *may* not be strictly chronological. He writes, “*We find in describing an event, the Biblical writer first makes a brief and comprehensive statement and then follows it with more or less elaborate details.*” Included among his list of examples, he cites the verse, “*And God made the two great lights and stars,*” from Genesis 1:16 (Oswald Allis. The Old Testament: Its’ Claims and its’ Critics. (Presbyterian and Reformed, 1972), pp. 82, 87).

²⁶ In Hebrew, “the lights; the great ones” (note the definite articles) that were created back on Day One in Genesis 1:1.

²⁷ *raqiah*

²⁸ *hashamaim*, taken by itself (see note 8, above), refers to the sky.

²⁹ See note 19, above concerning the same principle.

³⁰ *vayibara (bara)*

³¹ In Hebrew, “the sea creatures; the great ones” (note the definite articles).

³² The quality of possessing breath (“*of breath*”).

³³ See note 19, above for the same principle.

³⁴ *be ’ayseh (asah)*

³⁵ *adam*

³⁶ See note 8.

³⁷ “the man” (*ha ’adam*)

³⁸ “earth”(*eretz*) in Genesis 1:1 is the same word for the ground on which things creep.

³⁹ The word “*vav*,” is elsewhere with few exceptions translated as “and.”

⁴⁰ “on the day [*beyom*]; the seventh.”

⁴¹ Notice the absence of the “*vav*” (see note 5, above), indicating that 2:4 is not a part of the creation narrative, but with respect to 2:4a, is instead a summary of the creation events of Genesis 1. By contrast, 2:4b introduces material (ch. 2:5f.) which focuses on the events in the Garden of Eden.

⁴² See note 16, above for the same principle.

⁴³ *toledoth* (“generations”) is in the plural, without the definite article. It is striking that the apparent duration of the creation process is here measured in terms of “generations;” not solar days.

⁴⁴ *bara*

⁴⁵ In contrast to 2:4a, 2:4b implies that the apparent duration of the creation process is measured in one day *beyom* (“in day”). Notice again the absence of the definite article.