

## ***A Note on the Refrain in Genesis 1: Evening, Morning, and Day as Chronological Summary***

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*The meaning of the refrain in Gen 1 “There was an evening and there was a morning, X day” (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31) has long been in dispute. This paper argues that the refrain is a chronological summary of the preceding text by demonstrating what the syntax and usage of such summaries are in the OT. The phrase then means “In summary there was an evening and then a morning, X day,” thereby encompassing an entire day beginning at sundown and ending at the next sundown. Moreover, the phrase “evening and morning” is further defined in the refrain as a single day.*

KEYWORDS: *Chronological summary, refrain, sequential, non-sequential, Genesis*

One of the most vexing issues in the interpretation of Gen 1 is determining the correct understanding of the refrain:

[number] ויהי־ערב ויהי־בקר יום

So there was an evening, and there was a morning, day [number] (Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

This is often translated as “There was an evening, and there was a morning, [number] day.” There are two possibilities for this phrase—either as a continuing sequence completing the narrative of the creation day in question or as an explanation of the passage of time in the previous narration of God’s creative activity.

## THE REFRAIN AS SEQUENTIAL TO THE NARRATION

Should both preterite aspect verbs (וַיְהִי, “and there was”) be understood as sequential, thereby having each day’s narrative relating God’s work during the daylight hours followed by the night in the refrain? If so, night is in view by framing it with evening and morning.<sup>1</sup> Thus, following the narration of God’s work on a given day in Gen 1, the refrain ought to be understood as “Next there was an evening, and then there was a morning, [number] day.” In this understanding evening and morning are the beginning and ending points of the nighttime that follows the daytime of the narration.

One problem with this interpretation is that the normal way of speaking of night by framing it with evening and morning is not through the use of sequential preterite verbs, but by using the construction עַד . . . עֶרֶב (“evening until morning,” Exod 27:21; Lev 23:32; Num 9:15, 21) which is parallel to the construction for framing a day with morning and evening (בֹּקֶר . . . עַד . . . עֶרֶב; “morning until evening,” Exod 18:13, 14). However, the preposition עַד (“until”) is nowhere to be found in Gen 1:1–2:3. Clearly, the phrasing of the refrain is not the expected or normal language for referring to nighttime.

Another impediment to this is that elsewhere in the Scriptures Israel’s days—especially sacred days—are reckoned from evening to evening, not from morning to morning (Exod 12:6, 18–19; Lev 23:32; Deut 16:6; Neh 13:19–22; Luke 23:53). This reckoning of days is further reinforced by Israel’s purity laws that deem certain activities to render one unclean until evening, implying that a new day begins at that time (Lev 11:24–25, 27–28, 31–32, 39–40; 14:46; 15:5–8, 10–11, 16–19, 21–23, 27; 17:15; 22:6; Num 19:7–8, 10, 19, 21–22; Luke 23:50–54; John 19:31–42). Considering that the days of the creation week form the basis for Israel’s week culminating in the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11; 31:12–17), it appears as if Scripture elsewhere interprets the days in Gen 1 as beginning in the evening, not in the morning as required by the sequential reading.

This option for understanding the refrain leaves open the question of whether these days are literal days or can be explained as

1. E.g., Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 51; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 121; C. John Collins, “Reading Genesis 1–2 with the Grain: Analogical Days,” in *Reading Genesis 1–2: An Evangelical Conversation* (ed. J. Daryl Charles; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 84, n. 35.

something other than actual twenty-four hour days. For this reason, many contemporary evangelical scholars who opt for this interpretation also advocate for a non-literal seven-day week for Gen 1:1–2:4. It allows, therefore for an accommodation to modern neo-Darwinian views of the origin of life and for a very old universe. However, not all advocates of this view seek to accommodate contemporary scientific assessments of the universe's origins.

#### THE REFRAIN AS AN EXPLANATION OF THE PASSAGE OF TIME IN THE PREVIOUS NARRATION

Should the first preterite verb in the refrain be understood as non-sequential to the narrative with the second being sequential to the first event (evening)?<sup>2</sup> This would then view the refrain as summarizing the narrative's time sequence. Thus, following the narration of God's work on a given day in Gen 1, the refrain ought to be understood as "In summary, there was an evening and then there was a morning: [number] day." In this understanding the *evening* introduces the first part of the day (nighttime) while *morning* introduces the second part (daytime) to form a merism that indicates one complete day.<sup>3</sup>

This understanding of the refrain has the advantage of support from the rest of Scripture in reckoning Israel's days from evening—especially the Sabbath day and other days in Israel's sacred calendar. However, there needs to be an explanation of why the first verb ought to be read non-sequentially when the large majority of preterite verbs are used in a sequential manner (most frequently temporally sequential but also at times logically sequential). Moreover, can Hebrew use a non-sequential preterite to introduce an internal sequence using preterite verbs? I will demonstrate that such constructions are found elsewhere in biblical Hebrew, making this summarizing reading of the refrain more probable than the sequential reading.

This option for understanding the refrain makes an accommodation to modern scientific assessments of the origin of life and of the universe much more difficult. If the refrain is a *chronological* summary—if it states the time duration of the first day as encompassed by actual evening and the following nighttime and morning with its

2. E.g., Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 19.

3. Andrew E. Steinmann, "Night and Day, Evening and Morning," *BT* 62 (2011): 145–50.

subsequent daytime—then a regular twenty-four hour day is in view. Indeed, this interpretation rules out any type of metaphorical approach to the six creation days.

#### USE OF PRETERITE VERBS TO INDICATE SUMMARY

One use of preterite verbs with prefixed  $\text{ׁ}$  is explained in the standard grammars as summarizing.<sup>4</sup> Joüon and Muraoka present this summarizing use very briefly as:

The wayyiqtol is also used for a **conclusion** or a **summary**: Gn 23.20 “Thus it is that the field passed into Abraham's possession ( $\text{ׁׁׁׁׁׁׁ}$ )”; 2.1; Josh 10.40; 1Sm 17.50; 30.3; 31.6; 2Sm 24.8; Ru 1.22. In these examples one can hardly speak of succession.<sup>5</sup>

While these grammars recognize that not all preterite verbs indicate temporal or logical succession, they offer little in the way of identifying non-successive uses.

Despite this lack of guidance, there is one particular type of summary that can be fairly easily recognized. I will call it the *chronological summary*. It is appended to the end of a narrative or historical account and provides a summary of it by explaining the chronology of the events in the previous text. A number of examples demonstrate that chronological summaries often use preterite aspect verbs at the head of the summary.

#### *Genesis 5:1–32; Genesis 9:29*

In the genealogy stretching from Adam to Lamech (Gen 5:1–32) and ultimately to Noah (Gen 9:29), the synopsis of each person's life and descendants is concluded with a preterite verb at the head of a chronological summary (Gen 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31; 9:29). The summary for Enoch is somewhat different because he did not die (Gen 5:21–24).

4. *IBHS*, 551 (§33.2.1d); Joüon, 363–64 (§§118i, 118ia).

5. Joüon, 363–64 (§118i).

The summary is formulaic. For example:

ויהיו כל־ימי אדם אשר־חי תשע מאות שנה ושלושים שנה וימת

So all the days of Adam which he lived were 930 years, and then he died. (Gen 5:5)

The formula in general is: שנה וימת [number] שנים [number] [name] כל־ימי ("So all the days of [name] were [number] years, then he died"). Adam's summary is unique in adding the relative phrase אשר־חי ("which he lived") probably to denote that Adam, unlike the others in the genealogy, did not live from infancy to adulthood, since he was created, not born.

These examples of the chronological summary are probably the most important for understanding the Gen 1 refrain and share the following characteristics with it:

- 1) Both the refrain and the formula are introduced by a preterite form of the verb היה (Gen 1: ויהי ["and there was"]; Gen 5: ויהיו ["and they (i.e, the days) were"]).
- 2) Both the refrain and the formula contain an internal sequence using a preterite verb (Gen 1: ויהי ["and there was"]; Gen 5: וימת ["and he died"]).
- 3) Both the refrain and the formula can be understood as having a beginning stage with a summarizing preterite verb (Gen 1: ויהי־ערב ["In summary, there was an evening"]; Gen 5: ויהיו כל־ימי... ["So, all the days were"]) and an ending stage with a sequential preterite verb (Gen 1: ויהי־בקר ["then there was a morning"]; Gen 5: וימת ["then he died"]).
- 4) The formula occurs frequently in a relatively small amount of text (Gen 1: six times in 31 verses; Gen 5: eight times in 32 verses).

For Enoch the summary formula is different, since he did not die:

ויהי כל־ימי חנוך חמש וששים שנה ושלוש מאות שנה ויתהלך חנוך את־האלהים ואיננו כִּי־לקח אתו אלהים

So all the days of Enoch were 365 years, and then Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Gen 5:23–24).<sup>6</sup>

There are obvious differences for Enoch's unique situation: the substitution of וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים וַאֲיִנּוֹ ("and then Enoch walked with God, and he was not") for וַיָּמָת ("and then he died") and the additional explanatory clause כִּי־לָקַח אֹתוֹ ("for God took him"). However, despite these expansions, the underlying structure of this chronological summary is the same with one important addition: The phrase וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ ("then Enoch walked with God") is followed by וַאֲיִנּוֹ ("and he was not"). Enoch's walk resulted in "he was not." The additional information indicates result. This can be compared to the refrain in Gen 1. Thus Gen 1:5 states:

וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר יוֹם אֶחָד

In summary, there was an evening; then there was a morning: one day.

The first וַיְהִי ("In summary, there was") is a summary use of the preterite. The second is a sequential use that is internal to the summary. The phrase יוֹם אֶחָד ("one day") is the result.<sup>7</sup> The same holds for the other instances of the refrain in Gen 1.

Of the chronological summaries that will be examined in this paper, these in Gen 5 are the most important since they not only share features with the Gen 1 refrain, but they are also found in the same OT book, and both are in the opening section, the primeval history (Gen 1–11).

6. For the understanding of the verb וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ ("then he walked") as sequential, see Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 120. Twice it is said וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ חֲנוּךְ אֶת־הָאֱלֹהִים ("then Enoch walked with God"; Gen 5:22, 24). The first is clearly sequential, happening after Enoch was 65 years old. The second should also be seen as sequential, not only because of the parallel to the earlier phrase but also because of the sequential verb that is in the same position in the other chronological summaries, וַיָּמָת ("then he died").

7. For a defense of the translation "one day" instead of "the first day" see Andrew. E. Steinmann, "אֶחָד as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5," *JETS* 45 (2002): 577–84.

*Ruth 1:4b–5*

Another chronological summary introduced by a summarizing preterite verb is found in Ruth:

וישבו שם כעשר שנים וימותו גם־שניהם מחלון וכליון ותשאר האשה משני  
ילדיה ומאישה

In summary, they lived there about ten years. Then both of them—Mahlon and Chilion—died, and the woman was left without her children and her husband. (Ruth 1:4b–5)

It could be argued that the initial verb, וישבו (“they lived”), is simply sequential.<sup>8</sup> However, it is often argued that this is a summary of the entire time the family was in Moab.<sup>9</sup> Wilch persuasively argues that this must be the case, since understanding the verb as sequential would lead to an improbable situation:

“About ten years” (Ruth 1:4) likely refers to the total time of Naomi’s sojourn in Moab, not just to the length of time of the sons’ marriages before the sons died, for that would be an exceptionally long time for two different marriages each to remain barren. Probably most of the ten years transpired before the death of Elimelech, the sons married their Moabite wives soon after his death, then the sons died not too long after their marriages, since they remained childless.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Wilch describes the chronological summary in these terms: “The Qal imperfect of ישב introduces a parenthesis with circumstantial information in the form of a sequence.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the preterite verb וישבו (“In

8. Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *The Book of Ruth* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 91, n. 2. However, Hubbard admits that this could be reasonably understood to be a chronological summary.

9. Paul Joüon, *Ruth: Commentaire philologique et exégésique* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1953), 34; Ernst Würthwein, *Die Fünf Megilloth* (HAT 18; 2nd ed.; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1969), 9–10; John R. Wilch, *Ruth* (ConC; St. Louis: Concordia, 2006).

10. Wilch, *Ruth*, 127.

11. *Ibid.*, 117. Wilch references *IBHS*, 651–2 (§ 39.2.3c), which states “A disjunctive-*waw* clause may also shift the scene or refer to new participants; the disjunction may come at the beginning or end of a larger episode or it may ‘interrupt’ one. The ‘interruptive’ use, better called explanatory or parenthetical, ‘break[s] into the main

summary, they lived”) introduces the summary, and the preterite verb *וימותרו* (“then [they] died”) relates a sequence internal to the summary. Moreover, it is followed by another non-sequential preterite that indicates the result of the sequence: *ותשאַר* (“and [she] was left”).

While this chronological summary is somewhat different from the previous ones, it demonstrates once again that the first preterite verb is used in a non-sequential fashion to introduce a summary. It is followed by a preterite used to indicate a sequence internal to the summary. Like the refrain in Gen 1 and the summary of Enoch’s life at Gen 5:23–24, it also contains a result, this time in the form of a clause beginning with a preterite verb.

*Judges 10:2; 12:7, 9b–10, 11b–12, 14b–15*

Five cases of a chronological summary headed by a preterite verb are found in Judges.<sup>12</sup> In each case they follow a narrative or brief description of the judge’s tenure and serve to summarize his activity in chronological terms. Like the examples in Gen 5, they are formulaic. A typical example is Judg 12:9b–10:

וישפט את־ישראל שבע שנים וימת אבצן ויקבר בבית לחם

So he judged Israel seven years. Then Ibzan died and was buried in Bethlehem.

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narrative to supply information relevant to or necessary for the narrative’ (# 10). The disjunction may also indicate ‘either the completion of one episode or the beginning of another.’” In the case of Ruth 1:4b–5 the parenthetical material is at the completion of the episode and summarizes it chronologically.

12. There are two other chronological summaries about Israel’s Judges: The first is for Samson, Judg 16:31b (והוא שפט את־ישראל עשרים שנה), “he had judged Israel twenty years”). The second is for Eli, 1 Sam 4:18b (והוא שפט את־ישראל ארבעים שנה), “he had judged Israel forty years”). Both begin with *והוא שפט* (“so he judged”) instead of the preterite *וישפט* (“so he judged”). In the case of Samson, his death and burial are recorded immediately before the summary (Judg 16:30–31a). Eli’s death is recorded immediately before the summary (1 Sam 4:18a), though his burial is never mentioned. In both cases the chronological summary has no need for an internal sequence, since the death has already been related. Therefore, the beginning of the summary is pronoun followed by perfect aspect verb instead of a preterite verb. It appears as if the preterite is needed at the head of a chronological summary that contains other verbal expressions indicating an internal temporal sequence or explaining circumstances during the period covered by the summary (see the discussion of 2 Kgs 11:3 below).



The basic structure of the summary formula in Judges is: [place] בַּיָּקֵבֶר [name] וַיִּשְׁפֹּט [number] שָׁנִים [number] (“So he judged [number] years, then [name] died and was buried in [place]”).<sup>13</sup>

In the chronological summary in Judges the head preterite verb is non-sequential, whereas the following two preterite verbs are both sequential and complete an internal sequence of events encapsulated in the summary.

### *2 Kings 11:3*

A final chronological summary to be examined here summarizes the young Joash’s time living in the temple precincts. The narration before the chronological summary notes:

וּתְקָה יְהוֹשֻׁבֵעַ בֶּת־הַמֶּלֶךְ־יִזְרָחָבֵל אֶחָיוֹת אֶחָיוֹת אֶת־יְוָאֵשׁ בֶּן־אַחֲזִיָּה וְתַגְנֹב אֹתוֹ  
מִתּוֹךְ בְּנֵי־הַמֶּלֶךְ הַמּוֹמְתִים אֹתוֹ וְאֶת־מִינְקָתוֹ בַּחֲדָר הַמְטוֹת וַיִּסְתְּרוּ אֹתוֹ מִפְּנֵי  
עֵתְלִיָּהוּ וְלֹא הוּמָת

Jehosheba, King Jehoram's daughter and Ahaziah's sister, took Joash son of Ahaziah and spirited him away from among the king's sons who were being killed [and put] him and the one who nursed him in a bedroom. So they hid him from Athaliah and he was not killed. (2 Kgs 11:2)

This is followed by a chronological summary of the final statement in 2 Kgs 11:2:

וַיְהִי אִתָּהּ בֵּית יְהוָה מִתְחַבֵּא שָׁשׁ שָׁנִים וְעֵתְלִיָּה מְלַכְתָּ עַל־הָאָרֶץ

So he was with her [in] the house of Yahweh, hiding for six years. Meanwhile, Athaliah ruled the land. (2 Kgs 11:3)

Interestingly, the final sentence in 2 Kgs 11:2 begins with a non-sequential preterite (וַיִּסְתְּרוּ, “so they hid”) that heads an explanation

13. There are minor variations: Tola’s name is omitted at 10:2. At 12:7 the explicit subject יִפְתָּח (“Jephthah”) is inserted after וַיִּשְׁפֹּט (“So he judged”). Some names include a patronymic and/or gentilic modifier (e.g., עַבְדוֹן בֶּן־הִלֵּל הַפְּרָעֲתוֹנִי, “Abdon, son of Hillel, the Pirathonite,” Judg 10:14). Places vary from a simple place name (e.g., Shamir; 10:2) to a place name with descriptor (“Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites”; 12:15).

illuminating Joash's whereabouts. Following this there is a summarizing preterite verb (וַיְהִי, "So he was") that stands at the head of the chronological summary of Joash's hiding in the Temple (2 Kgs 11:3). Within this summary there is no internal sequence. Instead, this summary has two verbs that explain the circumstances attending to Joash being in the Temple. They are participles, as would be expected in communicating attendant circumstances (מתחבא, "hiding" and מלכת, "ruling").<sup>14</sup> One feature of this chronological summary is important to note. It begins with a preterite verb from the root היה ("be, become"). In fact, it is the same verb that is at the head of the refrain in Gen 1: וַיְהִי ("In summary, there was").

#### THE IMPLICATIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING THE REFRAIN IN GENESIS 1

##### *The Refrain Follows the Form of a Chronological Summary*

To this point I have demonstrated the possibility that the refrain in Gen 1 is to be understood as a chronological summary and that it, therefore, would not be in temporal sequence with the preceding narrative about God's activity on the day being summarized. It ought to be noted that other chronological summaries demonstrate that:

1. A chronological summary with an internal sequence is normally introduced with a preterite verb used in a non-sequential fashion (i.e., the summary usage of preterites).
2. A chronological summary with an internal sequence uses temporally successive preterite verbs within the chronological summary.
3. A chronological summary can begin with a preterite from the root היה ("be, become"; Gen 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23–24, 27, 31; 9:29; 2 Kgs 11:3).
4. A chronological summary may contain a reference to a result (Gen 5:23–24; Ruth 1:4b–5).

14. *IBHS*, 624–25 (§ 37.6d).

5. Chronological summaries are frequently formulaic (Gen 5:5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23–24, 27, 31; 9:29 and Judges 10:2; 12:7, 9b–10; 11b–12; 14b–15).

All of these features are relevant to the refrain in Gen 1: It can be viewed 1) as having a non-sequential preterite at its head (the first ויהי [“In summary, there was”), 2) as employing a preterite from the root היה (“be, become”) at its head, 3) as having an internal sequence employing a sequential preterite (the second ויהי), 4) as containing a result (day X) and 5) as formulaic, occurring in the same basic pattern in all six appearances in Gen 1.

An objection might be raised against this interpretation: The same verb (ויהי, “and there was”) is used in two different ways in the refrain. However, that objection might be turned around: What other Hebrew verb might be used to express the onset of evening or morning in the past? In English we prefer to use the verb *came* as in “evening came, then morning came.” We normally do not use “there was an evening” to mean the onset of evening.<sup>15</sup> In Biblical Hebrew, there are no other examples of a verb other than ויהי (“and there was”) that is used with either ערב (“evening”) or בקר (“morning”) to indicate the onset of evening. An objection to two different uses of ויהי (“and there was”) in the refrain must first demonstrate that the author of Gen 1 had another option available to him. Then it ought to be demonstrated that the author chose not to use it, implying that by deliberately using the same verb twice the author may have been signaling that the refrain was not a chronological summary. Such cannot be demonstrated, so any objection to two different uses of the same verb in one sentence is moot at best.

#### *Other Biblical Passages Indicate that the Refrain is a Chronological Summary*

We have, therefore, two options for understanding the Gen 1 refrain. The first is that the refrain presents a chronology of the entire day, consisting of two parts: morning and evening and then stating a result—namely, that the two parts make up a particular single day: one day (Gen 1:5), a second day (Gen 1:8), a third day (Gen 1:13), a fourth day (Gen 1:19), a

15. We might use that phrase to identify a particular evening as in “There was an evening two weeks ago when I ate a later dinner.”

fifth day (Gen 1:23), a day, the sixth one (Gen 1:31).<sup>16</sup>

The alternative is that the refrain is in temporal sequence with the preceding narrative. In this case the temporal sequence would be: creative activity (presumably during daytime)—an evening—a morning. The refrain then lists a day, implying that these three components comprise the day.

How should we decide between these two options? As mentioned in the introduction, the treatment of sacred days in Israel's calendar tips the scale in favor of the refrain being a chronological summary. Clearly the Sabbath regulations in Exodus are based on the days of creation in Gen 1 (Exod 20:8–11; 31:12–17). Both Exod 20 and Exod 31 require that the Israelite week—six days followed by a seventh Sabbath day—are in sequence, and it bases this practice of the week culminating in the Sabbath on the days in Gen 1:1–2:4, implying they, too, were a seven-day sequence. Indeed, by mandating the weekly Sabbath, Exod 20 is teaching Israel that God did his work in six contiguous days just as Israel would do and that God rested on the next day, the Sabbath just as Israel would do. Moreover, as noted above, Israel's reckoning of days relating to their sacred festivals and the laws of purity deems days to begin in the evening. The most obvious way that this can be explained is that the later Scripture passages *do not* understand the refrain in Gen 1 to be in temporal sequence with the preceding narrative. Instead, the reckoning of sacred days from sundown indicates that the Gen 1 refrain was understood to be a chronological summary of the preceding narrative.

#### THE SEVENTH DAY (GEN 2:1–3)

One other feature of the narration of the creation week must be noted: the refrain is not appended to the presentation of the seventh day in Gen 2:1–3. However, this serves as a literary device that reinforces the point that this day is set apart as special (Gen 2:3). This is noted by Arnold:

16. For the reason for translating “one day” at Gen 1:5 see Steinmann, “Night and Day” and Steinmann, “Ordinal Number.” Although the versions generally render the subsequent days with a definite article, no article is present for days two through five. On the sixth day the text does not say הַיּוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי (“the sixth day”). It says יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי (“a day, the sixth one”). Therefore, the refrain deliberately and purposefully identifies each evening and morning as a particular single day.

*Narration of the seventh day is completely different from the previous six, obvious by the suspension of the creation formula used for the first six days.* Beyond this literary observation, it should be clear that the seven-day pattern of Gen 1:1–2:3 transforms something as simple as the weekly calendar, with its regular twenty-four hour periods, into a constant reminder of God’s creative sovereignty. . . . the creation narrative’s doxology—the institution of the Sabbath—goes beyond a hymn of praise because it asserts that time itself is God’s domain.<sup>17</sup>

Since the setting of the seventh day is the climax to the other six, it is doubtful that by omitting the refrain the author meant his readers to understand this day as in any way chronologically different than the previous six. It has been stated elsewhere that the author of Gen 2:1–3 “. . . did not consider his readers so dim-witted that they would not have understood there was no reason to repeat the refrain” (i.e., he had no compelling reason that forced him to affirm that the seventh day was a day chronologically like the previous six).<sup>18</sup> In fact, there was a good reason *not* to repeat the refrain—to signal the unique sanctified nature of the seventh day.

Yet some Christian commentators (but by no means all or even a majority) have used the lack of the refrain for the seventh day to argue that the seventh day is presented literarily as if it had no end, since the refrain is missing.<sup>19</sup> Originally this is a thought from Augustine who asserted, “But the seventh day is without any evening, nor hath it any setting, because Thou hast sanctified it to an everlasting continuance. . . .”<sup>20</sup> However, this makes sense only if the day is seen as drawing to an end at evening (i.e., that only daytime, not nighttime is in view). However, the seventh day is clearly a prototype for the Sabbath (Exod 20:8–11; 31:12–17), and Sabbaths *begin* at evening and include the next morning—both nighttime and daytime make up a single day. The Gen 1 refrain affirms this. Thus, Augustine’s little *theologicum* is without basis in the actual seventh day in Gen 2:1–3 and is simply a quaint, if

17. Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis* (New Cambridge Bible Commentary; (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2009), 50, emphasis added.

18. Steinmann, “Night and Day,” 149.

19. E.g., Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC 1A; Nashville: B & H, 1996), 181; Collins, “Reading Genesis,” 87.

20. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* 13.36.51 (NPNF1, 1:207).

misleading, meditation on the eternal rest God has prepared for his people (Heb 4:1–11).<sup>21</sup>

The seventh day in Israel’s week—the Sabbath—becomes the paradigm for the rest of the days of the week. That is, it is a day that begins at evening and ends at the following evening. It is difficult, if not impossible, to reckon the rest of the days of the week as having some other starting point such as sunrise (as in some ancient Egyptian reckonings) or at midnight (as is modern western tradition inherited from the ancient Romans). The command to do all one’s work during the first six days of the week and then rest on the seventh *requires* that the first

21. Collins views Augustine’s observation as “the simplest explanation” for the missing refrain on the seventh day (Collins, “Reading Genesis,” 87). However, it is not the simplest, nor is it correct. Arnold’s observation mentioned above is far simpler. Moreover, Collins appears to believe that Augustine’s remark carries the weight of both Christian and Jewish tradition (Collins, “Reading Genesis,” 87 n. 41). I am unaware, however, of any Jewish commentator who follows Augustine’s observation. Moreover, there are quite a few Christian commentators on Gen 2:1–3 who do not mention Augustine or apply his observation to the seventh day. Collins also follows Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews* (TNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 116 and F. F. Bruce, *Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 106 in asserting “Hebrews 4:3–11 says that believers have entered God’s Sabbath rest—a rest that began in Gen 2:1–3. This makes sense only if God is still enjoying that same Sabbath.” However, a close look at Heb 4:10 reveals that it actually says “For the person who has entered His rest has rested (κατέπαυσεν) from his own works, just as God did from His” (HCSB). The verb is an aorist, implying simple action, and the verse predicates this of both the person who has entered God’s rest and of God himself. The verb does not in itself denote continuing action as if God is still in his rest that was initiated on the seventh day. Moreover, it is surprising that had the author of Hebrews wanted to denote continuing action, he did not use a present or imperfect tense verb. See Ernst DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1898), §35; see also Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 554–62 which states: “The constant characteristic of the Aorist tense in all of its moods, including the participle, is that it represents the action denoted by it indefinitely; *i.e.* simply as an event, neither on the one hand picturing it in progress, nor on the other affirming the existence of its result.” Also, see Wallace, “The aorist tense ‘presents an occurrence in summary, viewed as a whole from the outside, without regard for the internal make-up of the occurrence.’ This contrasts with the present and imperfect, which portray the action as an ongoing process. . . . if a speaker wants to speak of the unchanging nature of a *state* (such as “I have” or “I live”), the aorist is not normally appropriate. . . . The constative aorist covers a multitude of actions. The event might be iterative in nature, or durative, or momentary, *but the aorist says none of this* [emphasis added]. . . . The aorist indicative is occasionally used to present a timeless, general fact. When it does so, it does not refer to a particular event that *did* happen, but to a generic event that *does* happen.” (Clearly, this last situation is not the case at Heb 4:10 where God’s action is portrayed as what happened in the past on the seventh day.)

six days be reckoned as beginning and ending in the same manner as the seventh day. One cannot have the sixth day ending at a time different than when the seventh day is beginning, nor can one have the next week's first day beginning at a time other than when the previous seventh day is ending. This, then, dictates that all seven days in the seven-day Sabbath cycle be reckoned from the same starting point of the twenty-four-hour daily cycle. A practice of switching the reckoning of the beginning of a number of days in sequence somewhere during the sequence is unknown and unwieldy.<sup>22</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The most compelling way to read the refrain at Gen 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31 is as a chronological summary of the events that transpired on that day. It presents each day as beginning in darkness (cf. Gen 1:2) and each day as progressing to a period of light, a cycle of evening followed by morning. Moreover, it also relates the result of having the cycle of evening and morning as forming a single day, with each day numbered. This understanding of the days in Gen 1 is affirmed in Israel's sacred days, which always begin in the evening and end with the onset of the following evening. This paper has marshalled evidence to demonstrate that the chronological summary exists in biblical Hebrew and is present in Gen 1. That chronological summary defines each day as "evening and morning." Though this paper has presented new evidence, this conclusion about the meaning of the refrain is nothing new, but is at least as old as Basil of Caesarea (ca. AD 330–379):

*And the evening and the morning were one day.* Why does Scripture say "one day" not "the first day"? Before speaking to us of the second, the third, and the fourth days, would it not have been more natural to call that one the first which began the series? If it therefore says "one day," it is from a wish to determine the measure of day and night, and to combine the time

22. This is not to assert that at times people did not reckon days differently from the officially sanctioned way of reckoning them in a society. For instance, we officially count days as beginning at midnight. Yet at times people will get up in the morning and call it "the start of a new day." It is not inconceivable that at times the Israelites had similar informal ways of referring to the beginning of days, most notably from morning. Thus, one might argue that some texts in the Scriptures use this informal reckoning. One might understand Exod 19:16; Judg 19:5, 8; Isa 28:19 in this way. However, even these passages can be reconciled with a day that began at the preceding evening.

that they contain. Now twenty-four hours fill up the space of one day—we mean of a day and of a night....It is as though it said: twenty-four hours measure the space of a day, or that, in reality a day is the time that the heavens starting from one point take to return there. Thus, every time that, in the revolution of the sun, evening and morning occupy the world, their periodical succession never exceeds the space of one day.<sup>23</sup>

23. Basil of Caesarea. *The Hexaemeron* 2.8 (NPNF2 8:64).