

Genesis 1:1-2:3, Hebrew Text with English Translation

- 1.1 בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים
In beginning / at first God created
אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ:
the heavens and the earth.
- 1.2 וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וְכָהוּ
And the earth was formless and chaotic,
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
and darkness over the deep-ocean's surface,
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת
and God's Spirit, hovering
עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:
over the surface of the waters.
- 1.3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר
And God said, Let light be!
וַיְהִי-אוֹר:
And there was light.
- 1.4 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאוֹר כִּי-טוֹב
And God saw the light, that (it was) good.
וַיַּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:
And God divided between the light and the darkness.
- 1.5 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם
And God called to the light, Day!
וּלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה
And to the darkness He called Night!
וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר
And there was evening, and there was morning--
יוֹם אֶחָד:
a first day.
- 1.6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רְקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם
And God said, Let an expanse be in (the) midst of the waters--
וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם:
and let it be a divider between waters to the waters!

1.7 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָרָקִיעַ
And God made the expanse,
וַיַּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לָרָקִיעַ
and it divided between the waters which were beneath the expanse,
וּבֵין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לָרָקִיעַ
and the waters which were above the expanse--
וַיְהִי־כֵן:
and so it happened.

1.8 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לָרָקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם
And God called to the expanse, Heavens!
וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר
And there was evening, and there was morning--
יוֹם שֵׁנִי:
a second day.

1.9 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
And God said,
יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם
Let the waters be collected from beneath the heavens
אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד
into one place,
וּתְרָאָה הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת
and let the dry land be seen!
וַיְהִי־כֵן:
And so it happened.

1.10 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבֶּשֶׁת אֶרֶץ
And God called to the dry land, Earth!
וּלְמַקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים
And to the collection of the waters He called, Seas!
וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:
And God saw that (it was) good.

1.11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים
And God said,

תִּדְשֵׂא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא
Let the earth grow green—

עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע
green grass, vegetation seeding / producing seed—
עֵץ פֶּרִי עֹשֶׂה פֶּרִי לְמִינֹו
fruit tree(s) bearing fruit of its kind,
אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בֹו
whose seed is in it,
עַל-הָאָרֶץ
upon the earth!

וַיְהִי-כֵן:
And so it happened.

1.12 וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דָּשָׂא
And the earth brought forth green grass--
עֵשֶׂב מְזֵרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ
herbage seeding / producing seed of its kind,

וְעֵץ עֹשֶׂה-פֶּרִי
and tree(s) making fruit,
אֲשֶׁר זֶרְעוֹ-בֹו לְמִינֵהוּ
those with its seed in it, of its kind.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:
And God saw that (it was) good.

1.13 וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב
And there was evening,
וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר
and there was morning--

יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:
a third day.

1.14 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם
And God said, Let light-bearers be in the expanse of the heavens,

לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה
to divide between the day and the night.

וַהֲיוּ לְאֹתֹת
And they will be for signs,

וּלְמוֹעֲדִים

and for appointed seasons,

וּלְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים:

and for days and years.

1.15 וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

And they will be for light-bearers in the expanse of the heavens,

לְהַאֲרִיךְ עַל-הָאָרֶץ

to give light upon the earth.

וַיְהִי-כֵן:

And so it happened.

1.16 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים

And God made the two light-bearers, the great ones—

אֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַגְּדֹל לְמִשְׁלַת הַיּוֹם

the light-bearer, the great one, for rule of the day,

וְאֶת-הַמְּאֹר הַקָּטָן לְמִשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה

and the light-bearer, the small one, for rule of the night—

וְאֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים:

and the stars.

1.17 וַיִּתֵּן אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

And God placed them in the expanse of the heavens,

לְהַאֲרִיךְ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

to give light over the earth,

1.18 וּלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה

and to rule over the day and over the night,

וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ

and to divide between the light and the darkness.

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.

1.19 וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב

And there was evening,

וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר

and there was morning--

יוֹם רְבִיעִי:

a fourth day.

- 1.20 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם
 And God said, Let the waters swarm—
 שָׂרֵץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
 swarm(s) of living beings,
 וְעוֹף יַעֲוֹף עַל-הָאָרֶץ
 and bird(s), let (them) fly over the earth,
 עַל-פְּנֵי רִקְיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם:
 over (the) expanse of the heavens' surface!
- 1.21 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הַתַּנִּינִם הַגְּדֹלִים
 And God created the sea-monsters, the great ones,
 וְאֵת כָּל-נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה
 and every living being--
 הַרֹמְשֹׁת
 the ones that glide about,
 אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם
 with which the waters swarmed,
 לְמִינֵהֶם
 of their kind;
 וְאֵת כָּל-עוֹף כָּנָף
 and every winged bird,
 לְמִינֵהוּ
 of its kind.
 וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:
 And God saw that (it was) good.
- 1.22 וַיְבָרֵךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר
 And God blessed them, saying,
 פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ
 Be fruitful, and multiply,
 וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת-הַמַּיִם בַּיָּמִים
 and fill the waters in the seas.
 וְהָעוֹף יִרְבַּ בָּאָרֶץ:
 And the bird(s), let (them) multiply in the earth!
- 1.23 וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב
 And there was evening,

וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

and there was morning--

יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי:

a fifth day.

1.24 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

And God said,

תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

Let the earth bring forth living being(s)

לְמִינָהּ

of its kind--

בַּהֵמָה וּרְמֵשׂ

cattle, and animal(s) that creep,

וּחַיֵּי־הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ

and earth's wild-life of its kind.

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

And so it happened.

1.25 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ

And God made the earth's wild-life of its kind,

וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ

and the cattle of its kind,

וְאֵת כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ

and all animals creeping on the ground, of its kind.

וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.

1.26 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

And God said,

נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ

Let us make humanity in our image,

כְּדַמוֹתֵנוּ

like our likeness;

וַיִּרְדּוּ בְּדִגַּת הַיָּם

and let them rule over the sea's fish,

וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

and over the heavens' birds,

וּבְבֵהֶמָּה

and over the cattle,

וּבְכָל־הָאָרֶץ

and over all the earth,

וּבְכָל־הַרֶמֶשׂ הַרֹמֵשׂ עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

and over all the swarm(s) that swarm upon the earth!

1.27 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ

And God created the human being in His likeness,

בְּצֶלֶם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ

in God's likeness He created him.

זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Male and female He created them.

1.28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים

And God blessed them,

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים

and God said to them,

פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

Be fruitful, and multiply,

וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

and fill the earth,

וּכְבֹּשְׁהָ

and bring it under control;

וַיְרֹדוּ בַדְּגַת הַיָּם

and rule over the sea's fish,

וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

and over the heavens' bird(s),

וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הַרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ:

and over every living animal that creeps upon the earth!

1.29 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים הִנֵּה

And God said, Look--

נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע

I gave to you people every herbage bearing seed,

אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ
that is upon the surface of all the earth,

וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְּרִי-עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע
and every tree that has within it tree-fruit, bearing seed–

לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:
for you people it will be for eating;

1.30 וְלִכְל-חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ
and for all the earth's wild-life,

וְלִכְל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם
and for all the heavens' bird(s),

וְלִכְל רֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ
and for everything creeping upon the earth,

אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
which have in them life's breath–

אֶת-כָּל-יֶרֶק עֹשֵׂב לְאֹכְלָהּ
every green herb for eating!

וַיְהִי-כֵן:

And so it happened.

1.31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת-כָּל-אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
And God saw everything that He made;

וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב מְאֹד
and look--exceedingly good!

וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר
And there was evening, and there was morning,

יוֹם הַשִּׁשִּׁי:
the sixth day.

2.1 וַיִּכְלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ
And the heavens and the earth were finished,

וְכָל-צְבָאָם:
and all their army.

2.2 וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי
And God finished on the seventh day

מֵלְאֲכָתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה
His work which He made.

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

And He rested on the seventh day

מִכָּל-מַלְאָכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

from all His work which He made.

2.3 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

And God blessed the seventh day,

וַיִּקְדָּשׁ אֹתוֹ

and He set it apart–

כִּי בּוֹ שָׁבַת מִכָּל-מַלְאָכְתּוֹ

for on it He rested from all His work

אֲשֶׁר-בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

which God created to make.

What do we have here? It is, we believe, the first and last statement of the **Hebrew Bible**, the **Tanakh**. The Jewish scholars, found it as it is, and, thinking that it sums up the meaning of the **Bible**, put it in the first place in the **Bible**, as they put together the many different Hebrew scrolls. It is, we believe, a Divinely given vision, that overcomes the narrowness of Judaism, to proclaim the universal God of creation, Who welcomes all humanity into His “rest.” And, in a simple, easily understood / memorized seven-day depiction of that creation, shows all creation moving toward God’s “rest.” The vision contains no mention of Israel, or Jerusalem, or the Jews—but rather depicts the whole world, created by God, with humanity as the highest of His creatures—bearing His image, both male and female, made for intimate relationship with each other and with God, destined to share in His “rest.”

They gave no author’s name to the vision. We think of Moses, or perhaps Solomon (with his deep interest in nature)—but most of all we think of **Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55 of Isaiah)**, with its universalism, and with its emphasis on sharing in sabbath-rest, and **Ezekiel**, with its vision-stories of the valley of dry bones being resurrected to new life (**Ezekiel 37**) and the river of life flowing from the temple to the Dead Sea, bring new life (**Ezekiel 47**). Whoever the author was, it is a powerful, beautiful vision—but like all biblical visions, it contains puzzling enigmas, not easily answered, that have called forth attempts at solution by biblical scholars all over the world. Welcome to this great vision, as we begin to explore its meaning, and interact with worldwide scholarship!

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF GENESIS,¹

and Genesis 1:1-2:3, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

Text: The Hebrew text which we are using as the basis for this commentary is the traditional Masoretic text, which has been preserved in the great majority of medieval manuscripts, and which we are taking from the **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia**, edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph, and published by the Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt Stuttgart, 1977. Its Hebrew text has been based on the **Leningrad Manuscript B19A**, dated in the early 11th century C.E. The text has been provided to Bible-Works by the Westminster Theological Seminary.

Wenham states that “Despite the relative lateness of the main Masoretic manuscripts, it is universally recognized that the Masoretic Text [compiled by Rabbinic scholars in Tiberias in the 7th and 8th centuries C.E. [Common Era], but reaching back to a much earlier time] of **Genesis** has preserved the Hebrew text with remarkable fidelity from pre-Christian times.

“This conclusion, reached originally by comparing the Masoretic Text with other versions [primarily the **Samaritan Pentateuch**, from the fifth century B.C.E., Before Common Era]; the Greek Translation, or (**Septuagint, LXX, Rahlfs**), from the third century B.C.E. preserved in a number of Christian manuscripts from the fourth century C.E. and later; also the Peshitta Syriac, the Aramaic Targums, and the Latin Vulgate of Jerome are useful for comparison. This conclusion has also been confirmed by the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Fragments of fifteen manuscripts of **Genesis** have been found at Qumran dating from about the first century B.C.E. These show few variants from the traditional text. Readings agreeing with the **LXX** are rare, suggesting that the text of **Genesis** was already standardized in this era...

“These newer discoveries have led to renewed confidence in the relative antiquity and general superiority of the Masoretic Text. Waltke (1970) showed again that the **Samaritan Pentateuch**...represents a revision of the Masoretic Text [that is, as early as the fifth century

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The student is urged to purchase a copy of **The New International Version Study Bible**, our **NIVSB** (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506), where Ronald Youngblood is the author of its footnotes (henceforth referred to as “Youngblood”) and read the introductory materials at the beginning of **Genesis**, as well as its notes on each page of **Genesis**. In addition, the student is urged to purchase a copy of **The New Interpreter’s Study Bible**, our **TNISB**, (Abingdon Press, 2003), where the author of the footnotes is Theodore Hiebert, professor of Old Testament at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois (henceforth referred to as “Hiebert”) and to read all its footnotes as well as its introductory materials. We urge the same thing for the **ESV Study Bible, ESVSB** (2008, Crossway Bibles, Wheaton, Illinois), where T. Desmond Alexander, who teaches at Union Theological College in Belfast, Ireland is the principle author (henceforth referred to as “Alexander”). In so doing, the student will be relating to not only this present author’s studies, but to scholars throughout the English-speaking world.

B.C.E.!), in which Hebrew grammar is modernized and linguistic, historical, and theological problems are eased or brought into line with sectarian ideology. He argues that much of this revision dates from about the fifth century B.C.E. and that the Masoretic Text's textual tradition must therefore be earlier.

“Similarly, the **Septuagint** [or **LXX**, the Greek Translation (**Rahlfs**) of the **Hebrew Bible**], which sometimes has readings in common with the **Samaritan Pentateuch**, reflects a later variant Hebrew tradition at some points and is most useful as a witness to the understanding of **Genesis** current among Egyptian Jews in the third century B.C.E.” (1, pp. xxiv-xxv). See the article “Samaritan Torah” in **Wikipedia** on the Internet.

In this commentary, we will be foot-noting the variant readings that are found in these ancient witnesses to the Hebrew text as they occur. Admittedly, this makes for great difficulty in reading, but it has great potential for teaching us much about our **Bible**. The text of our **Bible** has not been “dropped down from heaven” in the form of an absolutely perfect, or “infallible” text, that has been perfectly preserved from any error in transmission.

Such extreme claims are made by some orthodox Jews (for example, Rabbi Tovia Singer, of Arlington, Texas), who holds that every word and every letter in the text has been preserved perfectly, over against the **New Testament** with its admitted thousands of variant readings. It is on this basis that the widely popularized **Bible Code** has been based. See the article “Bible Code” in **Wikipedia** on the Internet for discussion of this matter. Another author, making extreme claims, is Jonathan D. Sarfati, **The Genesis Account** (A Theological, historical, and scientific commentary on Genesis 1-11), published by CREATION BOOK PUBLISHERS, Powder Springs, Georgia, who holds that the **Book of Genesis** is “the written Word of God...Divinely inspired and inerrant in its original autograph [which is no longer available!] henceforth ‘Sarfati’.”

The Muslims oftentimes make similar claims for their **Koran**, as have the Mormons for the **Book of Mormon**, and there are many Christian students who make similar claims for the entire **King James Bible**, or later translations. Such claims cannot stand the rigid test of thorough examination of the texts—not only those of the Muslims and the Mormons, but also in **Genesis**, or the rest of the **Hebrew Bible**, the so-called **Tanakh** (which is an acronym for **Torah**, “Five Books of Moses,” **Nebiiym**, “Spokespersons,” or “Prophets,” both Early and Later), and **Kethubiym** (the additional “writings,” including **Psalms**, **Proverbs**, **Job**, **Chronicles**, **Daniel**, and others), nor in any of the documents of the **New Testament**. Such claims are indefensible, whether made by Muslims, Mormons, Jews or Christians.

At the same time, study of the variant readings of the biblical text play a very important role in serious study, as the variant readings force the student and translator to pay particular attention to the language of the text, which is no longer taken for granted. We have especially appreciated the **Samaritan Pentateuch's** numerous grammatical and spelling corrections of the Hebrew text (just as we have appreciated the many slight changes and adjustments of the text of the **New Testament** by the fifth century **Codex Bezae**). There are numerous examples throughout the text of **Genesis** of the differences between the **Samaritan Pentateuch** and the Masoretic Hebrew text.

Out of the study of textual variants comes the conclusion that the biblical text has been wonderfully well preserved across the span of close to three thousand years. For example, if all of the truly significant variant readings that are found in the **Greek New Testament** should be added together, they would hardly make up more than two or three pages of a 600 page **Greek New Testament**, and none of them would make any real change for its overall teaching. We have reached a similar conclusion with regard to the text of **Genesis**. There are in fact, hundreds of variant readings; but very few of them make any significant difference for the overall meaning— not even half a page. Where there is a significant difference, it can almost always be traced to sectarian influence (such as in a few readings in the **Samaritan Pentateuch**, and in the variant readings in the **Greek New Testament** found in Marcion, who lived in the 2nd century C.E., and who changed the text to conform to his views).

Title: The first phrase in the Hebrew text of 1:1 is בְּרֵאשִׁית, **bereshith** ("in beginning," or "at first"), which is also the Hebrew title of the scroll (scrolls in ancient times customarily were named after their first word or two). The English title, **Genesis**, is Greek in origin and comes from the word γενέσεως, **geneseos**, which appears in the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) of **Genesis 2:4; 5:1**. Depending on its context, the word can mean "birth," "origin" or "descent." In both its Hebrew and Greek forms, then, the title of **Genesis** appropriately describes its contents, since it is primarily a book of beginnings.

How true that is. **Genesis** is packed with important theological teachings, that form the basis for understanding the rest of the **Bible**. Its teachings concerning creation, the goodness of all creation, especially of humanity--male and female, the origin of evil, the unity of the human race, the judgments and blessings of YHWH Elohiym / God in history and the Divine promise that gives humanity a future--these and many more basic biblical teachings (such as God's providential care in the life of individuals and nations) find their roots in **Genesis**. It is not however, a book that stands on its own, but is the first of the "Five Books of Moses," and we will see that the opening words of **Exodus** are a continuation of the narrative of **Genesis**.

Background: Chapters 1-38 reflect a great deal of what we know from other sources about ancient Mesopotamian life and culture. Stories of creation, genealogies of peoples, stories about a world-wide destructive flood, geography and map-making, construction techniques, migrations of peoples, sale and purchase of land, legal customs and procedures, sheep-herding and cattle-raising--all these subjects and many others were matters of vital concern to the peoples of Mesopotamia during the time reflected in **Genesis**. They were also of interest to the individuals, families and tribes of whom we read in the first 38 chapters of **Genesis**.

The author appears to locate Eden, humanity's first home, in or near Mesopotamia; the tower of Babel was built there; Abram was born there; Isaac ("Yitschaq") took a wife from there; and Jacob ("Yaaqobh") lived there for 20 years. Although these patriarchs settled in Palestine, their original home-land was Mesopotamia.

Even though we cannot find one exact archeological confirmation of the stories of **Genesis**, what we can find is abundant evidence that they accurately reflect the background of the

ancient Near East from which they come.² The more we learn about the ancient Near East, the more we learn about the context from which the **Book of Genesis** comes, and the more we become able to understand its message and meaning for today, with our greatly different cultural context.

The closest ancient literary parallels to **Genesis 1-38** also come from Mesopotamia.

Enuma Elish ("When on high"--entitled **The Creation Epic** in Pritchard's work, pp. 60-72), tells the story of the God Marduk's rise to supremacy in the Babylonian pantheon, and is similar in some respects (though thoroughly mythical and polytheistic) to the **Genesis 1** creation account.

Some of the features of certain king lists from Sumer bear striking resemblance to the genealogy in **Genesis 5**, especially with regards to the longevity of the ancient kings!

The 11th tablet of the **Gilgamesh Epic** (see Pritchard, pp. 72-90) is quite similar in outline to the flood narrative in **Genesis 6-8**.

Several of the major events of **Genesis 1-8** are narrated in the same order as similar events in the **Atrahasis Epic** (see Pritchard, pp. 104-06). In fact, the latter features the same basic motif of creation-rebellion-flood as the biblical account.

Clay tablets found recently at the ancient (about 2500-2300 B.C.) site of Ebla (modern Tell Mardikh) in northern Syria may also contain some intriguing parallels, especially in its story of the battle between Baal and Yam, which is the Canaanite version of Enuma Elish. See J.C.L. Gibson's *Canaanite Myths and Legends*, second edition (T & T Clark International, New York, 2004).

In the light of these literary parallels, it becomes clear that the biblical story of creation in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** is intended as a powerful correction of the ancient Near East's polytheistic and superstitious views of creation.

In like manner, the biblical story of the universal flood (**Genesis 6-9**) is intended as an equally powerful correction of the commonly held flood stories throughout the ancient Near

2

The student is urged to consult James B. Pritchard's work entitled **Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament** (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1969). This work consists of two volumes, the second of which is **The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament**, and which contains hundreds of very helpful pictures of archaeological findings. Unless otherwise noted, our normal reference to Pritchard will be to volume one. **Genesis** fits into the cultural and sociological and political world revealed in these texts, like a hand fits into a glove. To attempt to understand **Genesis** apart from this cultural context oftentimes leads the interpreter astray, into unfounded conclusions. But to learn this cultural context, and interpret **Genesis** in its light, makes the biblical message come to life in an amazingly helpful new light.

East, especially such as that found in the **Epic of Gilgamesh**, revealing the true and living God over against the Gods of polytheism.

Two other sets of documents demonstrate the reflection of Mesopotamia in the first 38 chapters of **Genesis**.

From the **Mari letters** (see Pritchard, pp. 482-83), dating from the patriarchal period, we learn that the names of the patriarchs (including especially Abram, Jacob and Job) were typical of that time. The letters also clearly illustrate the freedom of travel that was possible between various parts of the Amorite world in which the patriarchs lived.

The **Nuzi tablets** (see Pritchard, pp. 219-20), though a few centuries later than the patriarchal period, shed light on patriarchal customs, which tended to survive virtually intact for many centuries. The inheritance right of an adopted household member or slave (see **Genesis 15:1-4**), the obligation of a barren wife to furnish her husband with sons through a servant girl (see **Genesis 16:2-4**), strictures against expelling such a servant girl and her son (see **Genesis 27:1-4, 22-23, 33**)--these and other legal customs, social contracts and provisions are graphically illustrated in Mesopotamian documents, including the legal codes such as the **Law-Code of Lipit-Ishtar** and the **Code of Hammurabi**. These law-codes reveal the kind of laws under which the patriarchs of Israel lived, long before the giving of the **Ten Commandments** and the **Covenant Code** of Israel in **Exodus**.

As **Genesis 1-38** is Mesopotamian in character and background, so **chapters 39-50** reflect Egyptian influence. Examples of such influence are: Egyptian grape cultivation (**40:9-11**), the Nile Riverside scene (**chapter 41**), Egypt as Canaan's breadbasket (**chapter 42**), Canaan as the source of numerous products for Egyptian consumption (**chapter 43**), Egyptian religious and social customs (the end of **chapters 43** and **46**), Egyptian administrative procedures (**chapter 47**), Egyptian funerary practices (**chapter 50**) and several Egyptian words and names used throughout these chapters.

The closest specific literary parallel from Egypt is the **Tale of Two Brothers** (see Pritchard, pp. 23-25), which bears some resemblance to the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (**chapter 39**). Other literary parallels include Egyptian autobiographical narratives (such as the **Story of Sinuhe**, see Pritchard, pp. 18-23, the **Report of Wenamun**, see Pritchard, pp. 25-29), and some historical legends which give general literary parallels. As we read the story of Joseph ("Yoseph") we enter into the cultural environment reflected in the Egyptian monuments and literary remains.

Author and Date of Writing:

Historically, the majority of Jews and Christians alike have held that Moses was the author / compiler of the first five books of the **Hebrew Bible**, or "**Old Testament**" (as Christians have commonly called it). These books, known also as the **Pentateuch** (meaning "five-volume book"), were referred to in Jewish tradition as the five fifths of the **Torah**, the Law (of Moses). Many conservative scholars hold that the **Bible** itself suggests Mosaic authorship of **Genesis**, since **Acts 15:1** refers to circumcision as "the custom taught by Moses," an allusion to **Genesis 17** (which says nothing concerning authorship of **Genesis**, only the origin of

circumcision). However, they will admit that a certain amount of later editorial updating does appear to be indicated, especially in the last chapter of **Deuteronomy**.³

3

Sarfati holds strongly to the Mosaic authorship of the **Pentateuch**, claiming that there are numerous claims of his authorship in the text, naming specifically the following passages from **Exodus**, **Numbers**, and **Deuteronomy** (but not a passage from **Genesis**):

Exodus 17:14,

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה

And YHWH said to Moses,

כָּתֹב זֹאת זִכְרוֹן בַּסֵּפֶר

Write this, a memorial in the scroll,

וְשִׂים בְּאָזְנֵי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ

and place (it) in Joshua's ears,

כִּי-מַחֶה אֶמְחֶה אֶת-זִכְרֵ עַמְלֶק

that I will certainly wipe out Amaleq's memory

מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם:

from beneath the heavens.

(This passage depicts Moses as being able to write, and to write in "the scroll," perhaps the "Scroll of Exodus," the Divine curse on Amaleq. But it says nothing about the **Pentateuch** or **Five Books of Moses**.)

Exodus 24:4a...7,

4 וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת כָּל-דִּבְרֵי יְהוָה

And Moses wrote all of YHWH's words...

(These were the words YHWH had spoken to him on Mount Sinai, the words of the "Covenant Code" contained in **Exodus 20:22-23:19**; or, **Exodus 21:1-22:16**. Nothing is said concerning the **Pentateuch** / **Five Books of Moses**, or the **Scroll of Exodus**!)

7 וַיִּקַּח סֵפֶר הַבְּרִית

And he (Moses) took a scroll of the covenant,

וַיִּקְרָא בְּאָזְנֵי הָעָם

and he read (it) in the people's ears.

וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר יְהוָה

And they said, All that YHWH said,

(continued...)

³(...continued)

נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע:

we will do, and we will listen / obey!

(So we learn that Moses could write a “covenant scroll,” that would eventually become a part of the **Scroll of Exodus**, and read it to the people. But this is far from a claim to authorship of the entire **Scroll of Exodus**, let alone the **Pentateuch**!)

Exodus 34:27 [-28],

27 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה

And YHWH said to Moses,

כְּתֹב־לְךָ אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

Write for yourself these words;

כִּי עַל־פִּי הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה

because according to (the) mouth of these words

כָּרַתִּי אִתְּךָ בְרִית וְאֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

I wrote with you a covenant, and with Israel.

28 וַיְהִי־שָׁם עִם־יְהוָה

And he was there with YHWH

אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה

Forty day(s) and forty night(s).

לֶחֶם לֹא אָכַל וּמַיִם לֹא שָׁתָה

He did not eat bread / food, and he did not drink water.

וַיִּכְתֹּב עַל־הַלְּחֹת אֶת דְּבָרֵי הַבְּרִית

And he wrote upon the (stone) tablets words of the covenant,

עֲשֶׂר־הַדְּבָרִים:

the ten words.

(Yes, Moses could write, and he could write YHWH’s covenant with himself and with Israel. But what he wrote (or YHWH wrote) was not the **Scroll of Exodus**, or the **Pentateuch**, the **Five Books of Moses**—it was the Ten Words / Commandments! And we wonder whether it was Moses or YHWH who wrote the words!)

Numbers 33:2,

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־מוֹצְאֵיהֶם לְמַסְעֵיהֶם

And Moses wrote their goings forth by their pulling-outs,

(continued...)

³(...continued)

עַל־פִּי יְהוָה

according to YHWH's mouth.

וְאֵלֶּה מַסְעֵיהֶם לְמוֹצָאֵיהֶם:

And these—their pulling-outs by their goings forth.

(Yes, Moses could write; and he wrote, at YHWH's direction, an itinerary for their times of leaving and pulling out. But there is nothing here concerning Moses' writing one of the "**Five Scrolls / Books**" or "**Pentateuch**.”)

Deuteronomy 31:9,

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת:

And Moses wrote this **Torah** / teaching;

וַיִּתְּנָהּ אֶל־הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי

and he gave it to the priests, sons of Levi,

הַנֹּשְׂאִים אֶת־אֲרוֹן בְּרִית יְהוָה

the ones bearing (the) chest of the covenant of YHWH;

וְאֶל־כָּל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

and (he gave it to) all Israel's elders / officials.

(Yes, not only could Moses write, he could write an entire scroll, here, apparently, the **Scroll of Deuteronomy**, which he gave to the Levitical priests, evidently to be carried alongside the chest of the covenant. However, it seems obvious that what is meant is an early form of **Deuteronomy**, without the addition of Moses' song, which he also wrote—see **verse 22**—and certainly not including the final paragraph of **Deuteronomy**, which tells of Moses' death and subsequent times. Safari admits this in his footnote 7 (Chapter 1, p. 11): “Admittedly, **Deuteronomy** includes an account of Moses' death... **34:5-8**...It's likely that Joshua appended Moses' death to close out the Books of Moses.” But there is not a mention here of Moses' writing the **Pentateuch** or the **Five Books of Moses**. One of the Five, but not all Five!)

The Jewish scholar Jeffrey Tigay, in his **JPS Torah Commentary Deuteronomy**, comments that “Now that Moses has finished expounding the Teaching (see **1:5**), which he has imparted orally until now, he writes it down and arranges for its regular public reading so that the people may be reminded regularly of its contents and future generations may learn it. These were steps of far-reaching significance. The writing of the Teaching was part of the process that eventually led to the creation of sacred Scripture—that is, the **Bible**—which is the heart of Judaism. The public reading of the Teaching is part of the ‘democratic’ character of biblical religion, which addresses its teachings and demands to all its adherents, with few distinctions between priests and laity, and calls for universal education of the citizenry in law and religion.” (P. 291)

(continued...)

³(...continued)

Deuteronomy 31:22,

וַיִּכְתֹּב מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא

And Moses wrote this song on that day,

וַיְלַמְדָהּ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

and he taught it to Israel's children.

(Yes, Moses could write—separate laws and itineraries, and even a whole scroll of the **Torah**; but now he writes a song, to be added to the **Scroll of Deuteronomy**. But nothing is said of the other Four Books of Moses, or the “Pentateuch”—which Safarti claims these passages show.)

Deuteronomy 31:24 [-26],

24 וַיְהִי כִּכְלֹת מֹשֶׁה לְכַתֵּב אֶת־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת

And it happened as Moses finished writing (the) words of this **Torah** / teaching

עַל־סֵפֶר עַד תַּמּוּם:

upon a scroll until their completion,

25 וַיִּצַו מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַלְוִיִּם

And Moses commanded the Levites,

נֹשְׂאֵי אָרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר:

(the) ones bearing (the) chest of YHWH's covenant, saying:

26 לָקַח אֵת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה

Take this scroll of the **Torah** / teaching,

וּשְׂמַתֶּם אֹתוֹ מֵצַד אָרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

and place it beside (the) chest of YHWH your God's covenant;

וְהָיָה־שָׁם בְּךָ לְעֵד:

and it will be there for a witness against you!

(Yes, Moses could write! Yes, he could write an early form of the **Scroll of Deuteronomy**—to be completed by Joshua or someone else. But with all of this writing, not a word is said concerning the **Five Books of Moses** / the **Pentateuch**! And as far as the **Scroll of Genesis** is concerned, there is not a word in it concerning authorship, certainly not a mention of Moses!)

We think a reading of **Kings** and **Chronicles** will demonstrate that the **Scroll of Deuteronomy** was taken by the priests, along with the chest of the covenant, and placed in the temple—where in time, the scroll was mis-placed and forgotten, until the time of Josiah, when it was found, and having been read, led Israel in a great religious

(continued...)

³(...continued)

revival. There is no mention of any other of the Five Scrolls of Moses being in the temple in the time of Josiah!

Safarti appeals to other passages in the **Hebrew Bible** as affirming Moses' authorship of the **Pentateuch**:

Joshua 1:7-8, most probably referring the **Scroll of Deuteronomy**—no mention of the **Pentateuch**—only הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת, literally, “the teaching, this one.”

Joshua 8:32-34, which mentions a סֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה, Scroll of Moses' Teaching,” again most probably referring to the **Scroll of Deuteronomy**, and most probably only a small portion of it—which he was able to write on the stones of the altar built on Mount Ebal—probably the Ten Commandments, certainly not the entire **Scroll of Deuteronomy**, absolutely not the **Pentateuch**!

Judges 3:4, which mentions: מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה אֶת־אֲבוֹתָם בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה: “(the) commandments of YHWH which he command their fathers by (the) hand of Moses.” Yes, “commandments”; but not the **Pentateuch**, or **The Five Scrolls of Moses**”!

1 Kings 2:3, which mentions YHWH's חֻקֹּתָיו מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְעֵדוּתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְעֵדוּתָיו, “His statutes, His commandments, and His Judicial Decisions, and His Testimonies, like the (ones) written in Moses' *Torah* / Teaching.” But not a mention of the **Pentateuch** or **Five Scrolls of Moses**!

2 Kings 14:6, which says concerning king Amaziah

וְאֶת־בְּנֵי הַמַּכִּים לֹא הִמִּית

And (the) sons of the ones striking (his father Josiah) he did not put to death,

כַּכְּתוּב בְּסֵפֶר תּוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה

according to the written (text) in a scroll of (the) teaching of Moses,

אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה יְהוָה לֵאמֹר

which YHWH commanded, saying,

לֹא־יִוָּמְתוּ אָבוֹת עַל־בְּנֵיהֶם

You shall not put to death fathers over / upon (what their) sons (did)!

(continued...)

Most so-called "liberal" scholars hold that **Genesis** was probably not compiled in its final form until much later, during the time of Solomon (the major stories), and then edited in its final form as late as after the Babylonian exile, especially by the work of Ezra and his fellow priests / scribes. Some students have held that while there are clearly many very ancient stories contained in the final **Book of Genesis**, reaching back long before the time of Moses, still the final editing of the entirety of the book as a whole was the work of later ages, with

³(...continued)

וּבְנֵיהֶם לֹא יוּמָתוּ עַל־אֲבוֹתָם

And sons shall not be put to death over / upon (what their) fathers (did)!

כִּי אִם־אִישׁ בְּחַטָּאתוֹ (יָמוּת) [יוֹמָת]:

But rather, each man by / for his sin will be put to death!

(This passage mentions "a scroll of (the) **Torah** / Teaching of Moses, and then makes it very specific, by quoting verbatim **Deuteronomy 24:16**. But there is no mention of the **Pentateuch** or **Five Scrolls of Moses**!)

2 Kings 21:8, where YHWH is depicted as promising His people will not be caused to wander from the Land of Israel,

רַק אִם־יִשְׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִים

Only if they will keep doing according to all which I commanded them,

וּלְכֹל־תְּחִלָּתָהּ אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה אֶתֶם עַבְדִּי מֹשֶׁה:

and to all the **Torah** / teaching which My servant Moses commanded them.

(Again, the passage mentions YHWH's **Torah** / teaching which Moses commanded the Israelites, but there is no mention of a specific scroll, let alone any mention of the **Pentateuch** or **Five Scrolls of Moses**!)

Safarti adds **2 Chronicles 25:4**; **Ezra 6:18**; **Nehemiah 8:1**; **13:1** (without doubt referring to **Deuteronomy 23:1-3**^{Eng}) and **Daniel 9:11-13**, but as in the passages already examined, there is not a mention of the **Pentateuch** or the **Five Scrolls of Moses** in any of them. The same thing is true of the passages he refers to in the **New Testament**. It is the universal belief in the **Hebrew Bible** and in the **Greek New Testament** that Moses lived, gave YHWH's **Torah**, wrote Scripture, and prophesied the coming of a great prophet like himself. But there is not one mention of the **Pentateuch** or the **Five Scrolls of Moses**! The passages Safarti refers to do not prove what he says they do.

Safarti adds that "While Moses was an eye-witness to the events of **Exodus** to **Deuteronomy**, the events of **Genesis** occurred long before his time. Moses is not actually named as author in the **book**. So the best explanation is that Moses was the *editor* of **Genesis**." (*Ibid.*) However, there is nothing said in the **Book of Genesis** about Moses' being its "editor," either. Safarti is grasping at straws.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 being perhaps one of the latest writings contained in the **Hebrew Bible**,

having been written as a sort of “introduction” to the teaching of the entire **Hebrew Bible**, by priests in post-exilic Israel (after 536 B.C.).

Whatever its date, and authorship, it is one of the most powerful theological statements ever made, with its universalistic view and emphasis on the Sabbath rest of God as the goal of creation. We are convinced that it is a vision-story, given to an unknown Hebrew author—perhaps Solomon, with his interest in nature, or even more likely **Second Isaiah** with its universalism and concern for sabbath observance, or **Ezekiel**, with its powerful vision-stories of the valley of dry bones brought back to life (**Ezekiel 37**) and the river of life flowing from the temple to the Dead Sea, bringing new life to the dead (**Ezekiel 47**), likewise combined with deep concern for sabbath observance.

The historical period during which Moses lived seems to be fixed with a fair degree of accuracy by **1 Kings**. We are told that "the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel" was the same as "the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt" (**1 Kings 6:1**). Since the former was approximately (“c.”, “about”) 966 B.C. (or B.C.E.; Christians prefer “Before Christ,” Jews prefer “Before Common Era”; I prefer “Before Christian Era”), the latter--and thus the date of the exodus--was about 1446 (assuming the 480 in **1 Kings 6:1** is to be taken literally). The 40 year period of Israel's wanderings in the desert, which lasted from about 1446 to about 1406, would have been the most likely time for Moses to write the bulk of what is today known as the **Pentateuch** (if we are to consider Moses as the author). But these dates are disputed by many scholars, and the date of the exodus is oftentimes placed in the thirteenth century B.C., rather than in the fifteenth.

During the last two centuries many scholars have claimed to find in the **Pentateuch** four (or more) underlying sources. The presumed documents, allegedly dating from the tenth to the fifth centuries B.C.E., are called **J** (standing for יהוה, Jahweh / Yahweh, the personal **Hebrew Bible** name for God), **E** (standing for אֱלֹהִים, Elohim, a generic name for God), **D** (standing for Deuteronomic) and **P** (standing for Priestly). Each of these documents is claimed to have its own characteristics and its own theology, which often contradicts that of the other documents. There has been a tradition of conservative scholarship that has sought to refute the existence of such documents, pointing out the great differences among the scholars who claim to have been able to detect and analyze them.

Under this "documentary analysis," the **Pentateuch** is depicted as a patchwork of stories, poems and laws. There are other scholars, however, who contend that this view is not supported by conclusive evidence, and who hold that intensive archaeological and literary research has tended to undercut many of the arguments used to challenge Mosaic authorship. But while this is true, it is also true that throughout the **Book of Genesis** it is obvious that the author has pieced together many ancient traditions, and as we read the final chapter of **Deuteronomy**, it is very clear that Moses did not write it, since it tells about the coming of Joshua and states that "Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses..." (**Deuteronomy 34:10**)

Nahum Sarna points out that there are indications of an early date for the composition of **Genesis**, in that the names of God used in **Genesis** are ancient [this is overstatement, since the names Yahweh and Elohiym are used throughout **Genesis** and the rest of the **Hebrew Bible**; Sarna has in mind such names of God as El and Shaddai], and are rarely found elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** (see Sarna, **Genesis**, p. xv.). Stone pillars and sacred trees are mentioned without any sense of the later condemnation of such objects, and the site of the later temple in Jerusalem goes completely without mention, while at the same time intermarriage with the Canaanites is treated as a very common thing, and later enemies are treated as close kin in this **book**.

Sarna concludes that "The cumulative effect of all this internal evidence leads to the decisive conclusion that the patriarchal traditions in the **Book of Genesis** are of great antiquity...[and] reinforce the case viewing **Genesis** as an authentic mirror of early historical tradition and weaken a claim of later inventiveness." (**Genesis**, p. xvii.) But while the traditions may be of great antiquity, this does not mean that the books in which those traditions are recorded are likewise of great antiquity.

Thus while we may agree with Jewish and Christian sources in describing **Genesis** as the first of the "Five Books of Moses," we do not have to mean that Moses has written every line in those books, and we do not have to deny that the final author or authors have used numerous sources, many of them of great antiquity, in putting together the finished product which has played such an important theological role in the history of both Israel and Christianity. But neither do we have to agree with those who claim that **Genesis** is largely the work of a much later time, with no or little historical value, and no input from Moses.

We can agree with the conservative scholars that Moses is indeed the central figure in the "Five Books of Moses," and can attribute the initial legislation to his inspiration and leadership. But we cannot deny that the Five Books of Moses have been composed from many different sources--since **Genesis** itself points out at least eleven of those sources--the opening picture of a seven-day creation which serves as an introduction and which speaks of "God" (אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym**); followed by ten תּוֹלְדוֹת, **tholedhoth** or "stories of descendants," some of which are obviously compilations of traditional stories and greatly divergent authorship. We can agree that scholars attempting to delineate these sources have been unable to find agreement in detail; but we cannot deny the obvious use of documents in the formation of the final **Genesis**.

We think that **Genesis** should be divided according to the indications given by its final editor, including its introductory chapter (1:1-2:3), followed by its ten separate תּוֹלְדוֹת, **tholedhoth**, "generations," while pointing out the obvious fact that within these ten divisions there are indications of still other source-documents.

We agree whole-heartedly with the Jewish scholar, Nahum Sarna, who in his commentary states that "...It is beyond doubt that the **Book of Genesis** came down to us, not as a composite of disparate elements but as a unified document with a life, coherence, and

integrity of its own. For this reason, a fragmentary approach to it cannot provide an adequate understanding of the whole. To be preoccupied with the smallest units of literary tradition may have its purposes; but the exercise is ultimately of limited value." (**Genesis**, p. xviii)

However **Genesis** may have come together (and we may never know), it is together--a unified work with some of the most powerful theological teachings ever given in human history.

The following works have been used throughout this commentary:

- Biblical Hebraica Stuttgartensia**, 4th edition, 1969 (Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt, Stuttgart); Rahlf's **Septuaginta** (2 volumes; Stuttgart, Privilegierte Wuerttembergische Bibelanstalt);
- J. B. Pritchard's **Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament** (Princeton University Press, 1969);
- James Charlesworth's **The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha** (2 volumes; Doubleday & Company, Garden City, N.Y., 1983);
- Bible Works 8-10** (software program containing a large number of Bible translations in both Hebrew, Greek, and modern translations; BibleWorks LLC, 1999);
- Bibloi 8.0** (another software program enabling rapid searches of Hebrew, Greek and English Bibles; Silver Mountain Softward, Cedar Hill, TX, 75104);
- The 27th edition of Nestle-Aland's **Novum Testamentum Graece** (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft);
- Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** (Volumes 1-12; published by Eerdmans);
- Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament**, Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (Clarendon Press, Oxford);
- Claus Westermann's **Commentary on Genesis** (3 volumes; Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1985);
- Nahum Sarna's Jewish Publication Society's **Torah Commentary**, Volume 1, **Genesis** (New York, 1989);
- Gerhard von Rad's **Genesis** (1976; The Westminster Press, Philadelphia);
- Gordon Wenham's **Genesis** (1994, Word Books, Dallas, Texas);
- Victor Hamilton's **Genesis** (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995);
- The Interpreter's Bible**, Volume 1, with commentary and exposition by Cuthbert Simpson and Walter Russell Bowie (New York, Abingdon Press, 1952);
- The New Interpreter's Bible**, Volume 1, with commentary by Terence E. Fretheim (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994);
- Bereishis**, A New Translation with a Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources, Volumes 1-5, Artscroll Tanach Series; (published by Mesorah Publications, Lt., 1969 Coney Island Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y, 11224).

Genesis 1:1-2:3, The Opening Chapter of the Hebrew Bible

The student is asked to read **Genesis 1:1-2:3** from **New International Version Study Bible** (with footnotes by Ronald Youngblood, henceforth “Youngblood”), **The New Interpreter’s Study Bible** (with footnotes by Theodore Hiebert, henceforth “Hiebert”), and **English Standard Version Study Bible** (with footnotes by T. Desmond Alexander, henceforth, “Alexander”), including all their footnotes, before continuing with these study-notes. The student is urged to pray earnestly for Divine guidance as this important beginning chapter of the **Bible** is read and meditated upon. **Bible** study without a heart open to God’s guidance through prayer is of little avail! But **Bible** study combined with genuine openness to God in prayer can lead to the development of a powerful Biblical Theology. So, study and pray! Pray and study!

Genesis 1:1-2:3, Introduction to Genesis and the Entire Hebrew Bible: World-View / Starting-Point⁴

4

Hiebert states that “People are incurably curious about beginnings. The **Book of Genesis** proves that this was just as true in antiquity as it is today. **Genesis** shares the scientist’s fascination with the birth of the cosmos and the origin of life on earth, the anthropologist’s curiosity about the first human beings, the historian’s interest in the beginning of civilization, a family’s esteem for their earliest ancestors, and the theologian’s concern about the founding events of religious traditions. **Genesis** is about all of these kinds of beginnings. And since it is earliest account of origins in the Jewish and Christian religions, the **Book of Genesis** has influenced the way people have thought about beginnings ever since.” (P. 1)

Alexander states that “The first eleven chapters of **Genesis** differ from those that follow. **Chapters 12-50** focus on one main family line in considerable detail, whereas **chapters 1-11** could be described as a survey of the world before Abraham. These opening chapters differ not only in their subject matter from **chapter 12** onward, but also because there are no real parallels to the patriarchal stories in other literatures...

“In contrast to the patriarchal stories, however, other ancient nonbiblical stories do exist recounting stories about both creation and the flood. The existence of such stories, however, does not in any way challenge the authority or the inspiration of **Genesis** [but if Alexander means the traditional conservative view of inspiration, we think he is wrong]. In fact, the nonbiblical stories stand in sharp contrast to the biblical account, and thus help readers appreciate the unique nature and character of the biblical accounts of creation and the flood...

“In other ancient literary traditions, creation is a great struggle often involving conflict between the Gods. The flood was sent because the Gods could not stand the noise made by human beings, yet they could not control it. Through these stories the people of the ancient world learned their traditions about the Gods they worshiped and the way of life that people should follow. Babylonian versions of creation and flood stories were designed to show that
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Babylon was the center of the religious universe and that its civilization was the highest achieved by mankind.

“Reading **Genesis**, readers can see that it is designed to refute these delusions. There is only one God, whose word is almighty. He has only to speak and the world comes into being. The sun and moon are not Gods in their own right, but are created by the one God. This God does not need feeding by man, as the Babylonians believed they did by offering sacrifices, but He supplies man with food. It is human sin, not divine annoyance, that prompts the flood. Far from Babylon's tower (Babel) reaching heaven, it became a reminder that human pride could neither reach nor manipulate God.

These principles, which emerge so clearly in **Genesis 1-11**, are truths that run through the rest of Scripture. The unity of God is fundamental to biblical theology, as is His almighty power, His care for mankind, and His judgment on sin. It may not always be obvious how these chapters relate to geology and archaeology, but their theological message is very clear. Read in their intended sense, they provide the fundamental presuppositions of the rest of Scripture. These chapters should act as eyeglasses, so that readers focus on the points their author is making and go on to read the rest of the **Bible** in light of them.” (P. 49)

It is the view of the present author that **Genesis 1:1-2:3** is a “vision-story,” that was written long after the writing of the rest of **Genesis**, and probably after the writing and combination of the “Five Books of Moses,” (called in Greek, the **Pentateuch**, the “Five-Book” collection). This vision-story, probably written by a visionary prophet such as the author of **Isaiah 40-55** (“Second Isaiah”), with his universalistic view and emphasis on the sabbath, or the prophet Ezekiel, with his powerful vision-stories of the valley of dry bones being brought back to life (**Ezekiel 37**) and the river of life flowing from the temple to the Dead Sea, making it come alive (**Ezekiel 47**), also concerned for sabbath-observance, seeks to give a theological basis for understanding the overall story of the Five Books of Moses. In its present position, it gives a uniquely powerful introduction to the entire **Hebrew Bible** and its theology.

It is important to emphasize that whatever will be said later concerning “clean and unclean” (by Jewish priests, largely in **Leviticus**) or the existence of evil (“satan,” “the devil,” “demons,” “unclean spirits”) in human history, must, for those who take the **Bible** seriously, always be understood in the light of this opening chapter of **Genesis**. Whatever position we may take concerning the origin and meaning of the undeniable uncleanness and evil that thwart human existence, it must come to terms with the teaching of this great introductory chapter, that everything has been created by the one God, and has been repeatedly declared “good,” “exceedingly good,” and that has to include the serpent in the Garden of Eden, which is identified as a creature which YHWH God made, and all the foods that will be declared “unclean” / “not good” by the Levitical priests!

The **Genesis** vision-story presents a God-centered world-view--the entire universe, with all its chaotic elements, have been created by the command of the one God--(1:1-2)⁴

4

Deism is the belief, claiming to be founded solely upon the evidence of reason, in the existence of God as the Creator of the universe--Who after setting the created universe in motion, abandoned it. The Creator God assumed no control over life, exerted no influence on natural phenomena, and gave no supernatural revelation of Himself in history. "Deists" believe in the existence of a personal God as Creator of the world, and final Judge of humanity, but as remaining, in the interval, wholly transcendent, being neither immanent in nature nor revealed in history or religious experience, at least not in any special or supernatural sense. The rationalistic movement known as English Deism arose in the 17th century and continued almost through the 18th century--as it attempted to construct a natural religion through reason alone.

Theism, by contrast, or more specifically, **monotheism**, is the philosophical belief in the existence of one God, transcending the universe in His greatness, yet immanent within the universe through knowledge of everything ("omniscience") and presence in every time and place ("omnipresence"), active in history through both "natural" and "supernatural" means.

Theism is opposed to **Atheism**, which holds there is no such God. It is contrasted with **Henotheism**, which claims that humanity's worship is owed to one great God who rules over many other Gods, and **Polytheism**, which teaches that there are many Gods, more or less equal, but oftentimes with a "chief God." It also contrasts with **Pantheism**, which claims that the universe in and of itself is Divine.

Simply and majestically, the opening sentence of **Genesis** sets forth the belief that the entire universe (this is the meaning of the phrase "the heavens and the earth") is the creation of God. That is, the universe is not self-made, or independent, or eternal. Everything in the universe owes its being to the creative power of God.

Claus Westermann, in the first volume of his three-volume commentary on **Genesis**, states that this opening verse has no precedent in the other cosmogonies of the ancient world; it is a construction of the author of **Genesis 1** and has been prefixed by him to the **Genesis** account of creation. (P. 97) Hermann Gunkel, a student from Germany (late 19th & early 20th centuries), states that "There is not a word in the cosmogonies (stories or theories of how the universe came into being) of other people that can be compared to this first word of the **Bible**." (**Genesis**, p. 110).

The student of **Genesis** should read the document entitled **Enuma Elish**, which is the Babylonian story of creation, for comparison with **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, and Plato's dialogue entitled **Timaeus**, for two of those ancient cosmogonies. Gunkel is correct, if his statement is understood in terms of the simplicity, greatness, and ability of this sentence in **Genesis 1:1** to both sum up the entire matter, and retain its ability to speak to the modern world. But Gunkel's statement is misleading and incorrect, if it is taken to mean that there are no other

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comparable "cosmogonies" from other nations and peoples which both can and should be compared to the biblical story--because in fact there are many such stories, and it is only in comparison with them that the true value and meaning of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** can be adequately comprehended. The present author, with a background in New Mexico and its Navajo culture, thinks in terms of the Navajo story of creation (**Dine Bahane**). Rather than rejecting these stories, we should listen to them with care and concern, because of their great cultural importance, and because of their ability to throw light and understanding upon **Genesis**, through both their agreements and disagreements.

In the creation stories of the nations surrounding Israel, not only was the origin of the world recounted, but also the story of the origin of the Gods themselves. In sharp contrast with this, the biblical stories have nothing to say about God's "origin." Rather, God is pictured as the "Eternal God," Who is present before the creation of the universe, and Who has neither beginning nor end. See **Psalm 90:1-2**, and in the **Christian Bible, Revelation 1:8**. Here, in the biblical story, the existence and reality of God "at first" is simply understood, and taken for granted (just as, in modern science, the existence of the physical universe is taken for granted as a starting-point, or as in philosophy, the validity of reason is taken for granted as a starting-point).

Every human being has been given a starting-point by those who raised them--it is a given fact of life. And the only way anyone can progress is to accept that starting-point in faith. Without faith we get nowhere. But as we move forward in faith, we have doubts, and questions. And those doubts / questions spur us on to learn, more and more--sometimes causing us to reject our initial starting-point / world-view, and find another, better one. Life becomes a great experiment, an adventure of seeking truth, of rejecting beliefs that cannot withstand scrutiny, of listening to new views and being willing to change.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 provides such a starting-point--it is the biblical starting-point--and we are challenged to listen to and accept it--and then prove it in our lives, as we put it to the test of what we see and learn, and compare it with the many competing world-views that surround us.

Westermann comments that "The creation narrative handed to us in **Genesis 1** finds a new setting as the beginning of the priestly work. It takes on the function and character of a solemn overture [we would add, not only to the so-called 'priestly work,' but also to the entire **Bible**]. It is the beginning of a series of events which starts with the creation of the world and spans the call of the patriarchs, the revelation in act (Red Sea) and word (Sinai) that is the basis of the covenant with Israel, the journey of the people through the desert, right up to the erection and dedication of the sanctuary which was to establish forever Israel's life as a life before God...

"The code that establishes Israel's liturgy once and for all and thereby sets apart the community which must worship in this way alone, is the code of the God who created not only Israel, but heaven and earth, and who blessed all creation and the whole of humanity...One
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cannot overestimate the significance of preserving and passing on a tradition about humanity in which God...[is encountered] is not Israel with its...liturgy and law, but the cosmos, creation and people [of every race and nation]. Israel, with all its esoteric and exclusive traditions, never lost sight of what God was doing for the world and its inhabitants." (P. 93)

We agree with this evaluation, especially in the light of **Amos 9:7's** explicit statements concerning the universal saving, delivering, care of YHWH. But we insist that the vision-story of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, with its universal emphasis, can only be seen as adequately ending in the kind of universal mission called for in **Isaiah 40-66**, and then embodied by Jesus, exemplified in his ministry, and then in his "great commission" to his disciples to go out from Israel into all the world with the good news. It will not be found in the narrow exclusivism of the Jerusalem temple and its later development in Rabbinic Judaism with its insistence on much of creation as being "unclean," and with exclusion of whole peoples and nations from its worship. It is our conviction that study of the **Book of Isaiah** together with the companion Volumes **Ezra / Nehemiah**, will show the powerful theological conflict between the narrow views of Rabbinic Judaism and the universalistic views of **Isaiah**, which have been embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ / Messiah.

Such a vision-story of God's creation (or, an account of how the universe began, a "cosmology") is of indispensable importance for human understanding and for the ability to "make sense" of life--since human beings long for an answer to the question, "Where did I / we come from?" And, "What is the meaning of it all?" The story told in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** expresses and enables an overall "world-view," along with a "view of humanity" that makes sense of both the individual's and the community's relationship to the universe, and to one another.

Without such a story, and the understanding it provides, life quickly becomes chaotic and fragmented, and has no basis for self-understanding or for ethical teaching. Such a story provides the basis for a framework of values, enabling ethical purpose and direction. It enables the integration of life and experience. It supplies the motivational power for the fulfillment of a transcendent goal, above and beyond time and change, enabling the individual or society to face hardship and suffering with courage and understanding and hope. Without such a story, there is no genuine basis for ethical behavior, especially when the way grows dark and treacherous, and death or tragedy threatens all that is counted valuable. Indeed, without the theology taught in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, the entirety of Jewish and Christian teaching will quickly come tumbling down.

The fact is that people cannot make sense of life without some such story, and when the biblical story is rejected, other stories will be quickly substituted for it. Modern examples of this can be seen in the Ku Klux Klan's story of where the black people came from, or in the story told by Elijah Muhammad and the Black Muslims concerning the origin of white people--both stories justifying the immoral treatment of others of different skin-color. The Nazi story concerning "Aryan Supremacy," and the destiny of the "Third Reich" forms another example of

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The **Genesis** vision-story depicts creation by transcendent command, *and* by immanent growth, in a series of six creative "days"--(1:3-31):⁵

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the importance and dynamic power of such stories in our modern world. Indeed, the history of the twentieth century gives impressive proof of the dynamic power for good or evil of such stories. None of those stories are "historical," or to be understood "literally"--they are in fact, deeply "mythical" (including the **Genesis** story). But they are also terrifyingly powerful.

Hitler reveals in his **Mein Kampf** how the most important thing in his rise to power was his Weltanschauung--"World-view." That was his starting-point, and everything else that he taught was based upon it. He had learned it on the streets of Vienna. It began with his conviction that the Jews were the cause of all the problems in the world, a world in which the Aryans were obviously the highest and best, the master race. And the obvious deduction from this was that the Aryans had the duty of "Anti-Semitism," of getting rid of the Jews. Over against that distorted "World-view," the Roman Catholic Church and the German Lutheran Church ought to have immediately challenged it with the Biblical World-view, which is that the whole universe is God's Creation, and the entire human race is one, made in the Image of God. Why the Churches did not do so, is beyond me--but the fact is, they did not, or if they tried, they were unsuccessful. And so, Hitler's World-view won, and with it the rise of the Nazis, and the tragic Holocaust and Second World War. We say, Let the 21st century Church rise up proclaiming with power the World-view / *Weltanschauung* of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, instilling it into our hearts, so that we will never again be guilty of allowing another Hitler to arise!

Question: Is there any story other than this biblical story that can provide a genuine basis for the human longings expressed in the American **Declaration of Independence**, or in the United Nations' **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**? The student of the biblical story quickly senses how the unity of all humanity, and the ultimate value of the individual, regardless of racial or geographical considerations, are rooted in the story found in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**. Is there any alternative story upon which these important values can be firmly based? We think not. What do you think?

5

Out of chaotic darkness and formlessness (the "raw matter" of the universe, created by God at the first), the Divine command brings order and shape--without any struggle on God's part, as is depicted in the cosmologies that surrounded Israel, where Yam (Sea) and Nahar (River) and Leviathan (Coiled One) and Rahab (Arrogant One) and Tannin or Tiamat (Dragon) all had to be conquered by the Gods Marduk or Baal.

The text does not deny, but rather affirms that the created universe has elements of chaos, and emptiness, and darkness--all of which have been initially created by God. But it tells how God's powerful word has brought order into that chaos and emptiness and darkness--they are totally subject to the Divine command. They are all "demythologized"--they are no longer viewed as Gods, or powerful monsters threatening human existence, but are reduced to the creatures of the one God, who do His will. In addition to this, the **Genesis** story holds that
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while darkness covers the face of the deep, so also does the hovering Spirit of God—in the midst of the darkness is the presence of the Divine Spirit, engendering life. We will refer to this matter of the “demythologizing” of the ancient Near East’s view-points time and again in our footnotes on the biblical text.

Later biblical teaching (especially in the story of the great flood in **chapters 6-9**) will warn that whenever God’s word is not obeyed, the created universe will return to a state of chaos and darkness--see **Jeremiah 4:23-26**, and Bernhard Anderson’s **Creation Versus Chaos**.

The Divine method of creation is described as two-fold: the hovering Spirit of God, and the spoken word of God (**verses 1-2**). On the one side, God’s creative power is viewed as present, immanent in the world, like a great vulture hovering over its egg-filled nest. On the other side, God is viewed as far above, “transcendent” to the world--God simply speaks, and it is done.

We believe that instead of the common either / or between creation or evolution, **Genesis 1** is best interpreted in terms of “creation and evolution,” or “creative evolution,” not an atheistic (‘Godless’) slow growth on its own, but a Divinely guided growth as the Spirit of God continually “hovers” over the oceans, and as the Divine command is given to the earth “to bring forth vegetation (see **1:11**) and animals” (see **1:24**). The French philosopher, **Henri Bergson**, entitled his major work **Creative Evolution**, and this kind of understanding enables religion and science to come together as one. In the light of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** and Bergson’s understanding, we can see how the creation of the universe is not a matter of “creation versus evolution,” but rather is a matter of “creative evolution,” in which all growth in nature comes about only by the Divine command, and through the Spirit’s nurturing presence in history, as God assigns different parts of His creation to further His creation. Such an understanding is of great help to biblical students who also are students of modern biology and the sciences.

We agree with Wenham in his statement that “**Genesis 1** provided the intellectual under-pinning of the scientific enterprise. Its assumptions of unity and order underlying the manifold and seemingly capricious phenomena of experience rest on **Genesis**’ vision-story’s assertion of the One Almighty God Who Created and Controls the world according to a Coherent Plan. Only such an assumption can justify the experimental method...It has been unfortunate that one device which our narrative uses to express the coherence and purposiveness of the Creator’s work, namely, the distribution of the various creative acts to six days, has been seized on and interpreted over-literalistically, with the result that science and Scripture have been pitted against each other instead of being seen as complementary. Properly understood, the vision-story of **Genesis** justifies the scientific experience of unity and order in nature...

”The **Bible**-versus-science debate has, most regrettably, sidetracked readers of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**. Instead of reading the chapter as a triumphant affirmation of the power and
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the first "day," with the creation of light, day and night--(1:3-5)
the second "day," with the expanse (or "sky") separating waters above and waters below--(1:6-8)
the third "day," with division between dry land and seas, and with the earth being commanded to "produce vegetation"--(1:9-13)
the fourth "day," with light-bearers in the sky--sun, moon, and stars--(1:14-19)
the fifth "day," fish and fowl, including the great sea-monsters--(1:20-23)
the sixth "day," with the earth commanded to bring forth living creatures of all kinds, and with the Divine creation of humanity, male and female, in the Divine image and likeness, given dominion over the earth, and vegetation to eat--(1:24-31)

The **Genesis** vision-story of creation is very explicit concerning human sexuality, holding that the relationship of male and female is God-given and good—but not Divine, to be worshiped.⁶

⁵(...continued)

wisdom of God and the wonder of His creation, we have been too often bogged down in attempting to squeeze Scripture into the mold of the latest scientific hypothesis or distorting scientific facts to fit a particular interpretation [for a powerful example, see Sarfati's 785 page commentary on **Genesis 1-11!**]. When allowed to speak for itself, **Genesis 1:1-2:3** looks beyond such minutiae. Its proclamation of the God of Grace and Power Who Undergirds the world and gives it Purpose justifies the scientific approach to nature. **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, by further affirming the unique status of [humanity], [its] place in the Divine Program, and God's Care for [humanity], gives a hope to mankind that atheistic philosophies can never legitimately supply." (Pp. 39-40) Yes, especially with its emphasis on sharing in God's "Rest"!

The present author has grown up in a family with sharply contrasting religious viewpoints, including the denial of the **Genesis** story of creation, and a stubborn refusal to even consider the truth of the biblical starting-point. I have not considered this a short-coming, but rather, a challenge to my own belief and acceptance of the **Genesis** account. And one thing has become perfectly clear to me—it is that apart from the biblical starting-point, there is no real basis for ethics / morality and hope beyond death. My entire adult life has been dominated by the great desire to serve others, especially those in need—widows and orphans, and those faced with racial / ethnic discrimination. Some in my family have considered me obsessed with these beliefs, and have wondered why I hold to them. But I myself feel blessed to have held such views, and to have been enriched by the many inter-racial and inter-religious associations that have been mine because of them.

6

Genesis 1:1-2:3 teaches (this same teaching is given in **chapter 2**) that human sexuality is God-ordained, and good--thus laying the foundation for the existence of humanity in the "family" of male and female, united by God as "one." Human sexuality is not Divine, to be worshiped; but neither is it evil, to be avoided. It is a God-given intimate relationship between male and female, intended as the Divine gift to the "family." These are profound teachings, so vital for the health and welfare of our modern world--which, the further it gets

(continued...)

The **Genesis** vision-story contains a seven-fold Divine affirmation of the goodness of all creation,⁷

⁶(...continued)

away from this teaching, the more broken and lost it becomes. Indeed, nowhere does the modern world become more "lost," than in its attempt to understand human sexuality apart from this basic biblical teaching.

It must be emphasized how the **Jewish / Christian Bible** is a "Book of the Family." Human sexuality is God-given, and is pronounced "very good." The home, formed by the unity of male and female, is the Divine intention for humanity. So both the opening **chapters** of **Genesis** emphasize. See also the later **Song of Solomon**, which sings the praises of sexual love between male and female.

Sexual intercourse between male and female is the Divine will for humanity (not celibacy, and not homosexuality). Thus, according to **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, sexual love is a good part of God's original creation, and not a Divine curse or afterthought caused by humanity's rebellion. For the biblical teaching, human sexuality is certainly not "Divine" as was taught in the fertility religions surrounding Israel, and in which human sexuality was worshiped and treated as Divine.

But neither is human sexuality evil, as has been taught in "ascetic" religion (oftentimes Christian organizations, in particular the Roman Catholic Church), in which human sexuality is looked upon as inherently "base" and "nasty," and is strictly governed in such a way as to reduce sexual pleasure as much as possible. Rather, according to the biblical story, human sexuality is a normal, God-given "blessing," that bonds the relationship between husband and wife, and enables humanity to share in the Divine work of furthering human life.

⁷

Seven times in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** God is depicted as pronouncing His creation "good," with an emphatic "very good" in the seventh pronouncement. See verses **4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, and 31**. Through this seven-fold repetition, the Divinely perceived "goodness" of all creation is underscored and emphasized, as if to say, "Whatever else we may say concerning the universe, we must always say that it is basically, fundamentally, *good*."

This is of great importance for the biblical understanding of the origin of evil. Evil must not be explained as rooted in the nature of matter or as rooted in creation itself. Rather, evil must be explained in terms of an originally "good" creation that has been perverted or distorted through misuse. That is why, for the **Bible**, there is nothing that is "evil" in and of itself--such as human sexuality, or material wealth, or physical power. Everything that is, because it has been created by God, is "very good"--it is only by its wrong use that it becomes "evil."

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The **Genesis** vision-story insists on “One God--no other Gods.” There are no demons in the closet.⁸

⁷(...continued)

Sarna states that "The formula of Divine approbation, 'God saw that [it] was good,' affirms the consummate perfection of God's creation, an idea that has important consequences for the religion of Israel. Reality is imbued with God's goodness. The pagan notion of inherent, primordial [original] evil is banished. Henceforth, evil is to be apprehended on the moral and not the mythological plane." (**Genesis**, p. 7)

And so, in Biblical Theology, even “the satan,” or “the devil,” must be viewed, not as a second God, or as a Divine being, but rather as one of the creations / servants of the one God, who can only do what God allows (exactly the way ‘the satan’ is depicted in **Job 1-2**). See especially **Isaiah 45:7** (quoted in footnote 9), where YHWH is depicted as claiming to be the author of evil.

⁸

All of the "demons," so feared by the ancient Near-East, have been "de-mystified," or "de-mythologized" in this teaching. There is nothing in all creation that is evil or bad, in and of itself. There is, of course, much that is fearsome, and dangerous; there is much that will test humanity's loyalty to God, and by its very existence become a “temptation” to human beings, to substitute its voice for the voice of the Creator; but there is nothing that is not His good creation. Therefore, the universe is a place where human beings can "rule" and "subdue"--by studying, learning, governing, gardening, making the most of God's good gifts. It is a world where "science" is possible--indeed, where science is imperative. But it is also a world where human beings, by their own choice, can become creators of terrifying evil, through disobedience to God's commandment, and the misuse of His good gifts. Where the ancient Near East saw demons and Gods surrounding the world in every direction, the biblical vision-story rejects that view, holding that there is only one God--sweeping the demons and demi-Gods from the world's closet.

When **Genesis 1:1-2:3** says that God created the great sea monsters, "This specification expresses an unspoken anti-pagan polemic. The plural noun in **verse 21**, **הַתַּנִּינִים**, **hattanniynim**, ‘the serpents,’ or ‘the dragons,’ or ‘the sea-monsters’ (see its occurrences in **Deuteronomy 32:33; Job 7:12; Isaiah 51:9; Lamentations 4:3; Daniel 2:7; 7:5; Psalms 74:13; 148:7**) appears in Canaanite myths from Ugarit, together with **לִיַּוְיָתָן**, **liwyathan**, ‘Leviathan’ or ‘serpent,’ or ‘dragon’ (see its occurrences in **Job 3:8; 40:25; Psalms 74:14; 104:26** and **Isaiah 27:1**) as the name of a primeval dragon-God who assisted Yam (Sea) in an elemental battle against Baal, the God of fertility...By emphasizing that 'God created the great sea monsters' late in the cosmogonic process, the narrative at once strips them of Divinity." (Sarna, **Genesis**, p. 10)

In fact, **Genesis 1:1-2:3** pictures the entirety of the universe--the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the creatures that live in the waters beneath, including the great sea-

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The **Genesis** vision-story depicts three works of dividing or separating, and naming.⁹

⁸(...continued)

monsters and “dragons”--as having all been created by God, and as having all been pronounced "good," "very good." Those very objects worshiped and feared throughout the ancient Near East as Divine--such as the sun, or the moon, or the stars, or the sea-monsters, or animals--are all the creatures of one God, and they are all good. They have no Divine power over humanity, but all are part of the creation which serves humanity, and over which humanity has been called to rule.

Wenham quotes Heidel in his detection of five areas in which **Genesis 1** appears to be attacking rival cosmologies.

“*First*, in some Near Eastern cosmogonies, dragons (תנין) are rivals whom the Canaanite Gods conquer, whereas in **Genesis 1:21** the great sea monsters are just one kind of the aquatic animals created by God.

“*Second*, these cosmogonies describe the struggle of the Gods to separate the upper waters from the lower waters; but **Genesis 1:6-10** describes the acts of separation by simple Divine fiat [‘command’].

“*Third*, the worship of the sun, moon, and stars was current throughout the ancient orient. **Genesis** pointedly avoids using the normal Hebrew words for sun and moon, lest they be taken as Divine, and says instead God created the greater and the lesser lights.

“*Fourth*, Babylonian tradition sees the creation of man as an afterthought, a device to relieve the Gods of work and provide them with food. For **Genesis**, the creation of man is the goal of creation and God provides man with food.

Fifth, **Genesis** shows God creating simply through His spoken word, not through magical utterance as is attested in Egypt.

“There thus runs through the whole **Genesis** cosmology ‘a conscious and deliberate anti-mythical polemic’ (quoting Heidel, **Babylonian Genesis**, p. 91).” (1, p. 9)

9

Westermann points out how, in the **Genesis** story of creation, ancient elements from the stories told in other cultures are taken up and included. Two of these elements are that of Divine creation as a matter of "dividing" or "separating," and that of "naming" what has been thereby created. To understand creation as a whole as a work of “separation” is very ancient and widespread. In some ways, modern science is deeply involved in this matter of separating and dividing, and giving new names to what has been separated out. Indeed, is this not what the technology behind the many advances in atomic research and the use of the electron is all about, as scientists learn to name and accurately describe the intricacies of nature? Is this not the kind of work that scientists have done in unraveling the DNA code?

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The relationship between this ancient story of God's creation and modern scientific understanding quickly becomes explicit and problematical here in **Genesis one**. According to this ancient, pre-scientific story, both light and darkness, day and night preceded the placing of the sun, moon, and stars in the "expanse" of the heavens—that is, the first three “days” are without the sun and the moon. But the day and night described by modern science are directly related to these heavenly bodies, and could not exist without them. How do you explain this?

We should begin with the acknowledgment that the vision-story is not intended to serve as a scientific or astronomical text-book, given to reveal exact scientific knowledge to its readers across the centuries, using timeless, scientifically "accurate" language that will fit any advances made in scientific understanding of the universe. Rather, it is a deeply religious story, written from the view-point of pre-Christian Israel, in the language of its day, incorporating many of the "pre-scientific" view-points of its time, with the intention of calling its readers to worship God the Creator rather than the created universe, with its awesome heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, and stars--all of which were worshiped by Israel's neighbors.

The Church should have long ago given up the attempt to read the biblical materials as scientific documents, to be contrasted with scientific views. For an important example of the fallacy involved in such a use of the **Bible**, see the story of Galileo, and the Roman Church's rejecting of his scientific conclusions on the basis of **Psalms 19's** statement that the sun makes a circuit from one end of the heaven to the other--concluding from this that the earth is the stationary center of the universe, not the sun, as Galileo (following the lead of Copernicus) insisted on the basis of his observations with the telescope, combined with his mathematical conclusions.

Here, in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, light is viewed as a creature, not as being Divine in itself, as it was viewed in Egypt, for example. Westermann notes that the **Genesis** story "...Departs here from the Egyptian cosmogonies: light is created, it is not Divine like Re (or Ra, the Egyptian God of the sun) Who shines over the primeval chaos...When light is equated with God then it can no longer be a creature of God. Persian religion on the other hand teaches the Divinity and eternity of light..." (P. 114) In the Persian "dualism" type of religion, there are two Divine beings--light and darkness, Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu / Ahriman. But here, in biblical religion, there is one true God, Who is the Creator of both light and darkness (see also **Isaiah 45:7**, which quotes YHWH as affirming "I form light and create darkness...")--neither of which is Divine. Sometimes Christians, in their superstitious attribution of God-like characteristics to Satan or the Devil begin to adapt a religion of "dualism" rather than holding fast to biblical "monotheism." But if Christians learn to take the **Genesis** vision-story of creation seriously, and adopt its world-view, they will avoid this mistake.

The same thing is true in this story's depiction of the creation of the great ocean-depth with its "monsters"--all of which are God's good creations, not Divine beings before whom

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The **Genesis** vision-story depicts the Creator God, author of nature and human fertility.¹⁰

⁹(...continued)
mortals must tremble in fear.

Sarna notes concerning the sun, moon, and stars, which are pictured as not coming into existence until after the earth's bringing forth vegetation [a view, we note, that conflicts with modern knowledge of vegetation's dependence upon sun-light], that "...The sources of power in what we call nature, which were personified and deified in the ancient world, are now emptied of sanctity. The productive forces of nature exist only by the will of one sovereign Creator and are not independent spiritual entities. There is no room in such a concept for the fertility cults that were features of ancient Near Eastern religions...

"...The emergence of vegetation prior to the existence of the sun, the studied anonymity of these luminaries, and the unusually detailed description have the common purpose of emphasizing that sun, moon, and stars are not Divinities, as they were universally thought to be; rather, they are simply the creations of God, who assigned them the function of regulating the life rhythms of the universe." (**Genesis**, p. 9)

As Sarna later notes, this is also an emphatic repudiation of astrology, so beloved in the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian worlds (as is attested to in **Matthew's** birth narrative of Jesus, at **Matthew 2:2**).

10

The fertility of the earth, attributed by Israel's Canaanite neighbors to Baal, the Divine "Husband," and to His feminine counterpart, Anath, the Divine "Mother," is in truth one of the good gifts of God to humanity. God speaks to the earth as the "earth-Mother" (compare **Psalm 90:2**, with its 2nd person masculine singular verb **וַתַּחֲוֶלְלִי**, **wattecholel**, "and You [YHWH] brought forth with labor-pains the earth and the world") calling upon the earth to bring forth life. Thus all of creation does not take place, according to this story, as a result of a spoken command of God--but comes as God calls upon His creation to share with Him in bringing forth life--which enables the story to be interpreted in terms of "evolutionary growth," rather than simply in terms of instantaneous creation. But whether instantaneously, or slowly, all fertility and growth is rooted in God, and gives evidence of the Divine Designer and Life-giver--God is the Creator, both before time and in time.

As Sarna notes, "Water does not here possess inherent, independent generative powers as it does in the pagan mythologies. It produces marine life only in response to the Divine command." (**Genesis**, p. 10) Time and again in our footnotes we will mention this matter of "continuing creation, as God's creatures share in that creation.

Fretheim comments that "Both God and the creatures have an important role in the creative enterprise, and their spheres of activity are interrelated. God has shaped the created order in such a way that the Creator and the creatures share overlapping spheres of interdep-
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The **Genesis** vision-story depicts humanity, male and female, as uniquely commissioned to rule the earth.¹¹

¹⁰(...continued)

endence and creative responsibility...In the very act of creating, God gives to others a certain independence and freedom. God moves over, as it were, and makes room for others...These chapters imply that the Divine sovereignty in creation is understood, not in terms of absolute Divine control, but as a sovereignty that gives power over to the created for the sake of a relationship of integrity. Such a view involves risk, since it entails the possibility that the creatures will misuse the power they have been given, which does occur." (Pp. 355-56)

11

The **Genesis** vision-story of creation holds strongly to the very highest view of humanity's unique value--whether male or female--in a world that swarmed with male chauvinist, racist, nationalistic and religious denials of human dignity and worth. Hermann Gunkel stated that humanity is here pictured as "the tiny God of the world." (P. 111). This is slightly overstatement, but the text does clearly teach that humanity is closely akin to God, made in the Divine image and resemblance, and commanded by God to "rule" the earth--a "semi-Divine" function.

Sarna notes that "Contrary to the common beliefs of the ancient world that the forces of nature are Divinities that may hold the human race in thralldom, our text declares man to be a free agent who has the God-given power to control nature." (**Genesis**, p. 13)

Sarna comments that "Without doubt, the terminology employed in **Genesis 1:26** is derived from regal vocabulary, which serves to elevate the king above the ordinary run of men. In the **Bible** this idea has become democratized. All human beings are created 'in the image of God'; each person [male and female] bears the stamp of royalty...The characterization of [humanity] as 'in the image of God' furnishes the added dimension of [their] being the symbol of God's presence on earth. This awareness inevitably entails an awesome responsibility and imposes a code of living that conforms with the consciousness of that fact." (**Genesis**, p. 12)

It should be emphasized that the "humanity" pictured here is the universal father and mother of the entire human race, from whom all races and all nationalities have sprung--and **Genesis 1-11** is the story of humanity, the human race, not the story of Israel--as is made explicit in **Genesis 10** with its survey of the "seventy nations," in which Israel is not even mentioned.

Sarna states that "There is only one human species. The notion of all humankind deriving from one common ancestry directly leads to the recognition of the unity of the human race, notwithstanding the infinite diversity of human culture. The sages of the **Mishnah**, in **Sanhedrin 4:5**, observed that mankind was created as a single unit in order to inculcate the idea that the destruction of a single life is tantamount to the destruction of the entire world and, conversely, the preservation off a single life is the preservation of the entire world." (**Genesis**, p. 13)

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No, this "humanity" depicted in **Genesis one** is not Jewish, even though the biblical story is Jewish in origin; and any Divine status which may be implied by this story must be assigned to all humanity, including women as well as men.

Over against the nationalistic myths of Aristotle (the Greeks are the master race), Nietzsche and Hitler (the Aryans are the master race); and over against the sexist myth of Pandora's Box and the modern male chauvinists (the source of evil in the world is the female sex)--all of which maintain the superiority of one group of humanity to all others--**Genesis 1:1-2:3** pictures all humanity, the entire human race, including females as well as males, Negro as well as White, as equally related to the one God of heaven and earth.

Sarna says, "The second section of the sixth day culminates the creative process. A human being is the pinnacle of Creation...Humankind is last in a manifestly ascending, gradational order...The thrice-repeated avowal that God created the man, uses the significant verb **בָּרָא**, **bara**), 'He created.' Human beings are to enjoy a unique relationship to God, Who communicates with them alone [the text does not say this] and Who shares with them the custody and administration of the world. At the same time, the pairing of the creation of [humanity] in this verse with that of land animals, and their sharing in common a vegetarian diet, focuses attention on the dual nature of humankind, the creatureliness and earthiness as well as the Godlike qualities." (**Genesis**, p. 11)

This dynamic view of humanity under God is still today far in advance of much modern ethical and religious practice. If the Synagogue and Church and Mosque intend to take this ancient story seriously, they will have to develop ethical and religious strategies (including their manner of election and appointment of community officials and ordained rabbis / ministers, imams, as well as their attitude toward interracial marriages) that are "universal" at their very core, and turn away in genuine penitence from their nationalistic, racist, and sexist policies of the past.

Modern anthropology emphasizes the unity of the human race. But this modern teaching has been long antedated by the teaching of **Genesis'** opening chapters, especially **chapters 1, 2 and 10**. There can simply be no real questioning of the fact that the **Bible** teaches the unity of the human race--and therefore pictures every human being on earth, of whatever race or nationality or language, as ultimately being "brothers and sisters" in one human family.

Fretheim comments that "The fact that the creation account rather than the birth of Israel stands at the head of the canon remains of considerable importance...The **Bible** begins with a testimony to the universal activity of God. God's creative activity not only brought the world into being, but was also effectively engaged in the lives of individuals and peoples long before Israel came into being...

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The **Genesis** story-vision of creation depicts the seventh day as the goal of creation—for all humanity to share in God's rest--(**2:1-3**)¹²

¹¹(...continued)

“Human beings receive their life and all their native gifts from the Creator quite apart from their knowledge of its source. The redemptive work of God takes place within a world and individual lives that have been brought into being and sustained by God’s care. God’s redemptive activity does not occur in a vacuum, but within a context decisively shaped by the life-giving work of God within and without Israel...The position of **Genesis 1-2** demonstrates that God’s purpose in redemption does not, finally, center in Israel.” (Pp. 354, 355)

¹²

Work is not a curse, according to **Genesis 1**--rather, it is the Divinely intended occupation of humanity, as male and female join in "ruling" and "gardening" this good, God-given earth.

But "all work and no play makes Jack and Jill dull boys and girls." Human beings are intended to have regular times for rest--for joining in the creative rest of their God. We agree with Sarna in his comment that "The ascending order of Creation, and the 'six-plus-one' literary pattern that determines the presentation of the narrative, dictates that the seventh day be the momentous climax. Man is indeed the pinnacle of creation, but central to the cosmogonic drama is the work of God, the Solo Performer. The account of creation opened with a statement about God; it will now close with a statement about God. The seventh day is the Lord's Day, through which all the creativity of the preceding days achieves fulfillment..." (**Genesis**, p. 14)

Biblical “eschatology” (teaching about the final end and future of human history, as well as hope for eternity beyond death) is rooted firmly in the teaching of **Genesis 1:1-23**. God wants his human creatures to work--but also to regularly take time for "rest" in companionship with the great Creator. God wants His creatures (both human and animal) to share in His "rest"--and the **Bible** builds upon this teaching its view of a future, blessed "rest" for the people of God. Here again is a profound teaching, which every people and nation upon earth needs to hear and observe; here is the foundation for hope for the future. The biblical hope of “heaven” is pictured in terms of an eternal “Day of Rest.” (See my doctoral dissertation at Duke, “Rebellion, Rest, and the Word of God,” an exegetical study of **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**.)

In none of the other stories of human origins from Israel's surrounding cultures is this division into seven days found, nor the emphasis upon the Divine intention for humanity to share in the Divine rest. Rather, this is peculiar to this opening story of **Genesis**.

Westermann points out that "By fitting the motif of rest (**2:1-3**) into the creation week, the author of **Genesis one** has given creation the character of an event that moves through time toward its goal...The seven-day pattern...is saying that it is always the same God in action, that God is the God of history as well as of creation; and the ultimate goal in creation is

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not the last work of creation, humanity, but what is hinted at in the description of the seventh day...God's work takes place in carefully regulated periods of which the conclusion, the celebration of the holy [nothing is said in the text about 'celebration of the holy,' but only God's 'seventh-day rest'], gives unity to the whole..."

And, Westermann adds, in interpretation of this story, "One does not just count up the seven days; they are rather like a parable. The author of **Genesis one** wants to say that time, properly ordered and directed in carefully regulated periods toward its God-given goal, began with creation." (P. 90)

We should agree with Westermann that the seven days are "rather like a parable." To take them as seven literal, 24-hour days, as is oftentimes done, is to introduce all sorts of unnecessary conflicts between modern scientific understanding and the biblical story. To take them as the story-teller's "parabolic outline," used for the sake of making the story understandable to its hearers, and easily memorized, and also in order to impart the Divine message concerning humanity's, and the universe's relationship to God the Creator, enables the modern student of science to accept and understand this biblical story without becoming intellectually and religiously "schizophrenic."

The movement in this biblical story of creation is from chaos and darkness to order and light; from "lower," inanimate forms of life, to "higher," animate forms of life, culminating in humanity; and from the first day to the seventh, a movement in time that finds its Divinely intended goal in "rest"--in cessation from activity and work, and in sharing in the Divine celebration of "rest." In the **New Testament, Hebrews 3:1-4:13**, the two motifs from the **Hebrew Bible**, of מְנוּחָה, **menuchah** "rest," "resting-place," and שַׁבָּת, **shabbath** "sabbath-rest" are combined, to depict the final "rest" that God has prepared for His people—something very similar to this development in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**.

Sarna comments that "God, through His creativity, has already established His sovereignty over space; the idea here is that He is sovereign over time as well. Through [its] weekly suspension of normal human activity, [humanity] imitates the Divine pattern and reactualizes the original sacred time of God, thereby recovering the sacred dimension of existence." (**Genesis**, p. 15)

It is on this basis that biblical teaching concerning the "end" looks forward to a coming "time of blessed rest," beyond the chaotic suffering of history, in the Kingdom of God. One day in seven dedicated to rest becomes a "foretaste" of the blessed Divine rest that God offers His people through Jesus--see **Matthew 11:28-30**. Humanity, like its Creator, should turn

from involvement in the "good works" of the created universe, to share in the celebration of "rest" with God, in order to enjoy the Divine pronouncement of "blessing."

But whether or not humanity will share in that "blessed rest" is not answered by the
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BIBLICAL WORLD-VIEW / STARTING-POINT

Genesis 1:1-2:3, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

In the midst of study, the student should be in constant prayer to God for guidance in understanding this highly important passage for Biblical Theology. A genuine Biblical Theology cannot neglect the theology of creation and the world-view which are rooted in this initial vision of the **Hebrew Bible**.

O God, are You truly here in my world, watching over what I am doing here? Am I / are we, really made in Your image? I open my heart to Your Presence, asking for wisdom. Enable me to understand this opening passage of my **Bible**, and to let its teaching fill my heart, and thereby become both the starting-point and the final end of my pilgrimage. Please reveal Yourself to me, in convicting power, so that I can gain and live by such a world-view!

1.1¹

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vision-story in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**. Rather, it is left as an open question--a question to which the next story in **Genesis 2:4-4:26** will give a definitive answer.

And so the opening story of **Genesis** is a "universal" story--concerning the entire universe, and the entire human family that lives upon the earth. We may conclude that because of this universal concern found in the opening story of **Genesis**, its "fulfillment" can only be found in the kind of "universal mission" and offer of "rest" that are at the heart of the mission of Jesus, and upon which he sends his followers as the risen Lord--see **Matthew 28:18-20**. From a Christian standpoint, nothing less than this universal mission, inviting all of humanity to share in the rest of God, can fittingly fulfill the **Genesis** vision-story.

1

Wenham comments that "**Genesis 1** (more precisely **1:1-2:3**) is the majestic opening chapter of both the Hebrew and the Christian **Bible**. It introduces the two main subjects of Holy Scripture, God the Creator and [humanity His] creature, and sets the scene for the long tale of their relationship. It is at the same time the opening of the **Torah**, or **Pentateuch**, the first five books of the canon, which relate the origins of the people of Israel. Although **Torah** is customarily translated 'Law,' this conveys too narrow a conception of what the **Torah** is. Rather **Torah** is 'a unique combination of story and commandment that makes a fundamental statement about what God expects by saying as forcefully as possible what the people of God is [quoting George Coats]. The narratives in **Genesis** teach ethics and theology just as much as do the law and theological sermons found elsewhere in the **Pentateuch**, and for this

reason these also belong to the **Torah**." (1, p. 5) We will return to this matter of "**Torah** legislation" in the creation-story in the footnotes that follow.

Bowie comments on **verse 1** that "These great words with which the **Bible** opens, 'In
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the beginning God...' express the Hebrew faith in the foundation of all life. The universe and everything in it depend upon a Divine conception and can be understood only in the light of a Divine plan...

"Later philosophies are more intellectual, but they may be equally arid for great hope and faith to grow in. [In some of those later philosophies,] the universe is the product of no guiding will at all, but only of mechanical chance; or, if a will is back of it, it is the will of a blind weaver or the capriciousness of One Who is cruelly indifferent to the human fates He deals with in the dark...Against such bleak and somber fatalism humanity needs continually to turn to the life-giving reassurance of the faith of **Genesis**...

"Over life there is the shadow of the darkest of all tragedies--that of human sin. But that is not the final word because it was not the first word. Since the universe began in God's beneficent purpose, all existence can be viewed not tragically but with trust: 'This is my Father's world.' Essentially all creation is such that a man may look at it rejoicingly and believe that it is framed to let him live and grow. Sun and moon, seedtime and harvest, earth and ocean, beasts and birds, do not belong to hostile demi-Gods, but to the God Who makes Himself known within the heart and soul of man." (Pp. 465-66)

Hiebert notes that "The **Book of Genesis** contains two accounts of creation. This first is spacious, taking in the whole cosmos as viewed from earth, while the second has a more limited, localized setting, taking place entirely within the garden of Eden (**2:4b-3:24**)." (P. 5)

But here, in the opening sentence of the **Hebrew Bible**, we are confronted with a difficulty that calls for careful attention. In the last two decades of the twentieth century, a new translation began to be made of these opening words, in **Genesis 1:1-3a**:

At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was wild and waste, darkness over the face of Ocean, rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters--God said..." (Everett Fox, 1983)

When God began to create heaven and earth--the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water--God said..." (**Tanakh**, 1985)

In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said..." (**New Revised Standard**, 1989)

This new translation can result in a momentous change in the theological understanding of **Genesis**. Instead of the Creator God Who is not subject to time or space, but Who called both time and space and the entire universe into being by His word, the **Genesis** story can be understood to depict a God Who is working on pre-existing formless matter, bringing
(continued...)

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים

In beginning / at first² God created³

¹(...continued)

order to the formerly chaotic mess—perhaps a view shared by the author of **Wisdom of Solomon 11:17**, which states that God is the One Whose hand κτίσασα τὸν κόσμον ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης, “created the cosmos / world out of formless stuff,” but which can be understood as meaning that God, Who created everything—including the “formless stuff,” created an ordered universe out of that originally chaotic condition.

Fretheim agrees with this new translation, and states that “The word beginning probably does not refer to the absolute beginning of all things...The author does not deny that God created all things, but God’s creative work in this chapter begins with something already there, the origins of which are of no apparent interest.” (P. 342)

Walter Brueggemann likewise states that he has “heretofore concluded, along with a consensus [‘general agreement’] of **Old Testament** scholarship, that Israel’s horizon of creation is not *ex nihilo* [out of nothing]. That is, Yahweh did not create the world where there as nothing. Rather Yahweh so ordered the ‘preexistent material substratum,’ which was wild, disordered, destructive, and chaotic, to make possible an ordered, reliable place of peaceableness and visibility.” (**Theology of the Old Testament**, 1997, p. 529)

But, when Brueggemann speaks of “a consensus of **Old Testament** scholarship,” he is only describing a small group of scholars over a period of some 20 years—which shrinks into insignificance when compared with the untold number of **Hebrew Bible** translators and students across the millennia, and is still in the majority today.

In contrast to this translation that has only emerged in the late 20th century (Fox claims that he has found it in “several medieval commentators”, p. 11), the translation “In the beginning / at first God created the heavens and the earth” is as old as the earliest **Bibles**—Hebrew and Greek, and all the versions, including **Bible** students from the earliest Jewish expositors down through Jewish and Christian history.

Hiebert lines up two modern English translations on one side against two other modern English translations on the other side, but this is greatly misleading. These modern translations stand over against literally hundreds of other translations, and against the largely unified tradition of almost 3,000 years of biblical scholarship. That does not mean that this recent interpretation is wrong—but it calls for a powerful defense and justification if it is to be followed! In the following footnotes we will be examining arguments for and against this new translation.

2

The opening phrase בְּרֵאשִׁית, **bere)shiyth**, “At first,” or, “In beginning” is found some
(continued...)

²(...continued)

five times in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Genesis 1:1a, here, at the opening of the story of Divine creation:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים,
In beginning / at first God created...

Jeremiah 26:1a,

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכּוֹת יְהוֹיָקִים בֶּן־יֹאשִׁיָּהוּ מֶלֶךְ יְהוּדָה
In beginning / at first of Jehoiakim's kingdom, son of Josiah, king of Judah...

Jeremiah 27:1a, same;

Jeremiah 28:1b,

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַמְלַכּוֹת צְדַקְיָה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה
in beginning / at first of Zedekiah's kingdom, king of Judah...

Jeremiah 49:4b, YHWH's word came to Jeremiah concerning Elam,

בְּרֵאשִׁית מַלְכוּת צְדַקְיָה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה לֵאמֹר:
in beginning / at first of Zedekiah's kingdom...;

Each time the temporal phrase ‘in beginning / at first’ is used, it is followed by an active verb—“God created,” or “this word was,” or “Chananyah spoke,” or the infinitive verb, “saying.”

This usage with reference to the beginning or start of a king's “reign” (all four times other than in **Genesis 1:1**), is closely related to its use here, for the beginning of God's creative activity. We think it highly probable that the author of **Genesis 1:1** is describing the beginning of God's Reign over the universe as beginning with His creation of heaven and earth. The totality of creation is His Kingdom, because He created it from the first. See my paper, “The Kingdom of God.”

There is no definite article in an unpointed Hebrew text, and the Masoretes left off the definite article in their edited, pointed text. Still, the text can easily be pointed with the definite article, and understood as “In the beginning,” or “At the first.” Origen of Alexandria (who died 254 C.E.) read it both ways, transliterating the Hebrew by Βρησιθ, “In beginning / at first,” or Βαρησηθ, “In the beginning / at the first,” or Βαρησεθ (same meaning), only spelled slightly

(continued...)

²(...continued)

differently, i.e., with the last vowel **epsilon** rather than **eta**. Thus Origen found this first word of **Genesis** both without and with the definite article.

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is Ἐν ἀρχῇ, **en arche**, “in beginning (with no definite article),” the identical phrase found in the opening words of the **Gospel of John 1:1-3**:

Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος,
At first / in beginning was being the Word,
καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν,
and the Word was being toward the God,
καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.
and God was being the Word;
οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
this One was being at first / in beginning towards the God.
πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο,
All things through Him became,
καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν. ὃ γέγονεν
and without Him not one thing became that has become.

Here in the **Gospel of John**, the teaching of **Genesis 1:1** is understood in terms of Jesus, the Word made flesh—Who is depicted as instrumental in the creation of everything that is, without exception—with no idea of God / the Word working with pre-existing material.

Hiebert notes that “Behind the different translations of the first verse...lie different conceptions about creation. The traditional translation, ‘In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth’ (**King James, Revised Standard**...[we can add, virtually all of the hundreds and hundreds of translations throughout over 2 millennia]) implies that the formless earth and waters (‘deep’) of **verse 2** were God’s first creative act. Creation is thus understood as making, bringing into existence all things ‘out of nothing,’ or *ex nihilo* [Latin], as this doctrine of creation is commonly known...

“A more recent alternative translation, ‘When God began to create heaven and earth’ ([**Tanakh**], or ‘In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth’ (**New Revised Standard**), regards **verse 2** as a subordinate clause describing the formless earth and waters as the pre-existing material out of which God shaped the world. Creation is thus understood as ordering, as imposing a design on formlessness and chaos. This alternative translation reflects the conventional opening for creation narratives in the ancient Near East.” (P. 5)

Hiebert is referring to **Enuma Elish**, which opens with the words, “When on high the heavens had not been named, firm ground below had not been called by name, naught but primordial Apsu, their Begetter, (and) Mummu-Tiamat, She Who bore them all, their waters commingling as a single body...”, in which the pre-existing but unnamed heavens and firm

(continued...)

²(...continued)

ground are already in existence, though not yet named, when Marduk begins His creative work. This **Study-Bible** also refers to:

Genesis 2:4b,

בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶרֶץ וְשָׁמַיִם:

in a day of YHWH's making (qal infinitive) earth and heavens.

Genesis 5:1,

בְּיוֹם בְּרָא אֱלֹהִים אָדָם

in a day of God's creating (qal infinitive) humanity

(It is apparently the use of the infinitives in these two passages that Hiebert refers to, thereby justifying the change of the Masoretic pointing בְּרָא (qal perfect, "He created") to בְּרָא, the qal infinitive here in **Genesis 1:1**.)

Psalm 104:5-9, which Hiebert states, depicts creation "as the establishment of order and restraint of chaos." (*Ibid.*)

Hiebert holds that this recent translation "Has received growing support...However, because the terms and grammar of **verse 1** are unique and precisely duplicated nowhere else in the [**Hebrew Bible**], scholars continue to debate these alternatives..." (P. 5)

Genesis 1:1 has been translated and understood as we have translated it by the Masoretes, and all the later versions up until the closing decades of the twentieth century. In addition, a number of other biblical passages teach the same thing. See, for example, in addition to **John 1:1-3**, just referred to:

Isaiah 42:5,

כֹּה־אָמַר ה' אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה

In this way the El / Supreme God YHWH spoke,

בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנוֹטִיָּהֶם

One creating the heavens and stretching them out;

רֹקַע הָאָרֶץ וְצֹאצְאֶיהָ

(One) beating out [like a silver-smith] the earth and its offspring;

נֹתֵן נֶשְׁמָה לָעָם עָלֶיהָ

(continued...)

²(...continued)

One giving breath to the people upon it,

וְרוּחַ לַהֲלָכִים בָּהֶן:

and Spirit / spirit to those walking in it.

(This passage in **Isaiah** does not envision eternal heavens and earth, existing side by side with YHWH God—but rather views heavens and earth and their inhabitants as created by YHWH, unless it be insisted that there had to be some pre-existing material for YHWH to “beat out.”)

Isaiah 44:24b

כֹּה-אָמַר יְהוָה גֹּאֲלֶךָ וְיֹצְרֶךָ מִבֶּטֶן

In this way He spoke—YHWH your Redeemer and your Fashioner from the womb:

אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה כָּל

I (am) YHWH, One making everything;

נֹטֶה שָׁמַיִם לְבַדִּי

stretching out heavens by Myself,

רֹקַע הָאָרֶץ,

beating out (like a silversmith) the earth--

מִי (אִתִּי) [מֵאִתִּי]:

who (was) with Me?”

(According to this passage in **Isaiah**, the Redeemer and Fashioner of YHWH’s servant, is the universal Maker, Who alone stretched out the heavens and shaped the earth—there was no one by His side! But, this later translation can hold, there had to be a pre-existing heavens for YHWH to stretch out, as well as some pre-existing form of matter for Him to “beat out.”)

Psalms 33:6,

בְּדַבַּר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נִעֲשׂוּ,

By YHWH’s word heavens were made;

וּבְרוּחַ פִּי כָּל-צְבָאָם:

and by His mouth’s Spirit / breath all their armies.

(This is not a picture of eternal heavens which YHWH has redesigned and given order to, but heavens that have been made by YHWH’s word!)

(continued...)

²(...continued)

Psalm 33:9,

כִּי הוּא אָמַר וַיְהִי

Because He spoke, and it (the world) came to be;

הוּא צִוָּה וַיַּעֲמֵד:

He commanded, and it stood up.

(Again, this depicts not an eternal world existing side by side with YHWH, but a world that came to be, that was brought into existence by YHWH's command.)

Psalm 90:2,

בְּטָרֵם | הָרִים יֵלְדוּ

Before mountains were begotten,

וַתְּחַלְּלֵ אֶרֶץ וְתַבֵּל

and You gave birth with labor pains (to) earth and world—

וּמֵעוֹלָם עַד-עוֹלָם

and from long distant time until long distant time,

אַתָּה אֵל:

You (are) El (Supreme God)!

(This **Psalm** points back to a time before there were any mountains, or earth, or world—all of which have been given birth by YHWH, the Mother / Creator, Who exists before the earth and mountains were begotten.)

Psalm 148:4-5,

4 הַלְלוּהוּ שָׁמַי הַשְּׁמַיִם

Praise Him, heaven of the heavens,

וְהַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל הַשְּׁמַיִם:

and the waters which are above the heavens!

5 יִהְלְלוּ אֶת-שֵׁם יְהוָה

They will praise YHWH's name,

כִּי הוּא צִוָּה וַנִּבְרָאוּ:

because He commanded, and they were created!

(That is, not eternal heavens that existed side by side with YHWH, but YHWH Who commanded and created the heavens.)

(continued...)

²(...continued)

Proverbs 8:22-31,

- 22 יהוה קנני ראשית דרכו
YHWH acquired me, first / beginning of His way;
קדם מפעליו מאז:
front of His works, from ancient time.
- 23 מעולם נסכתי
From long-distant time I was installed;
מראש מקדמי-ארץ:
from (the) first, from earth's ancient times--
- 24 באין-תהמות חוללתי
when there were no ocean-depths, I was given birth (through labor-pains);
באין מעינות נכבדי-מים:
when there was no springs of abundant waters.
- 25 בטרם הרים הטבעו
Before mountains were planted;
לפני גבעות חוללתי:
before I gave birth (through labor-pains) to hills--
- 26 ער-לא עשה ארץ וחווצות
when He did not make earth and fields;
וראש עפרות תבל:
and (the) first of earth's particles.
- 27 בהכינו שמים שם אני
When He established heavens, I (was) there;
בחוקו חוג על-פני תהום:
when He inscribed a horizon upon the deep ocean's surface;
- 28 באמצו שחקים ממעל
when He made firm clouds above;
בעזוז עינות תהום:
when He made firm springs of (the) deep ocean;
- 29 בשומו לים חקו
when He placed His statute for the sea

(continued...)

²(...continued)

וַיִּמְּוֹם לֹא יַעֲבֹרוּ פִּיּוֹ

–and waters will not cross over His mouth’s (word);

בַּחֲוֹקוֹ מוֹסְדֵי אָרֶץ:

when He inscribed earth’s foundations.

30 וָאֵהִיָּה אֶצְלוֹ אֲמוֹן

And I was near Him, a master workman;

וָאֵהִיָּה שֶׁשֶׁשֶׁעִים יוֹם יוֹם

and I was delights–day by day,

מִשְׁחֻקָּתָ לְפָנָיו בְּכָל־עֵת:

laughing playfully before Him, at all time(s);

31 מִשְׁחֻקָּתָ בְּתֵבֶל אֶרֶצוֹ

laughing playfully with (the) world, His earth;

וְשֶׁשֶׁשֶׁעִי אֶת־בְּנֵי אָדָם:

and delights with (the) children of humanity.

(Whereas **Isaiah 44:24** affirms that YHWH was alone when creating heavens and earth, **Proverbs 8** claims that Wisdom, the “first of His works,” given birth by YHWH, was there at YHWH’s side, joining with Him in the creation of the universe, at a time when there was no earth, no ocean-depths [that is, no “Tiamat” as in **Enuma Elish**], when there were no mountains or hills, before the heavens were established. This is not by any means a depiction of YHWH the Creator working with pre-existing “formless stuff,” but rather the depiction of an absolute Creator of the entire universe through His wisdom. **Genesis 1:1**, as translated across the millennia, fits into this depiction in **Proverbs 8**; but it is totally contrary to this late 20th century translation of the verse!)
See also:

Acts 14:15, Paul and Barnabas at Lystra in Asia Minor, call upon the people to not call them Greek Deities, offering them sacrifices, but rather tell them that they are:

εὐαγγελιζόμενοι ὑμᾶς

Announcing good news to you people,

ἀπὸ τούτων τῶν ματαίων ἐπιστρέφειν ἐπὶ θεὸν ζῶντα,

to turn away from these empty things to a living God,

ὃς ἐποίησεν τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν

Who made / created the heaven and the earth

καὶ τὴν θάλασσαν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς

and the sea and everything in them!

(That is, there are not many Gods, but one God, the Creator, Who made / created the heaven and the earth, the sea and everything in them.)

(continued...)

²(...continued)

Acts 17:24a, Paul proclaims to the Athenians with their many Gods, the “unknown God,”
ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ
The God Who made the cosmos / world and everything in it...

Colossians 1:16, by God’s Son,

ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς
All things were created, in the heavens
καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
and upon the earth,
τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα
the things visible and the things invisible.

Hebrews 11:3,

Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ,
By faith we understand the worlds / ages to have been prepared by God’s word,
εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγονέναι
so that not out of things appearing, that which is being seen has become.
(That is, what is visible--the physical world, the skies, the oceans, the mountains-- has come out of what is invisible--God, Who created by His word! This leaves room for God’s “putting in order” or “preparing” what is seen out of previously invisible, chaotic matter--but if that is what the author means, he certainly does not make it explicit; and the elements of chaos are very visible!)

All of these passages, with perhaps the exception of the Greek, philosophically oriented **Wisdom of Solomon 11:17** are directly in line with, and can be understood in the way that **Genesis 1:1** has been translated and understood for millennia--“In the beginning / at first God created the heavens and the earth,” that is “everything.” To change the Masoretic spelling of the Hebrew text, and make it teach something quite different (see the next footnote)--the existence of matter prior to YHWH’s creation--is in our opinion both unnecessary and unjustified. As the text stands, it holds God the Creator responsible for everything in existence--including chaos with its conflicting lack of order--from which God brought order. What do you think?

Compare **Isaiah 45:7**, where YHWH is depicted as claiming He is:

יוֹצֵר אֹר
One Who fashions light,
וּבוֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ
and Who creates darkness,

(continued...)

²(...continued)

עֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם

Who makes peace / prosperity,

וּבֹרֵא רָע

and creates evil—

אֲנִי יְהוָה

I (am) YHWH,

עֲשֵׂה כָּל-אֵלֵּהּ:

One Who does all these (things)!

(Yes, YHWH, the universal Creator of all there is, even including evil! And if even evil is YHWH's creature, and under His control, what is there to be afraid of? **Isaiah 45** is a powerful refutation of Dualism, the belief in two Gods, a good God and an evil God!)

3

The noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym**, translated "God," or "Gods," is in fact a plural noun, and when used of other religions in biblical literature should be translated as a plural, "Gods," which are on occasion derisively called in the Hebrew אֱלִילִים, **eliylyim** "Weak Ones," "Worthless Ones," "Nothings."

Here in the **Genesis** story of creation, this plural noun, אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** is followed by a singular verb בָּרָא, **bara**, "He (singular) created" (as spelled by the Masoretes), and the same thing happens almost always throughout the **Hebrew Bible**—it is a plural noun, but followed by singular verbs when referring to the God of Israel, YHWH. For some four exceptions, see **Genesis 20:13; 31:53; 35:7** and **Joshua 24:19**. Also, see the Hebrew grammar of **Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley** 145 i, p. 463).

The student of the **Hebrew Bible** quickly becomes accustomed to this peculiarity. The God of the biblical story is "one"; but He can also be spoken of in terms of the "plural"—see the strange language of **Genesis 1:26**, where אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** says, "Let *us* make humanity in *our* image..." It is in fact, a "plural singularity."

The verb בָּרָא, **bara**, "He created," is almost always used for the creative work of God--rarely (almost never) for human activities, and never for the work of the Gods of the nations surrounding Israel. The root word, with three slightly different meanings, occurs some 53 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, and 48 of those occurrences have the meaning "create." Some four times it means "cut down," or "cut out." Once it apparently means "to make oneself fat."

For occurrences of this verb in the **Hebrew Bible** with the meaning "create," see:

(continued...)

³(...continued)

Genesis 1:1, here, **21, 27, 27, 27**; **2:3, 4**, “God created”; **5:1, 2**, same;

Genesis 5:2, male and female were created;

Genesis 6:7, YHWH will wipe out humanity whom He has created;

Exodus 34:10, English translations have “produced” or “wrought,” but the verb is **נִבְרָאוּ**,
nibhreu, “wonders never before created”;

Numbers 16:30,

וְאִם-בְּרִיאָה יִבְרָא יְהוָה

and if YHWH will create a creation,

וּפְצְתָהּ הָאֲדָמָה אֶת-פִּיהָ וּבִלְעָה אֹתָם

and the earth will open its mouth and will swallow them...

(which YHWH is depicted as proceeding to do, swallowing up 250 men who stood in opposition to Moses);

Deuteronomy 4:32, ask about the former days, from the day God created humanity upon the earth;

Psalms 51:12^{Heb} / 10^{Eng}, create in me a pure heart, O God;

Psalms 89:13^{Heb} / 12^{Eng}, You (YHWH) created the north and the south;

Psalms 89:48^{Heb} / 47^{Eng},

זְכֹר-אֲנִי מִהַחֲלָד

(YHWH), remember me (literally, I), how (brief my) duration;

עַל-מָה שָׁוְא בְרִאת כָּל-בְּנֵי-אָדָם

upon what emptiness You created all children of humanity!

Psalms 102:19^{Heb} / 18^{Eng}

תִּכְתֹּב זֹאת לְדוֹר אַחֲרָיוֹן

Let this be written for a later generation;

וְעַם נִבְרָא יְהַלְלֵיהָ

and a people created will praise Yah!

Psalms 104:30, when YHWH takes away their breath, the sea-animals return to the dust;

תִּשְׁלַח רוּחְךָ

You will send forth Your Spirit;

יִבְרָאוּן

they will be created;

וְתַחֲדָשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה

and You will renew earth’s surface;

Psalms 148:5,

Praise YHWH sun and moon,
stars, highest heavens

(continued...)

³(...continued)

and waters above the skies;
let them all praise the name of YHWH,

כִּי הוּא צִוָּה

because He commanded

וַנִּבְרְאוּ

and they were created.

Ecclesiastes 12:1,

Remember (the One) creating you in the days of your youth...;

Isaiah 4:5,

וַיִּבְרָא יְהוָה עַל כָּל-מְכוֹן הַר-צִיּוֹן

and YHWH will create over all Mount Zion's place

וְעַל-מִקְרָאָהּ

and over its called assembly

עֲנַן יוֹמָם

a cloud-mass by day,

וְעֶשֶׂן וְנֹגֵה אֵשׁ לְהַבֵּה לַיְלָה

and smoke and brightness of a tongue of fire by night;

Isaiah 40:26, 28,

Lift your eyes to the heavens and see—

Who created these?...

God of long-lasting time, YHWH,

One Creating (present participle) the ends of the earth;

Isaiah 41:20, (YHWH will make streams of water flow in the desert for the thirsty),

so that people may know that YHWH's hand has done this,

the Set-apart One of Israel has created it;

Isaiah 42:5,

YHWH created the heavens and stretched them out...

He gives breath to all people;

Isaiah 43:1, 7, 15,

YHWH is the One Who created and formed Israel;

He created those who call on His name...

He is Israel's Creator;

Isaiah 45:7, 8, 12,

YHWH forms the light and creates darkness...

He created salvation and right-relationship;

He made the earth,

and created humanity upon it;

Isaiah 48:6^{Heb} / **7**^{Eng}, (from now on, YHWH will tell Israel new things),

things created now,

(continued...)

³(...continued)

and not long ago;

Isaiah 54:16,

YHWH created the blacksmith who forges a weapon;

He created the destroyer to work havoc;

Isaiah 57:19^{Heb} / 18^{Eng},

YHWH will create praise on the lips of the mourners in Israel;

Isaiah 65:17, 18, YHWH promises,

I am creating (present participle) new heavens and a new earth...

Be glad and rejoice in what I am creating (present participle again)!

Jeremiah 31:22,

YHWH created a new thing on the earth—a woman encircling a man;

Ezekiel 21:24^{Heb} / 19^{Eng},

YHWH instructs Ezekiel to create a sign-post on the road

(the piel infinitive is used twice);

Ezekiel 21:35^{Heb} / 30^{Eng},

the Ammonites are told that in the place where she was created (niph'al perfect), in the land of her ancestry, she will be judged;

Ezekiel 28:13^{Heb} / 15^{Eng},

on the day the prince of Tyre was created (niph'al infinitive), all the precious jewels in God's garden of Delight were prepared for him; he was blameless in his ways from the day he was created (again, niph'al infinitive), until wickedness was found in him;

Amos 4:13,

YHWH, God of Armies, is the One Who forms the mountains, creates (both verbs are present participles) the wind...;

Malachi 2:10,

Do we not all have one Father; did not One God create us?

No one paying attention to this on-going use of the verb **בָּרָא, bara**) in the **Hebrew Bible** can hold the view that “creation” was totally finished in the **Genesis** creation-story; rather, it is obviously used biblically to depict a present and on-going activity of God throughout history—a fact that fits nicely into Paul's proclamation that in Jesus Christ there is occurring a “new creation”—see **2 Corinthians 5:17** and **Galatians 6:15**.

Sarna comments that “Unlike the pagan cosmologies, **Genesis** exhibits no interest in the question of God's origins. His existence prior to the world is taken as axiomatic and does not even require assertion, let alone proof. There is no definition of God or any mystical speculation about His nature. God's nature finds expression not in philosophical abstractions but through His acts and through the demands He makes on human beings.” (P. 5)

See the passages quoted in footnote 14, in all of which YHWH is depicted as being in existence before creation occurred, but in none of which is there anything said concerning
(continued...)

³(...continued)
YHWH God's origin.

As mentioned in footnote 14, the late 20th century translation rejects the spelling (“pointing”) of this verb **בָּרָא**, **bara**), “He created,” given by the Masoretes, and has changed its pointing to that of an infinitive (**בְּרֹא**, **bero**), “to create,” instead of an active verb. In this way, instead of translating by “God created,” they translate by “When God began to create...” or “when God created,” thereby enabling the interpretation that God’s creative activity was limited to working with, and bringing order to, a prior existing, formless matter (in line with the Mesopotamian view expressed in **Enuma Elish**, and perhaps in **Wisdom of Solomon 11:17**—see footnote 14).

This is a technical Hebrew matter, and leaves the average student of **Genesis** wondering what it all means. It means that **Genesis 1:1-2** is viewed as teaching that unformed matter co-existed with YHWH God before creation began. And while we admit that it is certainly possible to repoint the verb in this way, it is our conviction that doing so blunts one of the central motifs of the creation story that is taken up and affirmed again and again in later Biblical passages, which claim that YHWH God has absolute power over the entire created universe, since He created it all “in beginning / at first”—including all of its elements—none of which are eternal or Divine, and none of which are worthy of worship—only God alone. See our discussion in footnote 14.

Hamilton comments that “The issue between these two options—‘In the beginning when’ and ‘In the beginning’—is not esoteric quibbling or an exercise in micrometry. The larger concern is this: Does **Genesis 1:1** teach an absolute beginning of creation of the heavens and the earth? To put the question differently, does **Genesis 1:1** suggest that in the beginning there was one—God; or does it suggest that in the beginning there were two—God and pre-existent chaos? The latter approach separates itself from the former in that it dictates the existence of chaos prior to creation...” (P. 105)

We should agree with Brevard Childs in his statement that “While there is a choice grammatically the theology of the Priestly author [we would add, the theology of the whole **Hebrew Bible**] excludes the latter possibility...” (**Myth and Reality in the Old Testament**, p. 32). Von Rad states, “Syntactically perhaps both translations are possible, but not theologically...” (P. 48) We agree with Childs and von Rad. Do you?

Bowie comments that “In the one strong word ‘created’ there throbs the virile Hebrew faith in the unconditional Creatorship of God. The universe did not come into existence by chance. It did not advance by the blind gropings of unconscious energies. It was not some dark welter of lifelessness inexplicably evolving into life. On the contrary, it was the purposeful creation of Him Who is the Fount of life. Therefore in God all things belong to some consistent pattern. The universe was made to fit together and to have meaning.

(continued...)

אַתְּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ:

the heavens and the earth. ⁴

³(...continued)

“Without that faith by which the **Old Testament** is illumined the whole framework of existence would not have as much sense as a jigsaw puzzle. The pieces of a puzzle may be scrambled and bewildering, but they were shaped by intelligence, and intelligence can find the clue by which every fragment can be fitted into the intended picture...

“On the contrary, a universe that had no Divine Creator—the universe assumed in the theory of mechanistic, Godless evolution—never could make complete sense, because it never would have been designed to have any...But with faith in a Divine Creator the entire scene and its suggestion changes. Then there is coherence in the whole fabric of existence, and an unfolding Purpose in history and in life. For a Holy Will created it, and Supreme Intention holds within Itself the ‘one far-off Divine event, to which the whole creation moves.’” (Quoting Tennyson, In Memoriam, Conclusion, strophe xxxvi.)...

“Out of a reverent regard for the facts of life within, and of the world without, arises faith. And if we ask how we may know faith to be something altogether different from wishful fantasy, this is the answer: Faith is validated when it proves to be a key that opens the gates to road after road of freedom and fulfillment. Walking on those roads of actual life to which faith has given entrance, [human beings know within themselves] that this must be the reality which was intended all along...

“The humblest human spirit can say nothing truer, and the most learned philosopher nothing wiser than this: God made me, and God made the world I live in. Therefore, as long as I am faithful, I need have no fear of circumstances. God can make conditions work together to finish whatever is the best that He means to create in me.” (Pp. 467-68)

What do you think? How do you understand this opening sentence of **Genesis**?

I have been very pointedly asked, If Bowie is right, and his view is true, how can you explain the haunting existence of terrifying evil in the universe? My answer is that the God of the **Bible** not only created the good and the beautiful, but also everything that we label “evil”—including “survival of the fittest / most adaptable,” and the “law of the jungle,” as well as the possibility of tragedy and evil. Both good and evil exist, and it is foolish to deny the existence of either. The evil that God has created, and allowed, has to do with human freedom, and with the Divine Purpose of Testing—serious, life-threatening Testing. The God Who created us wants us to take control of His creation all around us, and survive the test with which it confronts us. What a challenge; what a test!

4

The phrase “heavens and earth” occurs some 38 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, and means “the universe,” “everything there is.” Compare **Genesis 2:4**, with its footnote, where all
(continued...)

1.2 וְהָאֲרֶץ הָיְתָה תֵהוֹ וְבֵהוּ

And the earth was⁵ formless and chaotic

⁴(...continued)

of these passages are listed. This is a total claim--everything that there is in the universe has come from the creative power of God (including the chaotic original form, and the chaotic elements that still exist, challenging us, testing us--yes, including death).

This is a basic claim for biblical religion--there is nothing in the heavens above, or in the earth beneath, that does not point to Divine creative intelligence as its foundation and origin. See especially **Proverbs 8:22-31**, quoted in footnote 14.

This is, we think, a religious claim that can be tested through scientific study. Wherever we may look--no matter how far into outer space, or how deep within the atomic and sub-atomic world, nature continues to reveal its secrets to us, showing itself to be the intricately designed, orderly work of an astoundingly superior Intelligence and Power.

What do you think? Has modern science demonstrated this truth, or shown its falsity? What about our modern fascination with the DNA code and its complexities, offering untold new possibilities and challenges for health and growth? Do you think the DNA code is mindless, ruled by unintelligent chance, or profoundly meaningful, pointing to a Divine Intelligence at work in creation both at the beginning and throughout time? And if there are problems in DNA, is that a Divine challenge to discover those problems and correct them?

Westermann comments that "The sentence in **1:1** is not the beginning of an account of creation, but a heading that takes in everything in the narrative in one single sentence... It speaks of the creation of heaven and earth in the same way as do the hymns of the praise of God. One could say that the formula which is predicated of God, 'Creator of heaven and earth,' has been reshaped into a verbal sentence...The first sentence itself is really a cry of praise." (P. 94)

Do you agree with Westermann? What kind of utterance do you take **Genesis 1:1** to be? Is it the first page in your creed? If it is, and if you truly believe it, the entire **Bible** will take on a different look and meaning, and you will be forced into struggling with the problem of evil, just as was the author of **Genesis**, who addresses it in the story of Adam and Eve and their children in the next chapters.

5

The verb הָיְתָה, **hayetha**, can be translated "was" or "became," i.e., "when created, the earth was formless and chaotic," or "the earth, following creation, became formless and chaotic." The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) uses the imperfect verb ἦν, **en**, which means "was being," not "became (which would be ἐγένετο, **egeneto**).

(continued...)

⁵(...continued)

On the basis of this ambiguity in the Hebrew text, the view has been held by some that **Genesis 1** is describing a second “creation” of the earth by God, following an original creation which was the scene of the fall of the heavenly angels, and the origin of the devil, all of which, of course, has to be read into the text. See “Gap Creationism” in **Wikipedia** for the history of this view, and the role of the **Scofield Reference Bible** in that history.

Thus, on the basis of the possible meaning of this verb, a whole new theological view has been read into this text, with an alternative way of understanding the origin of evil, quite different from the biblical story as told in **Genesis 2-4**, where the testing of the first humans is done by the serpent which God made, and human responsibility for evil is affirmed.

Hamilton asks, “But do the contents of **verse 2** describe something that came to be after God created an originally perfect universe? Or does **verse 2** expand on and clarify the shape of the earth when God first created it? Or does **verse 2** describe the situation before God begins his *actual* creation as introduced in **verse 3**? The first of these suggestions is popularly known as the gap theory. In essence, this reconstruction suggests that **verse 1** describes the original creation, which was flawless. Then something catastrophic happened (Satan’s fall from heaven?), throwing God’s perfect earth into turmoil and judgment so that it *became* (not ‘was’) without form and void. Subsequently God started a second creation, so that **verse 3** describes not creation but recreation. The so-called gap theory has been given a wide hearing principally through the very popular **Scofield Bible**...” (Pp. 115-16)

For a “proof-text” supporting this theory, see **Isaiah 45:18**, which states that YHWH,

לֹא־תָהוּ בְרָאָהּ

did not create it a waste;

לְשֵׁבֶת יִצְרָהּ

to be inhabited, He formed it.

In these two ways **Genesis 1's** story can be easily changed: first, by re-pointing the active verb **בָּרָא**, **bara**) “He created” as an infinitive, **בְּרֹא**, **bero**), “to create”; and second, by reading this verb **הָיְתָה**, **hayetha**, “became,” or had become,” instead of “was.”

It is disconcerting to realize how ambiguous all language is, and how easy it is to change the meaning of almost any statement by such procedures. However, it seems very clear from taking these sentences in the context of the entire story in **Genesis 1:1-3:24**, that these are misleading translations / interpretations, which quickly depart from the intended meaning of the story—which is that God is the One, unique Creator of the entire universe, including its chaotic and evil elements, and that the origin of evil in His good universe is rooted in human disobedience to His Divine command in the course of human history, not in some prior fall of the angels or of satan. What do you think?

וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם

and darkness⁶ over the deep-ocean's⁷ surface,⁸

6

The text makes it clear, we think, that darkness is included as one of God's good creations (since it is a prominent part of "the heavens and the earth," or "the universe"). See the specific statement in **Isaiah 45:7**, where YHWH describes Himself as:

יוֹצֵר אֹרֶךְ וּבֹרֵא חֹשֶׁךְ

One forming light and creating darkness,

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבֹרֵא רָע

making peace / prosperity and creating evil–

אֲנִי יְהוָה עֹשֶׂה כָּל-אֵלֵּהּ

I, YHWH–One doing all these things!

Also, see **Psalms 18:11**, where it is stated that YHWH dwells in the darkness. In the narrative that follows, darkness will be regulated and controlled by God's command just as is the light.

It is important to note that the God of the **Bible** is the Lord of darkness as well as of light. There is no "dualism" in this **Genesis** account, with a "God of Light" over against a "God of Darkness" as is found in Zoroastrianism "Dualism," and which creeps into Christian theology when the "Devil" is given a Divine or semi-Divine status, rather than being viewed as God's creature, able only to do what God allows (as depicted in **Job 1-2**).

Bereishis notes that "The **Talmud** comments that 'darkness' is one of the things created on the first day [see **Chagigah** 12a]. In fact the creation of darkness preceded the creation of light, as evidenced by the sequence of the narrative [**Tamid** 32a]. Therefore, the

commentators point out, *darkness* is not merely the absence of light, but it is a specific object of God's creation." (P. 37)

Do you agree, or disagree? If you believe that YHWH created / creates the darkness, will you continue to be "afraid of the dark"? And if you believe that YHWH created evil, as **Isaiah 45:7** affirms, won't that change your attitude toward the evils that confront us in human history? Won't that give you confidence that good will triumph over evil, that order and beauty will be victorious over disorder and ugliness?

7

The noun translated "deep-ocean" is תְּהוֹם, **thehom**. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**)

(continued...)

⁷(...continued)

is the genitive singular noun ἄβυσσος, **abussou**, “abyss.” It (תְּהוֹם, **thehom**) is evidently used here in **Genesis 1** to mean the “ocean,” with its murky, chaotic mixture, covering the entire surface of the earth. Fox capitalizes the noun in his translation, “Ocean,” stating that his translation “Ocean” refers to “the primeval waters, a common (and usually Divine) image in ancient Near Eastern mythology. We think it is a mistake to capitalize the noun, as if it meant a God.

Hiebert states “The *deep* (*thehom*) is the great subterranean reservoir of water that erupts later in the Priestly account of the flood (7:11). Its linguistic relationship to *tiamat*, ‘sea,’ out of which the world is created in the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish* shows that this biblical creation story shares features with its neighbor’s creation stories.” (P. 5)

But in **Enuma Elish**, **Tiamat** is an evil Goddess killed by the God Marduk; here in **Genesis**, **thehom** is the ocean depth, created by the one God. Instead of describing this as “sharing features,” we think it is a matter of demythologizing the polytheistic beliefs of Israel’s neighbors. What do you think?

The Hebrew noun occurs some 35 times elsewhere:

Genesis 7:11 (the fountains of רַבַּת תְּהוֹם, **tehom rabbah**, the great ocean depth was broken open as Noah’s flood began; **8:2** (similar; only now it was closed);

Genesis 49:25 (Jacob predicts that God will bless Joseph with blessings from the heavens above and with blessings from the ocean-depth that crouches like a beast beneath;

Exodus 15:5, 8 (the waters of the Sea of Reeds / Red Sea that covered the Egyptian armies is called by the plural noun תְּהוֹמוֹת, **thehomoth**, “ocean-depths”);

Deuteronomy 8:7 (YHWH is bringing Israel into a good land, characterized by wadis of water, springs, and תְּהוֹמוֹת, **thehomoth**, “going forth in the valley(s) and in the mountain(s); that is, Israel’s “underground waters” are part of the ocean-depths);

Deuteronomy 33:13 (Moses blesses Joseph by quoting the words of Jacob in **Genesis 49:25**);

Isaiah 51:10 (הֲלוֹא אַתָּה הִיא הַיָּם הַגָּדוֹל, Was it not You, She [!] Who dried up the sea—waters of the great ocean-depth?—similar to **Exodus 15:5, 8**);

Isaiah 63:13 (where is YHWH Who led Israel through the ocean-depths? Similar to **51:10**);

Ezekiel 26:19 (YHWH is going to bring up the ocean-depth of the Mediterranean over Tyre);

Ezekiel 31:4, 15 (Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon; waters from the ocean-depth caused its growth);

Ezekiel 31:15 (when the cedar went down to the grave / underworld, YHWH closed the ocean-depth over it);

(continued...)

⁷(...continued)

Amos 7:4 (in the judgment called by YHWH, a fire devours the ocean depth and the land);

Jonah 2:6 (**verse 5** in English; Jonah states that ocean-depth surrounds him);

Habakkuk 3:10 (in a great Theophany described in Habakkuk's prayer, he states that ocean-depth "gave its voice high and lifted its hands"; obviously metaphorical);

Psalm 33:7 (plural; used metaphorically of YHWH's placing ocean-depths in store-houses);

Psalm 36:7 (**verse 6** in English; used as simile, YHWH's judicial-decisions are a great ocean-depth);

Psalm 42:8, 8 (**verses 7, 7** in English; used metaphorically—ocean-depth calls to ocean-depth at the roar of Your waterfalls;);

Psalm 71:20 (again used metaphorically, as if the psalmist has been buried in the ocean-depths of the earth, but YHWH will return and raise him up);

Psalm 77:17 (**verse 16** in English; metaphorically, the ocean-depths trembled at seeing God);

Psalm 78:15 (used in simile, when YHWH split rocks in the wilderness, He gave Israel drink from great ocean-depths);

Psalm 104:6 (used in simile, the ocean-depth is like a garment covering the earth, rising over the mountains);

Psalm 106:9 (when YHWH rebuked the Sea of Reeds / Red Sea, He led Israel through the ocean-depths as in the wilderness; similar to **Exodus 15:5, 8**);

Psalm 107:26 (in description of a ship in an ocean-storm, that rises up to heaven, then descends to the ocean-depths);

Psalm 135:6,

כֹּל אֲשֶׁר-חַפֵּץ יְהוָה עָשָׂה

Everything that pleased YHWH He did,

בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ

in the heavens and in the earth,

בַּיָּם וּכְל־תְּהוֹמוֹת:

in the seas and all ocean-depths.

Psalm 148:7 (sea-monsters and all ocean-depths are called to worship YHWH—they are not sinister Divine opponents of YHWH, but are creatures invited into YHWH's worship!);

Job 28:14 (Job quotes wisdom as saying it is not found in the ocean-depth, or with the sea);

Job 38:16 (YHWH asks Job if he has walked in searching out the ocean-depth);

Job 38:30 (YHWH tells Job that the ocean-depth becomes frozen);

Job 41:24^{Heb} / 31^{Eng}, when Leviathan goes through the sea, it leaves behind it a shining trail, making the ocean-depth appear to be white-haired);

Proverbs 3:20 (by YHWH's wisdom He broke open the ocean-depths, and caused clouds to drop dew);

Proverbs 8:24 (when there were no ocean-depths, Wisdom was given birth through labor-pains);

Proverbs 8:27 (when YHWH drew a circle on the face of the ocean-depth, Wisdom was there);

Proverbs 8:28 (Wisdom was there when YHWH made firm the fountains of the ocean-depth).

(continued...)

וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף

and God's Spirit,⁹ hovering¹⁰

⁷(...continued)

In the **Enuma Elish** (Mesopotamian account of creation) the Deity, **Tiamat**, is an evil Divine monster that is slain by Marduk, whose body is then severed in half, with the upper part becoming the heavens, and the lower part becoming the earth. Here, in **Genesis 1**, that view is rejected. The ocean, with its murky depths, is not an evil monster, but is the creation of the one God.

If there is a relationship between **tiamat** and **thehom**, as many scholars claim, but we see little evidence for, this statement in the biblical story continues its “demythologization” of the ancient Near East’s view-point of nature. Not only was the awesome, mysterious “ocean-depth” not present when God’s creation began, it is not a Divine being, but rather YHWH’s creature, obedient to His command, which humanity no longer needs to fear.

As Hamilton observes, “The *deep* of **Genesis 1** is not personified, and in no way is it viewed as some turbulent, antagonistic force.” (P. 111) Instead, it is completely under the control of the creative word of God—without any struggle involved.

But, we observe, this is not to say that the deep ocean will not present all sorts of challenges and tests to humans, as they seek to travel across it, or go down into its depths to learn its secrets, or as they face its hurricanes and tsunamis. Yes, the deep ocean is a Divine creature, subject to Divine control—but nonetheless capable of becoming a terrifying monster threatening humans with great destruction. It is certainly a test of human ingenuity and perseverance!

⁸

The phrase in Hebrew is פְּנֵי תְהוֹם, **peney thehom**, literally “faces of ocean-depth.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is simply ἐπάνω, **epano**, “above,” which leaves off the metaphorical language of the Hebrew original.

⁹

The phrase רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, **ruach)elohiym**, can be translated “God’s wind” (Westermann), “the Wind of God” (Wenham), or “a spirit of God,” or “God’s Spirit.” **Tanakh** has “a wind from God sweeping over the water.” Fox has “rushing-spirit of God,” not capitalizing spirit. It is translated πνεῦμα θεοῦ, **pneuma theou** in the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**), which is likewise ambiguous, and can be translated in different ways, exactly like the Hebrew.

Gerhard von Rad, Bruce Vawter and R. K. Harrison translate the phrase as if אֱלֹהִים, **)elohiym**, “God,” is used in this phrase as an adjective, something like “a God-like wind,” or “an awesome gale.” However, we think this is very unlikely, with no real proof that the noun
(continued...)

⁹(...continued)

אלהים,)elohiym, “God,” or “Gods” is ever used as an adjective.

It is argued that the translation “Spirit” (meaning the Set-apart Spirit of God) is anachronistic, and is little more than the reading back into this early document of later Christian “Trinitarian” views. We understand how Christians have oftentimes been guilty of just this, and are thankful to Jewish scholars for pointing this out. However, if **Genesis 1** is the product of an Israeli prophet (we have suggested a vision of **Second Isaiah** or of **Ezekiel**), such an understanding of the immanent “hovering” of God’s Spirit is not at all anachronistic, even if ambiguous, in the light of the many references to the Spirit’s powerful work in history found oftentimes in the **Hebrew Bible**, among which see:

Genesis 6:3,

לֹא־יִדּוֹן רוּחִי בָאָדָם לְעֹלָם

My Spirit will not judge / contend against humanity for long-lasting time.”

Genesis 6:17, human beings and other living creatures are described:

כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ רוּחַ חַיִּים

all flesh which (has) in it spirit / Spirit of lives...

Genesis 8:1, YHWH causes a רוּחַ, ruach, “wind” to blow across the waters of the flood, making the water dry up;

Exodus 14:21, YHWH causes the reed sea to part

בְּרוּחַ קְדִים עֶזְרָה

by a strong east wind / Spirit

Job 33:4,

רוּחַ־אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂתָנִי

Spirit of El made me

Psalm 104:30,

תִּשְׁלַח רוּחְךָ

You will send forth Your Spirit;

יִבְרָאוּן

they will be created...

The question is, Does God use a “wind” hovering over the chaotic mass to bring about order, or is it God’s Spirit that accomplishes this work of creation? We think it far more probable that the text means God’s Spirit rather than His wind—it is the wind that causes hurricanes. What do you think?

עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם:

over the surface¹¹ of the waters.¹²

¹⁰(...continued)

The piel feminine singular participle is מְרַחֶפֶת, **merachepheth**, “hovering,” which is translated in the **Greek Bible** by a finite verb, ἐπεφέρετο, **epophereto**, an imperfect middle verb meaning “was being brought,” or “was being borne.” This Hebrew verb רָחַף, **rachaph**, is found elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** in only two places:

Deuteronomy 32:11 (a great vulture “hovers” over its young);

Jeremiah 23:9 (the spokesperson’s bones “shake” because of the terrible condition of his people leading to Divine judgment).

The verb is not used of the wind, and it is most likely that **Genesis 1** means the Spirit of God was “hovering” over the surface of earth’s oceans in a way similar to that of a great vulture hovering over its nest with its baby chicks. The creation is hereby depicted as not only being the instantaneous work of the Divine command; it is also the continuing work of the “hovering” presence of God’s Spirit. Yes, even the “chaotic mess” (*tohu wabohu*) was being watched over by God’s Spirit. Meditate on that statement, when you see the chaos and turmoil of the modern world, or when your life is “falling apart.” God’s Spirit is there, bringing goodness out of chaos, joyful praise out of terrifying fear!

Sarna translates this participle by “sweeping,” a translation for which we see no justification, but perhaps necessary if the text is indeed describing the wind. **Bereishis** says Rashi “maintains that if ‘wind’ were meant, the verb מְנַשֶּׁבֶת, **menashebeth**, ‘blowing’ would have been used instead of מְרַחֶפֶת, **merachepheth**.” (P. 31)

See footnote 5, where we argue that this text fits well into the philosophical concept of “creative evolution.” This is a most important emphasis for the modern student to make—at least it has been such for me—especially in the light of controversy between “creationism” and “evolutionism” with their “either-or” arguments. We think the biblical story does not teach “either / or” with regard to this matter, but rather, “both / and.” In the light of this teaching, we can easily accept all evidences of instantaneous creation, such as the “big bang,” and at the same time accept all evidences for slow growth (“evolving”) and development—seeing both as evidences for Divine creation, before time and within time, by God and by His “hovering” Spirit, and by the cooperation of His earthly creative partners. What do you think?

11

The plural construct noun פְּנֵי, **peney**, literally “faces of...” is used here again; only here it is the surfaces of the waters, and once again the Greek translation (**Rahifs**) is ἐπάνω,

(continued...)

¹¹(...continued)
epano, “over.”

12

The two phrases are parallel:

- (1) וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם
and darkness over surfaces of (the) deep-ocean;
- (2) וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם
and God’s Spirit hovering over surfaces of the waters.

In the midst of the omnipresent darkness is the Divine Spirit--both are “over” the waters of the deep. This is a most important affirmation for the biblical understanding of the problem of evil. Where the Spirit of God is present, the monstrous deep becomes nothing more than “the waters.” We agree with Hamilton’s statement that “Yes, there is a formlessness there, a foreboding darkness, but all is kept in check and under control by the Spirit of God.” (P. 115)

Youngblood comments that “The awesome (and, for ancient man, fearful) picture of the original state of the visible creation is relieved by the majestic announcement that the mighty Spirit of God hovers over creation. The announcement anticipates God’s creative words that follow...

“(The) *Spirit of God* was active in creation, and His creative power continues today (see: **Job 33:4**, where Elihu affirms:

רוּחַ-אֱלֹהִים עָשָׂתָנִי

Spirit of God made me;

וְנִשְׁמַת שַׁדַּי תַּחֲיֵנִי

and Shaddai’s breath will give me life;

Psalm 104:30 [speaking of the animals,

תִּשְׁלַח רוּחְךָ

You will send forth Your Spirit–

יִבְרְאוּן

they will be created;

וְתַחֲדָשׁ פְּנֵי אֲדָמָה

and You will renew (the) surface of the ground]...

“The imagery may also suggest the winged sun disk, which throughout the ancient Near East was a symbol of Divine majesty.” (P. 6).

(continued...)

1.3 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר

And God said,¹³ Let light be!¹⁴

¹²(...continued)

Alexander states that the picture of the hovering Spirit “creates a sense of expectation; something is about to happen.” (P. 49)

What do you think? Do you agree? If God’s Spirit is hovering over the face of the dark chaotic waters of history, is there not reason for optimism, for throbbing hope? Bowie comments that “...To the biblical writers there are no half-Gods [such as in the Babylonian story, with Tiamat, Apsu, etc., and Marduk]. There could be chaos and darkness, but in these were no malignant forces of such kind that God had to use them as materials for His creation. ‘The high and lofty One that inhabits eternity’ alone is God. Over whatever is waste and void his Spirit moves—moves broodingly and creatively according to a Holy Purpose which nothing can be strong enough to turn aside. That is good to remember when life seems empty within, or when over the life of the world around us darkness seems to descend [as in times of world wars, and devastating hurricanes, etc.]; the brooding Spirit has not vanished from our universe. Not only did He bring forth the world from ‘chaos and old night,’ but by God’s mercy He may yet bring forth a fairer world from new darknesses that beset us.” (P. 468) Do you agree with Bowie? We do.

Bowie again states, “The author is approximating the position of **Isaiah 45:6-7**: ‘I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness.’ All aspects of the universe belong to God: therefore no aspects of man’s experience can be without His Presence: ‘If I make my bed in [**sheol**, ‘the grave’; that means, ‘If I die’], behold You are there...If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me: even the night shall be light about me...The darkness and the light are both alike to You’ (**Psalm 139:8, 11-12**)...

“As a great modern Christian wrote to a friend in the darkness of affliction: ‘You cannot understand, or explain, but you know as well as I, that back of everything is God, and God is Light—we shall see. And God is Love—we shall be satisfied. It may be a long while, but it will be worth waiting for.’ (Quoting Babcock, **Thoughts for Every Day Living**, p. 152).” (P. 470)

What do you think? Can you make such an affirmation in the face of death’s dark hand? As these notes have taken shape, we have experienced a terrifying tsunami in South-east Asia; the terrorist bombing of the Twin Towers in New York City, and a devastating earthquake in the capital city of Haiti. In the midst of these, can we still affirm that God’s Spirit is hovering over the chaos? **Genesis** dares to make just such a confident affirmation. Can you make it?

¹³

The plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** again occurs with a singular verb.

(continued...)

¹³(...continued)

This phrase, “and God said...” occurs in **verses 3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28** and **29** (for a total of ten occurrences). **Alexander** notes that “This is the first of the 10 words of creation in **chapter one.**” (P. 50)

Hamilton notes, “It is the **Latin Vulgate’s** translation of **verse 3, fiat lux**, ‘Let there be light,’ that has given birth to the phrase ‘creation by **fiat.**’ The [ten-fold] emphasis is on creation by speech as command.” (P. 119)

Sarna comments that “The Divine word shatters the primal cosmic silence and signals the birth of a new cosmic order. Divine fiat is the first of the several modalities of creativity employed in this account...It signifies that the Creator is wholly independent of His creation. It implies effortless and absolute sovereignty over nature.” (P. 7)

In modern physics, we are constantly hearing of the “big bang” theory of the universe’s coming into existence suddenly, instantaneously and inexplicably, from out of mysterious darkness (the “black hole”)—which can be seen as corresponding to God speaking and it instantaneously happening—the universe coming into existence “out of nothing.” What do you think?

14

The phrase **יְהִי אֹר**, **yehi or**, “let light be,” can also be translated “light will be.” The phrase is translated in the Greek by γενηθήτω φῶς, **genetheto phos**, the 3rd person singular aorist imperative verb, “Let light become.” Whereas the Hebrew verb is ambiguous, the Greek verb is more definite. **Bereishis** states that “The verb indicates effortless activity, as a king who utters commands to his subjects...*Midrash Tehilim* 18:26 states, ‘An artist can make nothing except by hard work, but God makes things by the mere breath of a word...’” (P. 39)

It is obvious that light is being described by this text as something created by the command of God, thereby “demythologizing” or taking away the Divine status attributed to light by much of the thought world of the ancient Near East.

Westermann notes the great contrast between **Genesis 1:3-5** and the cosmologies of Egypt and Persia, where light is treated as Divine and eternal. “...Light is created, it is not Divine like Re who shines over the primeval chaos...When light is equated with God then it can no longer be a creature of God. Persian religion on the other hand teaches the Divinity and eternity of light. ‘In Persian cosmogony...light, as the sphere in which Mazda dwells, is uncreated and eternal’ [quoting John Skinner]...” (P. 114)

Simpson comments that “Light was [according to **Genesis**] created before even the sun—one of the features of the story which renders impossible all attempts to bring it into line with modern scientific knowledge...” (P. 469)

What do you think? Can there have been light on planet earth and the growth of plants
(continued...)

¹⁴(...continued)

before the existence of the sun? And can there have been evenings and mornings before the existence of the sun? Questions such as this pose no problem for our view that **Genesis 1:1-2:3** is an enigmatic vision, depicting the creation in the model of a human week of seven days, making it easy to understand and memorize—but not intended to be taken literally or scientifically. We leave it to scholars such as Safarti to attempt to explain all of the text scientifically.

Bowie agrees with Simpson, and states that it makes “it plain that this chapter is no scientific treatise. Labored efforts to make it appear that its picture of creation does parallel here and there the conclusions of physical science is misconceived and misdirected. Those who wrote this beginning to the book had none of the long process of detailed discovery slowly and laboriously pursued by which science has pushed its way into the unknown; they had to use the daring of the poet to imagine where they could not see [we call that ‘inspiration’]. Like the unborn science which they could not dream, they too wanted an answer to the riddle of the universe, but the kind of answer they were seeking was different from that in which science may be content to rest: not primarily ‘How was the universe created?’ but ‘Who created it?’ Not ‘What was the process?’ but ‘What was the purpose?’ In such terms they sought to express the one truth which to them was all-important, [that is], that before all and in all is God.” (P. 469)

What do you think? Do you agree with Bowie?

We think that the **Genesis** story of creation does seek to answer the same kind of questions that modern science seeks to answer, including the “how” and the “process.” It tells us that God is behind it all and in it all—that God has created the entire universe both by instantaneous command, and by the hovering Spirit, working through the creatures that share in on-going creation. Or, as we may put it, this is a God-breathed universe, with God’s presence in its every nook and cranny. But this does not make the **Genesis** story a scientific treatise.

Fretheim comments that “These chapters are prescientific in the sense that they predate modern science, but not in the sense of having no interest in [science’s] types of questions...Such texts [**1:11, 20, 24**] indicate that Israel’s thinkers were very interested in questions of the ‘how’ of creation, and not just questions of ‘who’ and ‘why.’” (P. 337)

Fretheim notes that it is the Divine word that causes light to be. He states that “God as speaker is another key metaphor for God’s creative activity. See:

Psalm 33:6, by the word of YHWH the heavens were made;

Psalm 33:9, for YHWH spoke and the earth came to be; He commanded and it stood firm;

148:5, similar;

2 Esdras 6:38-54, You spoke at the beginning of creation, and said on the first day, Let heaven and earth be made, and your word accomplished the work. Then the Spirit was blowing... [detailing the various commands given on the following days]...

(continued...)

וַיְהִי־אֹר:

And there was light.¹⁵

¹⁴(...continued)

“The centrality of the word means that the creation is not an accident, but a deliberate act of the Divine will; it expresses what God intends. The word personalizes the activity; God enters into the creative deed [think once again of the teaching of **John 1:1-18**, concerning the Word!] The Word bespeaks transcendence, expressing the separateness of God from the created order, which is not a Divine emanation or birth [but the metaphor of creation through giving birth’s labor-pains occurs in the **Hebrew Bible**—see, for example, **Psalm 90:2** as quoted in footnote 2]. At the same time, God’s Speech reveals Divine vulnerability, for God’s speaking does not occur in isolation or function as command [but we ask, why not? We think it does function as command]. The use of the jussive ‘let there be’ leaves room for creaturely response (**verses 11, 24**); the cohortative ‘let Us make’ leaves room for consultation (**verse 26**); the ‘let them have dominion’ (**verse 26**) entails a sharing of power. God’s way of Speaking Creation communicates with others, makes room for others, with the attendant risks...

“The Divine Speaking often involves a Speaking with whatever is *already* created (**verses 11, 20, 22, 24, 28**) in such a way that the receptor of the word helps to shape the result. The earth itself assists importantly in creative activity (**verses 11, 24**). While God’s work creates the potential for this creaturely response, it is creation from within the creation, not from without. Both human and non-human creatures are called to participate in the creative activity made possible by God.” (P. 343)

Do you agree with Fretheim? We think there can be no reasonable doubt that the **Genesis** story of creation involves the creatures as co-creators, as furthering God’s initial creations.

What do you think? Do you look upon yourself as a “co-creator with God”? Doesn’t this become obvious when we share in giving birth to children?

¹⁵

The phrase is וַיְהִי־אֹר, **wayehi-jor**, “and it was (or, ‘became’) light,” is translated into Greek by καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς, **kai egeneto phos**, “and it became (or was) light.” We understand this as depicting an instantaneous creation, not something that slowly grew or developed. Just as the formless and chaotic universe suddenly came into being by Divine creation, and then was being hovered over by God’s Spirit, so also light came into existence by the Divine command, according to the **Genesis** story, and then became the subject of Divine ordering.

As Sarna puts it, in this biblical story, the ancient Divinities are being “emptied of
(continued...)

1.4 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאוֹר כִּי־טוֹב

And God saw¹⁶ the light, that (it was)¹⁷ good.¹⁸

¹⁵(...continued)

sanctity”--**Genesis 1** is engaged in a powerful statement of the “de-sanctification” of the Gods of the ancient world, and an emphatic repudiation of astrology: “God’s commanding utterance possesses the inherent power of self-realization and is unchallengeable. The sevenfold repetition of the execution formula, ‘and there was,’ emphasizes the distinction between the tension, resistance, and strife that are characteristic of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies and the fullness of Divine power that we find here.” (P. 7)

The **Talmud (Chagigah 12a)** states that “the light created on the first day is identical with the luminaries (**verse 14**), for the luminaries were created on the first day but were not suspended (in the firmament) until the fourth day [all of which is being read into the biblical text!...]...‘Light’ in our verse designates the sun, moon, and stars which were created on the first day, along with the heaven, earth, light, darkness, air, and water. God thus prepared the potential for everything on the first day...Note that from the first until the fifth day you will not find either the words ‘created’ or ‘formed’ (B’chor Shor)...The luminaries created on the fourth day served as receptacles to contain and harness the primal light...(Malbim)” (**Bereishis 1**, pp. 39-40)

We sense in these comments an (unsuccessful) attempt to avoid difficulties inherent in the biblical text in the light of modern scientific understanding, reading into the text things that are simply not there. What do you think? In an ancient text such as this, we do not expect scientific exactness. Do you?

Youngblood comments that “The creation, as fashioned and ordered by God, had no lingering traces of disorder and no dark and threatening forces arrayed against God or man. Even darkness and the deep were given benevolent functions in a world fashioned to bless and sustain life.” (P. 6)

We disagree with Youngblood, thinking his view is naive. We believe that as the **Genesis** story develops in **chapters 3-4**, and then in the course of human history, it is obvious that the creation in fact has lingering traces of disorder and dark, threatening forces, especially in the form of human choices to disobey the Divine command, and in the threatening forces of nature, such as earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricane, evil dictators, plagues, etc.

¹⁶

The plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** again occurs with a singular verb.

¹⁷

Neither the Hebrew nor the Greek has a verb at this point. We have supplied the
(continued...)

וַיִּבְדֵּל אֱלֹהִים בֵּין הָאֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ:

And God divided¹⁹ between the light and²⁰ the darkness.²¹

¹⁷(...continued)

phrase “it was,” but we could just as well supply “it is.”

18

Here begins what we take to be the most important single motif of the **Genesis** story of creation--what God creates (everything He creates, and He creates everything, including ‘the satan,’ and evil) is declared to be “good” after God sees it. Seven times in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** it is stated that God saw His creation, “that it (was / is) “good,” with an emphatic “very good” in the seventh pronouncement. The story appears to say that God inspects what He has created, and only following that observation is the creation declared to be “good.”

Hiebert states that “This is the clearest and strongest affirmation in the **Bible** of the sacred character of the natural world.” (P. 5) But we disagree--the declaration is that the created world is “good,” not “sacred”! The natural world is to be received as a “good,” “very good” gift from God, but is not to be worshiped!

Wenham notes, “God the Great Artist is pictured admiring His handiwork...Light, not darkness, is noted as good: God is, as it were, prejudiced in favor of light.” (P. 18)

We agree with Sarna that “The pagan notion of inherent, primordial evil is banished. Henceforth, evil is to be apprehended on the moral and not the mythological plane.” (P. 7)

Fretheim comments that “The [later] ‘subdue’ language (**1:28**) implies that ‘good’ does not mean perfect or static or in no need of development.” That is, a good, very good world still needs to be brought under human management and control, even to be “subdued.” (P. 343)

We agree--and hold that in God’s “good” earth, human beings still need to build hurricane barriers, tornado shelters, and earth-quake proof buildings, refusing to build on top of known geological faults, etc. We still need to prepare ourselves to resist the consequences of wrong choice by human beings, such as building armed forces and weapons in order to defeat evil human dictators. What do you think?

We hold that It is a good world--but at the same time, a dangerous world, in need of human beings made in the Divine image, to take control of it, and help to shape its destiny! And, we believe, even the terrifying evils that we must be prepared to confront and defeat have a good purpose--it is that of a Divine “testing.” See the **Book of Job**, with its depiction of Job’s extremely hard testing--which ends with Divine blessing.

19

(continued...)

1.5 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לְאוֹר יוֹם

And God called²² to the light, Day!

¹⁹(...continued)

The plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** again occurs with a singular verb. On this work of “dividing,” see footnote 7.

²⁰

It is a peculiarity of the Hebrew language that oftentimes when it uses the preposition בֵּין, **beyn**, “between,” it uses it twice. Literally, this statement reads (in both Hebrew and in Greek), “And God divided between the light and between the darkness.” We think it best in English to leave off the second “between,” which, if left in English, makes the statement difficult, if we do not recognize this Hebrew usage. See also **verses 7, 14, and 18**. We agree with Hamilton in his statement that “The reproduction of the preposition in English produces only redundancy.” (P. 118) There are many occasions, however, when the preposition is used by itself, and is not repeated. See **Brown-Driver-Briggs**, p. 107.

²¹

The implication of this statement is that initially the created light was intermixed with darkness, another indication of the תְּהוֹ וְבְהוֹ, **thohu wabhohu**, chaotic mixture, that characterized the “raw material” of God’s initial creation (see footnote 18). But now God separates the light from the darkness, enabling light and darkness as we know them, to exist separately, although side by side. This matter of “separating,” “dividing,” is certainly an important element in this **Genesis** account of creation.

The verb וַיַּבְדֵּל, **wayyabdel**, “and He divided,” occurs (in different forms) in **verses 4, 6, 7, 14 and 18**, thus becoming “one of the central ideas in this chapter.” (Wenham, P. 18).

Benedikt Otzen, in his article on this verb in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament II**, pp. 1-3, states that “...The individual phases in creation are depicted as a separation of the different elements from one another: light from darkness, water from the firmament, day from night, etc. The author uses the word בָּדַל, **bdl** in order to emphasize a major idea in the Priestly account of creation, viz., that the Creator-God is a God of order rather than a mythological Procreator.” (P. 2)

We think that with the use of this verb, the ancient Near Eastern way of describing Divine creation by separation is being combined with the later way of describing creation as a matter of the Divine command, creation by the word. What do you think?

²²

The plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym** “God” again occurs with a singular verb.

וַלְחֹשֶׁךְ קָרָא לַיְלָה

And to the darkness He called Night!²³

23

According to the author of **Genesis one**, it is God the Creator's work to give names to His creatures, separating them out from their confused, nameless mixture, thereby announcing their nature and their role in His creation. Youngblood comments that "In ancient times, to name something or someone implied having dominion or ownership." (P. 6)

Frethem comments that "God's naming stands parallel to, but does not overlap, the human naming in **2:19-20**. The naming (either Divine or human) does not thereby create these realities. In naming, the Deity *responds* to the creation. In effect, God looks at what has come into being, evaluates it, and discerns its place in the creation. The Creator thus not only speaks and acts, but also reacts to what has been brought into being and continues further. The act of creation constitutes, thus, no simple punctiliar [i.e., limited to one point in time] act, but also involves a process of action and interaction with what has been created. In this process, naming entails knowledge of and relationship with the thing named." (P. 344)

This work of separating and giving of names occurs throughout this story of creation, and is continued in the next chapter by YHWH God's assigning a similar task to the first human being, to name the animals that YHWH God brings to him. When the Creator God names the various elements in the formless chaos, their nature, and their task become apparent, by virtue of that naming.

Wenham comments that "In the **Old Testament**, to name something is to assert sovereignty over it; compare **2:20**; **2 Kings 23:34**; **24:17**. Here darkness, though not said to be created [but does not the text depict God as the Creator of everything, including light and darkness? We hold that it does], is still named by God." (1, p. 19) God is being depicted as just as much in control of darkness as He is of light.

We believe that the modern scientific enterprise can be genuinely rooted in just such a view of the importance of separating and naming, just as has been accomplished by scientists drawing a map of the human genome, and as they name the differing functions of the manifold elements in the genome. Do you agree?

It is important for the biblical account of creation to emphasize that the Divine control of the darkness and night, is just as pronounced as is the Divine control of light and day (just as earlier the **Genesis** account has affirmed the "hovering Spirit's presence" in the midst of the darkness).

Westermann (who holds that darkness is not being pictured as part of the Divine creation) states that "God names not only the light which He has created but also the darkness of which it is not said that He created it. God takes dominion over the darkness by this act...So darkness becomes part of the order of creation. The uncreated moves into the
(continued...)

וַיְהִי עֶרֶב וַיְהִי בֹקֶר

And there was evening, and there was morning--

יּוֹם אֶחָד:

a first day / day one.²⁴

²³(...continued)

created in a way which is beyond the understanding of man..." (P. 115)

We disagree, thinking that the text at least implies that darkness is created by God; it undoubtedly describes God as exercising control over it. Compare **Isaiah 45:6-7**, where YHWH claims that He creates darkness as well as forming light. Because of this, there is nothing in the darkest night of which the believer in God need be fearful, not death, not the grave, not the after-life--for God is in control of the night just as well as of the day--and according to **Psalms 139:8**, YHWH is just as present in sheol / the grave / death as He is in this earthly life. And remember the promise of **Hosea 13:14**, where Yahweh is depicted as promising, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave (Sheol); I will redeem them from death!"

What do you think? Do you agree with this? The biblical world view enables the believer to conquer fear, even the fear of death and the grave, the "last enemy"!

²⁴

The **Genesis** story of creation divides God's creative actions into seven days with evenings and mornings. Fox translates by "There was setting, there was dawning, one day." Alexander comments that "By a simple reading of **Genesis**, these days must be described as days in the life of God, but how these days relate to human days is more difficult to determine." (P. 50) Compare:

Psalm 90:4,

כִּי אֵלֶיךָ שָׁנִים בְּעֵינֶיךָ כְּיוֹם

Because a thousand years in Your eyes (are) like a day--

אֶתְמוּל כִּי יַעֲבֹר

yesterday, when it passes,

וְאֶשְׁמֹרָה בַּלַּיְלָה:

and (like) a watch in the night.

2 Peter 3:8,

Ἐν δὲ τούτῳ μὴ λαυθανέτω ὑμᾶς, ἀγαπητοί,

But then do not let this one thing escape notice (from) you people, loved ones--

ὅτι μία ἡμέρα παρὰ κυρίῳ ὡς χίλια ἔτη

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

that one day with Lord (is) like a thousand years,
καὶ χίλια ἔτη ὡς ἡμέρα μία,
and a thousand years (are) like one day.

In other words, don't try to measure God's "days" by human measurements of time—they simply don't apply to God! Advocates of seven literal twenty-four hour days in the **Genesis** story of God's creative acts need to take this into serious consideration. The first three of these days in the activity of God are described as having evenings and morning before the existence of the sun. We think the author of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** is using the well known experience of a week of seven days as a vehicle for describing the mysterious and wonderful creative activity of God—but think it unnecessary and mistaken to insist on a literal creation-week of seven twenty-four hour days. See the numerous articles on "Creationism" in **Wikipedia** on the Internet, and Sarfati's commentary.

What do you think? Do you agree with the correspondences implied in the following chart given by Alexander on p. 50?

Location	Inhabitants
Day 1. Light and dark	Day 4. Lights of day and night
Day 2. Sea and sky	Day 5. Fish and birds
Day 3. Fertile earth	Day 6. Land animals (including mankind)

This statement "there was evening and there was morning" reflects the Jewish manner of reckoning time, beginning and ending with sun-down. See **Bereishis** 1, p. 44; but see Sarna, **Genesis**, p. 8, for a different understanding).

In the **Genesis** creation story, the new "day" begins with sun-down, and the dark-night is the first half of the day, while the light of day-time is the second half of the day, remarkably different from our modern method of measuring a day from midnight to midnight. Does this then mean our way of measuring time is wrong, and "goes against the **Bible**"?

Legalistic interpretation of the biblical documents quickly latches onto such statements as this, claiming that this is the **Bible's** way of teaching its readers how to "calculate time" (etc., etc.), and shows conclusively that the Roman and modern method of counting a day as beginning at twelve midnight is non-biblical and wrong. Thus the observance of a day of rest must begin in the evening, at sunset, not at any other time. A case can certainly be made for the observance of one day in seven as set-apart time for rest from daily work on the basis of this chapter, but to go beyond this, we believe, is mistaken.

When we come to the **New Testament Book of Acts**, we will find the Roman method of counting day and night being used, without a sign of anything going wrong. We insist that such legalistic interpretation of the **Bible** is mistaken.

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

The entire created universe—even such elemental things as darkness and light, and evening and morning, are subject to the Divine ordering. But there is a great difference between a “cosmology,” or “hymn of praise for the Creator,” and a book of legal instructions for the observance of rituals. Legalistic interpretation refuses to make such a distinction, insisting on deriving legislation from non-legislative texts—such as is sometimes found in the Jewish **Mishnah**.

When the biblical text intends to give legislation, it knows perfectly well how to do so—as in the **Ten Commandments** and in the **Covenant Code**—without our reading it into those texts where it is not clearly intended, and where no Divine commandment is given. We will be mentioning this matter of “**Torah** legislation” in the **Book of Genesis**, and in this creation-story again and again. What do you think?

According to this biblical story of creation, evening and morning existed before the creation of the sun, and its being placed in the sky to regulate day and night. This constitutes, we think, a great problem for those who want to read the **Genesis** account as an exact, correct scientific document, in which there can be no such thing as day and night apart from the movement of the earth on its orbit, and the light that comes from the sun, and the darkness that is only the earth’s shadow as it turns away from the sun’s light.

We agree with Westermann, who holds that the literal interpretation of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** in terms of seven 24-hour days is unnecessary, and leads to constant conflict with modern scientific understanding, just as happens when we insist that day and night could not have existed before the creation of the heavenly light-bearers, and as we seek to relate this chapter’s teaching to the different modern ways of determining the age of the earth, in which millions of years of slow growth and development are indicated by scientific evidence, making the idea of the earth’s creation in seven 24-hour days an absurdity. See our footnote on **Genesis 2:2**.

Hamilton observes on **verses 3-5** that “These three verses contain the words of both God and the narrator. Actually there are only two narrated words of God on this first day: **יְהי אֹר**, **yehi)or**, ‘Let there be light!’ Everything else (introduction of the Deity, a description of the created object, a statement of evaluation, information on subsequent activities of God, a chronological note) is from the narrator...Yet it is the words of God, however brief, that are paramount. The narrator’s contributions function as something of an appendage. God is the Soloist; the narrator is the accompanist.” (P. 119)

We think it is very important to constantly keep this distinction in mind when studying the biblical documents—the difference between what is described as Divine words, and the human words of the editors / narrators / authors. Of course, there are those who hold that every word in the **Bible** is Divine, and inerrant (Sarfati)—but that view is very difficult to hold when reading such books as **Job**, or **Ecclesiastes**, or **Jeremiah**—where the human element quickly becomes obvious. It is difficult to affirm that the statements of Job’s “friends” are

(continued...)

1.6 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רָקִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ הַמַּיִם

And God said,²⁵ Let an expanse²⁶ be in (the) midst of the waters //

²⁴(...continued)

Divine statements, when YHWH specifically states that they were wrong (**Job 42:7**), and that Job's own statements were spoken "without knowledge" (**Job 38:2**; compare **42:3**)! A number of the statements in **Ecclesiastes** are pessimistic to the core, and can hardly be considered Divine words. Likewise, in Jeremiah's prayers, we hear the heart-rending complaints of a dedicated prophet, but hardly Divine words. What do you think?

Bowie comments on **verse 5**, that "There is the double fact of day and night; and the message of the **Bible** is that God gave them both. Life has its beautiful and blessed rhythm. There is a time for action and a time for rest. There is a time when all the ways of the world are clear and open, and a time when the shadows fall and we must wait. And the promise is that as the Lord made both day and night, so 'the Lord shall preserve your going out and your coming in' (**Psalm 121:8**)..." (P. 471)

²⁵

The plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiyim** "God" again occurs with a singular verb.

²⁶

The noun רָקִיעַ, **raqiy(a)**, means "that which is beaten out thin," or "that which is spread out," and refers to an "extended surface," or "expanse." The word has been translated by both "firmament" and "expanse" in Christian and Jewish English translations. Fox translates by "dome."

"Ibn Ezra states that [it] means something that is stretched out, and that in our verse it refers specifically to the אַוִיר, **awiyr**, atmosphere...Hirsch explains that if it is derived from רָקַע, **raq(a)**, 'extending,' 'stretching,' then רָקִיעַ, **raqiy(a)** could characterize the gaseous expansion of the air, in contrast to the denser water and earth—hence the atmosphere which fills the space between the waters below and those above...But Hirsch suggests that this is only a secondary meaning of רָקִיעַ, **raqiy(a)**. It has rather the meaning of 'beaten thin,' by which, in the case of metals, an extension is achieved. Accordingly, [it] refers to the lower surface of the heaven which has the appearance of a dome or vault over and about the earth...The 'dome' however is merely an optical illusion.

"Malbim explains...[that] there is no such thing as a physical 'dome' girding the earth. [The term] is therefore to be understood as referring to the area of the clouds. The vaporous mist ascends until that area where it becomes water in the form of rain and returns to earth... The interpretation, then, of the verse is: 'Let the sky which was created on the first day be stretched forth amidst the waters which engulfed the earth' (B'chor Shor)." (**Bereishis** 1, p .

(continued...)

²⁶(...continued)
45).

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is στερέωμα, **stereoma**, which means “steadfastness,” or “solid body,” or “foundation.” The older English translations (**King James** and **1917 JPS**) use the Latin-derived word, “firmament” (**firmamentum** in the **Latin Vulgate**) a word descriptive of “that which supports.”

As the author of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** uses it, the word refers to something that is solid, but nonetheless “beaten out thin,” which extends from the waters on the earth below to the waters in the heavens (the clouds) above, or as **verse 8** explains, the “heavens” above the earth. It is certainly not a “scientific” description of the atmosphere that surrounds the earth, but NASA’s work in outer space has taught us how “real” that atmosphere is, how necessary it is for human existence, serving as a “protective shield,” and how solid, though “beaten out thin” it appears to be when vessels from outer space enter or “crash” into it as we have witnessed in the shuttle Columbia tragedy, as the spaceship burned up as it crashed into earth’s atmosphere.

Hiebert translates “dome,” and states that “according to ancient Israel’s cosmology, it is an impermeable [not capable of being penetrated] barrier that holds back a great reservoir of water in the sky, separating it from the great reservoir under the earth.” (P. 6)

Fretheim comments that “Having no idea of infinite space, the writer thought the sky was something solid (**Job 37:18** [God asks Job if he able to beat out the clouds as hard as a poured-out mirror]), either metal or ice, held up by pillars (**Job 26:11** [Job says that ‘The pillars of heaven tremble...’]). This ‘dome’ provided living space between the waters above (the source of rain and snow, flowing through windows (**Genesis 7:11** [‘the windows of the heaven were opened’—and therefore the ‘dome’ is penetrable]) and the waters on and below the earth.” (P. 344)

This is an example, we think, of “proof-texting,” culling various statements from different parts of the **Bible**, and then combining them to form “the biblical picture” (such as G. Schiaparelli’s, that was shown in older **Bible** dictionaries). But never in the **Bible** itself is there a text that puts these various images together as one united view (as Fretheim is doing here).

Rather, we hold, the biblical pictures of the universe are varied and inconsistent, involving a great deal of symbolism, but all of them “open to God,” both from within and from without. Here in the story of creation, the “expanse” above the earth is simply described as having been “beaten out thin,” with no further attempt at description.

What do you think? Do you think we moderns can honestly think of the atmosphere above us as a “dome”? We think it is entirely possible, but not necessary.

וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם:

and let it be a divider between waters to the waters!²⁷

1.7 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַרְקִיעַ

And God made²⁸ the expanse,

27

Alexander notes concerning **verses 6-8** that “Water plays a crucial role in ancient Near Eastern creation literature. In Egypt, for example, the Creator-God Ptah uses the preexistent waters (personified as the God Nun) to create the universe. The same is true in Mesopotamian belief: it is out of the Gods of watery chaos—Apsu, Tiamat, and Mummu—that creation comes. The biblical creation account sits in stark contrast to such dark mythological polytheism. In the biblical account, water at creation is no Deity; it is simply something God created, and it serves as material in the hands of the Sole Sovereign Creator.” (P. 50)

The phrase וַיְהִי מַבְדִּיל בֵּין מַיִם לַמַּיִם, **wiyhiy mabhdil beyn mayim lamayim**, is literally, “and it will be a divider between waters to the waters.” The **LXX** translates, διαχωρίζον ἀνὰ μέσον ὕδατος καὶ ὕδατος, **diachorizon ana meson hudatos kai hudatos**, “a thing dividing in the middle of water and water.” This difficult statement in Hebrew is explained clearly in the succeeding **verse 7**.

28

In the preceding statements, God said, “Let it be” and “it was.” Here, God says “Let an expanse be...” but then instead of it simply happening, the text goes on to say “And God made the expanse...”

“This is one of the verses which caused Ben Zoma so much difficulty that ‘he caused the earth to shake.’ He questioned why, after God expressed His intention in **verse 6**, it was necessary to say in **verse 7** that ‘He made,’ as though His wish were insufficient.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 47)

Again the plural noun אֱלֹהִים, **elohiyim** is followed by a singular verb. We have noted this already on a number of occasions, and will not point it out further—although it occurs constantly throughout the **Hebrew Bible** (with a few exceptions—see footnote 15).

The verb וַיַּעַשׂ, **wayya(as**, “and He made,” from the root verb עָשָׂה, **(asah**, is now used rather than the preceding “He created.” The two verbs, made and created, are in fact synonyms, although the verb “create” is much more rarely used in the **Hebrew Bible** than the verb “make.” The Greek translation (**Rahfs**) uses the same aorist verb, ἐποίησεν, **epoiesen**, “he made,” in the translation of the verb “He created” in **verse 1**, and in this present verse.

(continued...)

וַיִּבְדֵּל בֵּין הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מִתַּחַת לַרְקִיעַ

and it divided²⁹ between the waters which were beneath the expanse,

וַיִּבֶן הַמַּיִם אֲשֶׁר מֵעַל לַרְקִיעַ

and (between) the waters which were above the expanse--

²⁸(...continued)

The root verb עָשָׂה, (**asah** “make” is used ten times in this opening story of **Genesis: verses 7, 11, 12, 16, 25, 26, 31, 2:2, 3** and **4**. The verb בָּרָא, (**bara**), “create,” is found seven times, in **verses 1, 21, 27, 27, 27, 2:3** and **4**.

Some students (such as Westermann) attribute this use of the two verbs to two different ways of telling the narrative of creation in the ancient Near East. However, it may only be that the author uses the two verbs as synonyms in order to give variety to the narrative. At any rate, the author certainly does not have one uniform way of describing the Divine activity in creation.

See also the use of other verbs for the Divine creative activity such as יָצַר, **yatsar**, “He shaped / formed” (like a great “Potter”), **Genesis 2:7, 8** and **19**; נָטַע, **nata**(, “He planted” (like a great “Gardener”), **Genesis 2:8**; צָמַח, **tsamach**, “He caused to sprout” (again, like a great “Gardener”), **Genesis 2:5, 9**; and בָּנָה, **banah**, “He built” (like a great “Carpenter”), **Genesis 2:22**--all of which are “anthropomorphic,” i.e., using human activities to describe the Divine activity, even though they are grossly inadequate for describing the hidden, mysterious Divine working in the creation of the universe, and in human history.

What do you think? Do you agree that these verbs are “anthropomorphic”? And if you object to the use of “anthropomorphism,” what type language do you propose?

29

As Hamilton points out, “Syntactically the subject of *separated* could be either God (‘He separated’) or the vault [our ‘expanse’] (‘it separated’). God can be understood as the subject on the basis of the parallel in **verse 4**, where God is clearly the subject of the same verb...In favor of attaching the verb with vault [our ‘expanse’] as subject is the fact that later in the narrative the work of separation is assigned to the created items themselves, and not to the Creator (**verses 14, 18**).” (P. 123)

We agree with Hamilton’s comment, and think that the text is ambiguous at this point.

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

and so it happened.³⁰

30

This is the first appearance of this phrase in **Genesis 1**, וַיְהִי־כֵן, **wayehi-keyn**, “and it happened this way,” or “and so it happened.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως, **kai egeneto houtos**, “and it happened this way” (the phrase is placed at the end of **verse 6** instead of here at the end of **verse 7** as it is in the Hebrew text.

Compare **verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24** and **30**, for this same phrase, “and so it happened.” The Divine word of command is what happens in history. This is an important motif for the biblical story of creation—but it is also an important motif in the writings of the great Hebrew Prophets, both “early” (**Joshua** through **Kings**) and “later” (the “major” and “minor” writing Prophets), as they show the working out of God’s “word of command” in the history of Israel and the nations. That is, God’s word was determinative in creation, and is also determinative in history.

Now, as an octogenarian writing these notes, I realize how true this has been throughout my life—it is the Divine Word that has been determinative in my life, even when I neglected or rebelled against it. What about you?

Cassuto emphasizes the difference between the **Genesis** account of creation and the Babylonian description of the dividing of the slain corpse of Tiamat by Marduk, at the conclusion of their epic battle. Westermann agrees with Cassuto, stating that “This is quite justified and is in contrast to the remark of Gunkel, ‘It is closely related to the Babylonian story where Marduk splits Tiamat, the primeval sea, into two parts.’ “ (P. 118)

Cassuto goes further in stating that “Here we have neither war nor weapons; a body is not carved up, nor are its segments used for construction; a simple process of physical unfoldment takes the place of the mythical train of events described in the pagan legends.” (Quoted by Westermann, p. 118) Westermann thinks that Cassuto has gone too far in this comment, but we think Cassuto’s comment is entirely appropriate. There is certainly no Divine struggle being depicted here in **Genesis 1**; rather God’s work in creation and making is both effortless and without opposition. What do you think?

And we add, while there is no opposition in creation, in humanity’s history there is constant opposition, as human beings question and reject God’s Word, and even Israel rebels against it. It is a struggle, but God’s Word ultimately wins the battle! It is God’s creation—and it can only be “good” when conforming to God’s Word!

1.8 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַרְקִיעַ שָׁמַיִם

And God called to the expanse, Heavens!³¹

31

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) interpolates the phrase καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι καλόν, **kai eiden ho theos hote kalon**, “and the God saw that (it was) good,” into the Hebrew text at this point.

“Rashi notes that the **Torah** does not conclude this **verse [7]** with the phrase כִּי־טוֹב, **kiy-tobh**, ‘that it was good’ as it does on the other days of creation, because the task of creating the waters, although begun on the second day, was not completed until the following day (when they were gathered and became seas). Incomplete work is still imperfect (i.e., because having not yet attained its intended state, it could not be described as ‘good.’” (**Bereishis** 1, pp. 47-48)

The Hebrew masculine plural noun שָׁמַיִם, **shamayim**, “heavens,” “skies,” or “airs,” is translated here in the Greek by the singular noun οὐρανόν, **ouranon**, “vault of heaven,” or “sky.”

The Mesopotamian story of creation, **Enuma Elish**, tells the story of the origin of the heavens as follows: “Then the Lord [Marduk] paused to view Her [Tiamat’s] dead body, that He might divide the Monster and do artful works. He split Her like a shellfish into two parts; half of Her He set up and ceiled it as sky, pulled down the bar and posted guards. He bade them to not allow Her waters to escape.”

As Hamilton notes, “In this myth [**Enuma Elish**], sky is made not only from preexisting material but specifically from one-half of the cadaver of an evil Goddess. Then Marduk must provide locks and guards to deter Tiamat from unleashing her threatening waters on the earth. Heaven as antagonist operates under restraint.” (P. 123) What a contrast with the **Genesis** account!

It is to be noted that in the **Genesis** creation narrative, God is described as giving names to only those things which He has “separated” from one another—see **verses 5** (day and night), **8** (heavens), and **10** (earth and seas).

Westermann states that “By naming them God destines space and time to be the world of humanity forever and in this very same action shows Himself to be the Master of the world so defined. In the traditions which [the priestly writer] received, in Sumer and Babylon, naming is the finish of the act of creation.” (P. 87)

Westermann further notes that “Heaven in the **Old Testament** is simply something created; it has no Divine character at all. The creation and naming of the firmament is

(continued...)

וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

And there was evening, and there was morning--

יוֹם שֵׁנִי:

a second day.

1.9³² וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

And God said,

³¹(...continued)

affirming strictly that heaven is created; it is part of ‘not God.’ Heaven is not a different sort of creature from earth; it has not a closer relationship to God than earth (**Deuteronomy 10:14** [Look—to YHWH your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it]); God is on the other side of heaven just as the earth is on this side. [But should we not rather say that for the **Hebrew Bible** and for the **New Testament** as well, God is present in the heavens, and on earth, both transcendent to them, and immanent within them?—not on the ‘other side’ of either of them?]....

Heaven is simply something created. When the **Old Testament** speaks of heaven as a dwelling of God, as it rarely does, or of God acting from heaven, then this is either metaphorical or the language of tradition...There is no indication at all in the **Old Testament** that God created heaven for Himself to live in as happens, for example in Egypt: ‘When heaven was separated from earth, when the Gods climbed up to heaven’...One can say that where God is One, heaven loses its meaning as a dwelling of the Gods. The **Old Testament** can speak of the destruction of heaven at the last judgment simply because heaven, like earth, is something created (**Isaiah 34:4; 51:6** [כִּי־שָׁמַיִם כֶּעָשָׁן נִמְלָחוּ] **kiy-shamayim ke(ashan nimlachu**, ‘because heavens like smoke were dissipated’])...” (P. 119)

For the **Hebrew Bible**, God both created the heavens, and dissipates them; neither of which actions has any effect on God’s reality or dwelling-place. Compare **2 Peter 3:7**, “...the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly people.”

32

Wenham comments on **verses 9-13** that “The narrative moves from the creation of light by which the works of God are seen, through heaven, the throne of God [where is this said in this passage? Are we to understand that God had no throne before His creation of the universe? See Westermann’s remarks in the preceding footnote], to earth, the abode of man. With the establishment of land and sea the basic parameters of human existence in time and space are complete. But unlike the works of the first two days, the work of the third involved no new creation, but [was] more an organization of existing material.” (P. 20)

יִקְוּ הַמַּיִם מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶל־מְקוֹם אֶחָד

Let the waters be collected³³ from beneath the heavens into one place,³⁴

וְתִרְאֶה הַיַּבֶּשֶׁת

and let the dry land be seen!³⁵

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

And so it happened.³⁶

33

The niphil imperfect 3rd person plural verb יִקְוּ, **yiqqawu**, “let them be gathered,” or “they will be gathered,” is from the root קָוָה, **qawah**, “to gather.” From this verb has come the noun מִקְוֵה, **miqweh** (or **miqwah**) which means “gathering” (or even “pool,” i.e., gathering of water), later to be used in Israel for immersion pools dug into bed-rock beneath homes.

34

Instead of the Hebrew text’s “one place,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the noun συναγωγή, **sunagogen**, “gathering,” which probably means that the Hebrew text being used by the Greek translators read מִקְוֵה, **miqweh**, “collection” (compare **verse 10**, where the phrase וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם, **ulemiqweh hammayim**, “and to gathering of the waters” occurs), instead of מְקוֹם, **maqom**, “place.”

35

Or, “and let the dry land appear,” or “and the dry land will be seen.” The niphil imperfect 3rd person singular feminine verb תִּרְאֶה, **thera)eh**, can have either meaning, i.e., “it (i.e., the dry land, feminine singular) will appear,” or “it (the dry land) will be seen.”

36

The phrase וַיְהִי־כֵן, **wayehi kheyn**, “and so it happened,” stresses that when God the Creator speaks His word of command, it happens just as He commands. This is a major motif in this story of creation--see **verses 7, 9** (here), **11, 15, 24** and **30**. Even when this phrase does not appear, still the thought is present, as that which God commands comes into being just as He has commanded. The entire universe is subject to the Divine word. We believe that this is part of the important Biblical Theology of the word of God.

Bereishis 1, p. 50 imaginatively states, “Until then the earth was a plain, entirely submerged under water. Scarcely had God’s words: ‘Let the waters be gathered’ been uttered, when mountains and hills appeared all over and the waters collected in the deep-lying
(continued...)

1.10 וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַבֹּשֶׁת אֶרֶץ

And God called to the dry land, Earth!³⁷

וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים

And to the collection³⁸ of the waters he called, Seas!³⁹

³⁶(...continued)

valleys...” (Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer; Zohar)

Westermann notes that “The separations end with **verse 9** and do not occur in the subsequent acts of creation.” (P. 121)

The Greek translation (**Rahfs**) interpolates into the text at the close of **verse 9** the sentence,

καὶ συνηχθη τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ ὑποκάτω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ εἰς τὰς συναγωγὰς αὐτῶν
and it was gathered together, the water, that beneath the heaven, into the
gatherings of theirs,
καὶ ὤφθη ἡ ξηρά
and it was seen, the dry (land)

This demonstrates, we think, that the Greek translators were working with a slightly different form of the Hebrew text from that of the later Masorettes.

³⁷

The first noun in the proud name אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל, **erets Israel**, literally “land (of Israel),” does not belong exclusively to Israel. Rather, according to the **Genesis** story of creation, all the dry land of the planet is Divinely given that same name אֶרֶץ, **erets**, “earth” or “land.” This is part of what we are calling the “universalism” of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**.

Modern Israel’s emphasis on the land of Israel as “the land,” needs to be seen in the light of the **Genesis** story, in which all of the dry land of planet earth is God’s “very good” creation!

³⁸

The compound word is וּלְמִקְוֵה, **ulemiqweh**, “and to (the) gathering (of...)” The deep ocean, so feared and superstitiously treated as a Divine monster by Israel’s neighbors, is here pictured as nothing more than a big immersion tank! Again we sense this matter of the “demythologizing” of the ancient Near East’s cosmologies.

³⁹

(continued...)

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.⁴⁰

³⁹(...continued)

Out of the chaotic original condition of created matter, comes the Divine action (through the spoken word), separating the confused mass (“raw material” created by God) into distinct elements, and then “naming” the individual parts—thus giving clarity and meaning to the originally confused mixture.

Rabbi Hirsch comments that “This division of the land by the seas into separate countries became the foundation of all the development of nations.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 51)

Hamilton notes that “The narration of the creation story now advances from the category of time to that of space. This is the last time, in the creation context, that God will name anything. He continues to create, but He ceases to name. That responsibility will be delegated to man, once he arrives on the scene (**2:19, 20, 23; 3:20; 4:17, 25, 26; 5:3, 29**).” (P. 125)

Westermann notes that “The separation of the land and the water without any sign of a struggle is by far the most common description [of creation in the ancient Near Eastern cosmologies] and is found in many forms in Egypt. The description of the primeval hill rising out of the deep predominates...” (P. 120)

We agree with Westermann, but add that in those Egyptian cosmologies concerning the primeval hill rising out of the deep, the exact place where it arose is considered the “navel of the earth,” and is the location of the center of worship. There is absolutely nothing like this in the **Genesis** story of creation, where we could expect the land of Israel, and Jerusalem in particular, to be pointed out as the “earth’s navel.” But there is nothing like this. See Pritchard, **ANET**, pp. 3-10 for the Egyptian cosmologies.

40

Once again (see **verse 4**) this major motif of **Genesis one** is repeated--that of the fundamental “goodness” of the created universe. Unformed and in a chaotic condition, the universe is not, in its original condition, declared “good.” It is only following the Divine “separating” and “naming,” assigning the function of the various created elements, that instead of being a negative, uninhabitable “waste,” the creation becomes “good”--a suitable place for human habitation, with the necessary conditions present for the support and engendering (giving rise to) of life.

Compare **Isaiah 45:18**, where the affirmation is made that YHWH

לֹא־תָהוּ בְרֵאָה

Not formless did He create it (the earth);

(continued...)

1.11 וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים תִּדְרָשׂא הָאָרֶץ דֶּשֶׁא

And God said,⁴¹ Let the earth⁴² grow green—

⁴⁰(...continued)

לְשֵׁבֶת יִצְרָהּ

for habitation He formed it.

What do you think? How do you understand **Isaiah 45:18** in the light of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**? Can the “gap theory” claim this as a proof that the story involves two creations, the first one perfect and good, the second filled with an original chaos? See footnote 17.

Hamilton notes that **Genesis 1:10** is structured exactly like **verse 5**.” (P. 125)

Westermann comments that “The three acts of separation are the source of the three basic categories in which creatures, and above all living beings, live out their existence—the category of time and the categories of space...The alternation of night and day is the basis of time, the creation of the firmament, the basis of the vertical dimension, the separation of the water and the land, the basis of the horizontal dimension.” (P. 119)

⁴¹

Youngblood notes that the phrase “God said” occurs “twice on the third day (**verses 9, 11**) and three times (**verses 24, 26, 29**) on the sixth day.” (P. 6) He lines up the six days as follows:

Day 1	light (verse 3)	Day 4	light bearers (verse 14)
Day 2	water under the expanse...	Day 5	every living and moving thing with which the waters teem...
	water above it (verse 7)		every winged bird (verse 21)
Day 3a	dry ground (verse 9)	Day 6a	livestock, creatures that move above the ground and wild animals (verse 24)
Day 3b	vegetation (verse 11)	Day 6b	every green plant for food (verse 30)

“Both the horizontal and vertical relationships between the days demonstrate the literary beauty of the chapter and stress the [author’s view of the] orderliness and symmetry of God’s creative activity.” (Pp. 6-7)

⁴²

The author pictures God the Creator as enlisting the created earth as His “partner” in
(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

the bringing forth of life. Instead of God bringing forth the grass with its herbs and seeds and fruit-trees simply by Divine command, and instantaneously, the author pictures God as giving His “call” of command to the earth to participate in this life-giving, creative process. Earth’s fertility, attributed by the Canaanites to Baal and Anath, is in this **Genesis** story attributed to earth itself, at the command of אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym**, “God.”

Ibn Ezra states that “...With this command, God implanted within the earth the eternal power to produce vegetation.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 52) Indeed, the created earth becomes a co-creator with God!

Westermann states that the background of this statement is “...the ancient idea of the origin of life from the earth. The earth, the mother of all life, brings forth what is living. [The priestly author] allows this ancient idea to continue to echo.” (1, p. 87)

He also comments that “The formulation of the fourth work of creation is very different from what has preceded. ‘God’s word...now abdicates its creative power, i.e., the word now allows what has just been created to be the origin of something new.’ (Quoting W. H. Schmidt).” (P. 124)

We disagree that this is a matter of God’s “abdicating” His creative power. Rather, it is simply a matter of God’s expanding His creative power, using His creatures to further the process of creation.

Sarna comments that “Here the earth is depicted as the mediating element, implying that God endows it with generative powers that He now activates by His utterance. The significance of this singularity is that the sources of power in what we call nature, which were personified and Deified in the ancient world, are now emptied of sanctity. The productive forces of nature exist only by the will of One Sovereign Creator and are not independent spiritual entities. There is no room in such a concept for the fertility cults that were features of ancient Near Eastern religions.” (**Genesis**, p. 9)

Hiebert notes that the plants in this story form “the first form of life,” and he adds that the vegetation that is described are “the two kinds of plants cultivated by Israelite farmers...the first, wheat and barley, the second...tree crops, primarily olives.” (P. 6) However, the text itself is not that specific, mentioning neither wheat, or barley, or olive-trees—and we doubt that this statement can be considered as having Israelite crop production in mind. What do you think?

Bowie comments that “There is no act of creation for which it is more instinctive to thank God than for this one. Here is the blessing of the fertile ground, with its productivity of growth—the everlasting miracle of ‘the good earth.’ Human existence depends upon the earth’s fertility... [Therefore,] to sin against the land is to sin against the good life which God has put within the reach of men. The Christian church therefore, and every intelligent

(continued...)

עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע

green grass, vegetation seeding seed–

עֵץ פְּרִי עֹשֶׂה פְּרִי לְמִינּוֹ

fruit tree(s)⁴³ bearing fruit of its kind,⁴⁴

⁴²(...continued)

individual in it, has a concern for the forces that destroy the land...” (P. 473)

Do you agree with Bowie? Do you think that ecology is an important element in Biblical Theology? We do. The first task of humanity, according to the **Genesis** story, is to take up the task of gardening, of farming.

⁴³

A few manuscripts of the Hebrew, the **Samaritan Pentateuch**, the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**), the **Targum of Jonathan** and the Latin Vulgate all interpolate the conjunction וְ before the noun עֵץ, i.e., “and tree(s)...” just as is read in **verse 12**. The interpolated conjunction does not change the meaning of **Genesis**.

Wenham comments that with this interpolated conjunction, the text “implies that עֵשֶׂב, (**esebh**, ‘plants’ [our ‘vegetation’] and עֵץ, (**ets**, ‘tree’ are included in דְּשֵׁא, (**deshe**), ‘grass,’ whereas without ‘and,’ ‘grass,’ ‘plants,’ ‘trees’ could be mutually exclusive categories.” (P. 4)

⁴⁴

Genesis 1 stresses the phrase לְמִינּוֹ, **lemiyno**, “of (literally ‘to’) its kind,” thereby showing the different “kinds” of botanical life, with the seeds that produce only according to their inherent nature (we are learning to say, “according to their DNA code”).

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has a lengthy phrase, κατὰ γένος καὶ καθ’ ὁμοιότητα, **kata genos kai kath homoioteta**, “according to family, and according to likeness,” which is an addition to the Hebrew text, raising the mention from one kind, to three kinds. Modern scientific study of genetic “codes” is throwing great light on this subject. See **Wikipedia’s** article “Phylum,” with its eight major taxonomic (classification) ranks (7/26/2014).

Westermann comments on the meaning of the word מִין, **min**, “kind,” that “Its meaning is precisely the same as that of the word used today in the natural sciences, namely species or genus...” (P. 126) What do you think? “Precisely the same”?

Wenham comments that “There runs through this chapter a concern with definitions and divisions. God has created different types of plants and given them the power to

(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

reproduce: 'seed bearing, fruit bearing.' There is a givenness about time and space which God has ordered by His Own decree. The different species of plant and animal life again bear testimony to God's creative plan...

"The implication, though not stated, is clear: what God has distinguished and created distinct, man ought not to confuse. Order, not chaos, is the hallmark of God's activity... Things are so because God made it so, and men and women should accept His decree." (1, p. 21) It is clear that some Jews understood the matter in this way: see:

Leviticus 19:19,

אַת־חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ

You people must keep my statutes.

בְּהִמְתֵּךְ לֹא־תִרְבֶּיעַ כְּלָאִים

Your (singular) cattle must not breed with different kinds of cattle.

שְׂדֵךְ לֹא־תִזְרַע כְּלָאִים

Your field, you must not plant with different kinds of seed.

וּבִגְד כְּלָאִים שֶׁעֲטָנֹו לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ:

And a robe made from different kinds of cloth shall not be worn by you.

Deuteronomy 22:9-11,

9 לֹא־תִזְרַע כְּרִמָּךְ כְּלָאִים

You shall not plant your vineyard (with) two kinds (of vines / seeds);

כִּן־תִּקְדָּשׁ הַמְּלֵאָה הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר תִּזְרַע

lest you set-apart the entirety of the vine(s) / seed(s) which you plant,

וּתְבוֹאֹת הַפְּרִים:

and the vineyard's produce.

10 לֹא־תַחְרֹשׁ בְּשׁוֹר־וּבַחֲמֹר יַחְדָּו:

You shall not plow with an ox and with a donkey together.

11 לֹא תִלְבַּשׁ שְׁעֵטָנֹו

You shall not dress (in) mixed materials—

צִמְרֵן וּפְשִׁתִּים יַחְדָּו:

wool and linen / flax together.

What do you think? Do you agree with Wenham? We do not and ask, Where in this text is there such an implication? While this text certainly teaches that God created the plants and animals "according to kind," it is a long stretch to draw such conclusions—which quickly lend support to racist and nationalist conclusions such as were drawn by the Nazi Germans (continued...)

אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוֹ-בּוֹ

whose seed is in it,

עַל-הָאָרֶץ

upon the earth!⁴⁵

וַיְהִי-כֵן:

And so it happened.⁴⁶

1.12 וַתּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ דְּשָׂא

And the earth brought forth⁴⁷ green grass⁴⁸--

⁴⁴(...continued)

(the Aryan race must be kept separate from the inferior other races), as well as by the Ku Klux Klan and the Black Muslims in America (both of which have taught that their race is superior, and must be kept separate from other races).

God has made human beings to rule over the earth, and by learning the laws of genetics in both plants, animals and humans, great strides can be made in increasing crop production throughout the earth, and cures for seemingly incurable diseases can be found. But simply because conjoined twins are given birth does not mean that surgical separation is a violation of the will of God. What do you think? See our commentaries on **Leviticus** and **Deuteronomy** for reasons for these passages in Israel's history—God's command for the Israelites not to engage in the sympathetic magical practices of their surrounding neighbors.

⁴⁵

Fox translates by “God said: Let the earth sprout forth with sprouting growth, plants that seed forth seeds, fruit trees that yield fruit, after their kind.” (P. 14) This translation reproduces the similarities of sound in the Hebrew text, and we have attempted to do the same in our translation.

⁴⁶See **verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24** and **30** for this same phrase, “and so it happened.”

⁴⁷

Fretheim comments that “**Verses 11-13** witness to a shift in God's way of creating; the earth itself participates in the creative process.” (P. 344)

Westermann comments that “the meaning of ‘the bringing forth’ is primarily: ‘let something which is within come out.’ The plants are in the earth and the earth lets them come forth...The background is the widespread image of Mother Earth, the earth as the bearer of all life and all the vegetation...The terms ‘to bring forth from...’ or ‘to come forth from...’ are found especially in primitive creation narratives...The old description is certainly modified. It is only
(continued...)

עֵשֶׂב מִזְרִיעַ זֶרַע לְמִינֵהוּ

herbage seeding / producing seed, seed of its kind,⁴⁹

⁴⁷(...continued)

God's Creative Word that enables the earth to bring forth the plants; it cannot do so of itself. But this happens in such a way that the older voice can still be heard." (P. 126)

Once again God's creatures are called / commanded to share in continuing creation. We believe that if biblical students would pay more attention to these statements, it would help to eliminate the conflict between "evolution or creation," and enable the development of a view of "creative evolution," in which the Divine creation occurs not only instantaneously at the beginning, but continues throughout history through the presence of the "hovering," engendering Spirit, and the cooperation of the created elements such as the earth and human beings. What do you think?

⁴⁸

Hamilton comments that "It is a moot point whether **verses 11 and 12** refer to three different types of plant growth or to two. The Hebrew allows either possibility." (P. 126) He thinks that the noun **אֲשֶׁבֶת**, (**deshe**), which we have translated "green grass," is an all-inclusive word meaning "verdure," "green thing(s)," which is then defined by the two words **עֵשֶׂב**, (**esebh**, "herb(s)" or "vegetation," and **עֵץ**, (**ets**, "tree(s).") Hiebert notes that "the germination of plants (is) earth's first form of life." (P. 6)

⁴⁹

Compare footnote 57 for this same phrase, "of its kind." Here the Greek (**Rahlfs**) has only the translation of the Hebrew, **κατὰ γένος**, **kata genos**, "according to family," with nothing additional interpolated.

Fretheim comments that "The description of the plants and trees with their capacity to reproduce by themselves gives evidence for a probing interest in what we would call 'natural science.'" (P. 344)

Compare the statement in **1 Kings 4:29-34** concerning King Solomon's great wisdom, including different trees, from the cedars in Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of a wall, as well as beasts, birds, reptiles and fish. This story of creation displays a kindred interest in such a wide variety of nature. And we ask, should we consider the possibility of Solomon's envisioning and writing the **Genesis** story of creation? We think perhaps...but consider it much more likely that the vision has come from **Second Isaiah**, with its universalism and concern for sabbath-observance, or from **Ezekiel**, with its vision-stories of the valley of dry bones being resurrected (**chapter 37**), or the river of life flowing out of the temple, bringing life to the most desolate, dead place on earth, the Dead Sea (**chapter 47**), who also has deep concern for sabbath-observance. We will never know for sure the author of this vision-story—
(continued...)

וַעֲץ עֹשֶׂה פֵּרוֹי

and tree(s) making fruit,

אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוֹ-בּוֹ לְמִינֵהוּ

those with its seed in it, of its kind.⁵⁰

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.⁵¹

⁴⁹(...continued)

but we can certainly make its vision our own, and live by it!

50

Here again the Greek (**Rahlfs**) adds the longer phrase, κατὰ γένος καὶ καθ' ὁμοιότητα, **kata genos kai kath homoioteta**, “according to family, and according to likeness,” which, we think, points to the use of a slightly different Hebrew text from that of the Masoretes.

Modern biological science, with its manifold divisions of the differing types of plants, only enlarges on this ancient biblical teaching.

Hamilton comments that “God’s creative design is that both the plants and the trees will reproduce themselves by bearing seed ‘each according to its kind’...Here the concept of both the supernatural and the natural have their place. What exists exists because of the creative word of God. This spoken word is the ultimate background to all terrestrial phenomena. Yet this same word grants the means of self-perpetuation to various species and orders of creation...” (P. 126)

Westermann comments that “There is a large gap between **Genesis 1:11-12** and **Enuma Elish**. The description in **Genesis** is on the way to a scientific explanation of the origin of plants. The classification of the plants shows a scientific interest. An objective interest has taken the place of a purely functional interest in plants as nourishment for humans.” (P. 124)

Do you agree with Westermann that “The description in **Genesis** is on the way to a scientific explanation of the origin of plants”? We do. The Creation Story is not a “scientific story,” but when compared to all of the other ancient cosmologies, it is by far the closest to a “scientific” account—it is “on the way” to such an account.

51

See **verse 4** for the beginning of this basic seven-fold motif of the goodness of all creation.

1.13⁵² וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב

And there was evening,

וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

and there was morning--

יוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי:

a third day.⁵³

52

Hamilton notes that **verses 13-15** “move from the creation of the bare earth to the ornamentation of that earth. Unlike the first and second days, which feature one act of creation, this day has two acts of creation: earth and vegetation.” (P. 125) We do not think “ornamentation” is a good description of what is happening. Do you? We think something like “development” is better, bringing forth what is innate possibility.

53

Here again we see the division of the creation-story into the work of seven days, which we understand as a story-teller’s technique for enabling people to memorize and remember the vision / story, but should not be taken woodenly and literally, as if it is an accurate scientific depiction. We are reminded of **Matthew 1:1-16’s** genealogy of Jesus, in which the much longer and quite different genealogy of **Luke 3:23-27** is shortened and arbitrarily divided into three artificial units of fourteen each, probably for the sake of memorization.

Hamilton comments that “With the conclusion of the third day yet another color is added to God’s cosmos. To the basic white and black of day and night has been added the blue of sky and sea. Now the canvas is adorned with green. The golden-yellow sun and the reddish human being will complete this rainbow of colors.” (P. 126)

The reason that Hamilton speaks of the “reddish human being” is that the Hebrew name / noun אָדָם, **adham**, “man,” is closely related to the adjective אָדָם, **adhom**, “red.” The author of these notes’ Navajo son, Phillip, will appreciate this fact!

Each of the first two days of creation can be seen as containing only one major creative act; whereas here, on the third day, there are two distinct creative acts, and the same thing can be seen with regards to the sixth day, so that the creative acts are as follows:

Day 1, 1 creation (light; day and night);

Day 2, 1 creation (sky separating waters above and waters below);

Day 3, 2 creations (dry land; green vegetation);

(continued...)

⁵³(...continued)

Day 4, 1 creation (heavenly light bearers);

Day 5, 2 creations (fish and fowl);

Day 6, 2 creations (land animals and human beings).

According to this view, there are nine creative acts divided among the six days. It can be speculated that an ancient Near-Eastern story of creation perhaps told of the nine creative acts, and that the priestly writer in Israel, desiring to tell the story in terms of six days, plus a seventh day of rest, compressed the nine creative acts in this way in order to make them fit into his artificial scheme of six days of creation ended by the seventh day of rest.

However this scheme is arbitrary, because it depends on combining two elements as one on days 1 and 2; day 3 can be seen as containing three creations (including seas); day 4 can be seen as containing at least three creations (sun, moon and stars). The fact seems to be that the biblical story of creation (and certainly creation itself) is too diverse and multi-faceted to be subjected with any degree of accuracy to any neat scheme such as this.

For a “vision-story,” easily understood and memorized by children, such a scheme is effective. It is equally effective religiously, as it leads to awe and worship of the Creator, and to the observance of a seventh-day of rest. But as a “scientific” description, while it serves as an ancient attempt at physical description, it is completely inadequate in the light of modern knowledge, especially with its depiction of day and night and vegetation existing before the existence of the sun. What do you think?

54

Hiebert comments on **verses 14-19** that “On the fourth day, God populates the realms of day and night, created on the first day, with the heavenly bodies that inhabit and regulate these realms.”

Wenham comments that “The creation of the sun, moon, and stars is described at much greater length than anything save the creation of man. The description is also quite repetitive. The fullness of the description suggests that the creation of the heavenly bodies held a special significance for the author and possibly that a variety of sources underlie the account..

“The most obvious reason for the detail in the fourth day’s description is the importance of the astral bodies in ancient Near Eastern thought. In neighboring cultures, the sun and the moon were some of the most important Gods in the pantheon [in Egypt, the God Ra / Re is the sun, and the God Thoth is the moon—see Alexander, p. 50], and the stars were often credited with controlling human destiny...So there is probably a polemic thrust behind the **Genesis** treatment of the theme. This comes out in several ways.

“First the sun, moon, and stars are created by God: they are creatures, not Gods. And with creatureliness goes transience; unlike the Hittite Sun-God, they are not ‘from eternity’...
(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי מְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

And God said, Let light-bearers⁵⁵ be⁵⁶ in the expanse⁵⁷ of the heavens,⁵⁸

⁵⁴(...continued)

“Second, the sun and the moon are not given their usual Hebrew names שֶׁמֶשׁ [shem-esh] and יָרֵיחַ [yareach] here, which might suggest an identification with Shamash the Sun God or Yarih the Moon God. Instead they are simply called ‘the larger’ and ‘the smaller light’...

“Third, the sun and moon are simply assigned the role of lighting the earth and ruling the day and night, as the surrogates of God. This is quite a lowly function by ancient Near Eastern standards...

“Finally, the stars, widely worshiped and often regarded as controllers of human destiny, are mentioned almost as an afterthought: they too are merely creatures.” (P. 21)

And, we add, they are creatures given by God to serve humanity—humanity is not created to serve them!

55

The plural feminine noun מְאֹרֹת, **me)oroth**, means “lights,” “light-bearers,” “luminaries,” or just “lamps.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is φωστῆρες, **phosteres**, “light-givers,” “luminaries.” The reason for translating “luminaries” or “light-bearers” is that the normal Hebrew word for “light” is אֹר, **or**; while the word used here has the prefixed **m-**, which oftentimes signifies “place of-(light).”

Bereishis 1, p. 55, notes that “The origin of the word מְאֹרֹת, **me)oroth**, luminaries, is derived from מִן אֹר, **min or**, ‘from (the) light,’ indicating that they possessed no independent light; they were like ‘windows’ that transmitted a portion of the primeval light which had been hidden from view by the firmament (Aderes Eliyahu).”

We think it more likely that the noun is one of a number of Hebrew nouns where the **mem**-prefix indicates “place of...” But both views of the derivation of the noun are speculative, and uncertain.

Westermann comments that “This description of the stars in terms of their function expresses clearly their state as creatures in accordance with the intention that dominates the whole pattern; the sun and the moon are creatures of God; it is in this that their dignity and their limitations lie...To describe them as מְאֹרֹת, **me)oroth** is not to degrade them, but to set

(continued...)

לְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הַיּוֹם וּבֵין הַלַּיְלָה

to divide between⁵⁹ the day and (between) the night!

⁵⁵(...continued)

their limits. To describe the sun and the moon constantly as lights or lamps is to put the heavenly bodies as a whole in the context of creation. This is so important theologically that it can scarcely be exaggerated.” (P. 129)

Here, in the biblical story of creation, neither of the names of these two heavenly bodies is even mentioned. They are helpful sources of light to the earth; but they are not Gods to be worshiped!

⁵⁶

Or, possibly, “light-bearers will be...” “The commentators note the use of the singular form יְהִי, **yehiy**, instead of the plural יְהִיּוּ, **yihyu** which would be consonant with the plural object מְאֹרֹת, **(me)oroth**, luminaries...Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Radak note that it is not unusual for Scripture to intermix number and gender...” (**Bereishis** 1, pp. 54-55)

⁵⁷

See footnote 39 for discussion of this noun רַקִּיעַ, **raqiya**) which we are translating “expanse.”

⁵⁸

The **Samaritan Pentateuch** and the **Greek translation (Rahlfs)** interpolate an additional phrase into the text at this point, εἰς φάωσιν τῆς γῆς, “in order for light / illumination of the earth.”

⁵⁹

The Divine work of “separating” between the individual elements of creation is now given to elements of creation themselves.

Westermann comments that “By emphasizing the function of separating given to the heavenly bodies [the priestly writer] is saying that this is the same work of creation, based on and continuing [God’s] first works of separation, in however different a way.” (P. 129) Again, the creatures of God take up their God-given tasks of continuing His creation.

Instead of humanity being created to serve the heavenly Deities (represented by the sun, moon and stars), the heavenly bodies have been given the task of serving humanity’s needs. What a difference from the cosmologies of the surrounding Near-Eastern religions!

וְהָיוּ לְאֹתוֹת

And they will be for signs,⁶⁰

וּלְמוֹעֲדִים

and for appointed seasons,⁶¹

60

Bereishis 1, p. 56, notes varying interpretations concerning the meaning of the heavenly luminaries serving as “signs.” One interpretation is that they are “omens, for when the luminaries are eclipsed, it is an ill-omen for the world, as in the verse (**Jeremiah 10:2**) ‘Be not dismayed at the signs of the heaven’...According to many, **אֹתוֹת**, **othoth**, *signs*, refers to the luminaries’ function as man’s guide (i.e. compass) as navigational aids...

HaRechasim leBik’ah comments: They are signs of God’s greatness in two ways:

- (1) They are constant signs and symbols of His omnipotence...
- (2) They sometimes diverge from their natural course to comply with His will as when the sun stopped for Joshua...
- (3) And [they serve] as a guide to determining the festivals.”

We remember **Matthew’s** description of the eastern wise-men who “saw a star in the east” that led them in their search for the new-born King.

What do you think? Is there any truth to “astrology” (literally, “science of the stars”)?

61

Or, perhaps the noun **מוֹעֲדִים**, **mo(adiym** should be translated “(for) appointed times of meeting,” i.e. “festivals.” Fox translates by “set-times.” See **Brown-Driver-Briggs**, p. 417, where it is noted that “It is most probable that...the reference is to the sacred seasons as fixed by the moon’s appearance.”

The emphasis found in these statements concerning the heavenly light-bearers is that they are God’s servants, placed in the heavens to serve humanity’s needs—they are not Divine, or “in control” of human destiny, and therefore to be feared or placated or worshiped. And, we add, there is great freedom for humanity, when the sun, moon, and stars are seen in this way. No longer are we enslaved to the superstitious conclusions attached to them. Instead of serving them, humanity is free to take control of the God-given earth with all its resources! And as they do so, the heavenly light-bearers will serve them!

וּלְיָמִים וְשָׁנִים:

and for days and years.⁶²

1.15 וְהָיוּ לְמְאֹרֹת בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

And they will be for light-bearers in the expanse of the heavens,

לְהַאֲרִיךְ עַל-הָאָרֶץ

to give light upon the earth.⁶³

62

Westermann comments that “The second function of the heavenly bodies is ‘to be for signs and for seasons and for days and years’...The significance of the heavenly bodies for the division of the seasons and the determination of the yearly feasts is well-known all over the world and at all levels of civilization accessible to us. One of humanity’s earliest and most significant achievements was to derive chronological order from the course of the stars [as we are learning from study of the Incan, Mayan and Navajo civilizations]...

“We can see how deeply rooted this is in human history when we reflect that even today the festal calendar differs from the fixed calendar because the feasts are still calculated according to the heavenly bodies, though their content has no longer anything to do with it.” (Pp. 129-30)

63

Hamilton states that “Few commentators deny that this whole chapter has a strong anti-mythical thrust. Perhaps in no other section—except the sixth day—does this polemic appear so bluntly as it does here. It is sufficient to recall the proliferation of astral Deities in most Mediterranean religions: the sun, the moon, and the stars are Divine. As such they are autonomous bodies. Around each of them focus various kinds of religious cults and devotees...In the light of this emphasis **Genesis 1:14ff.** is saying that these luminaries are not eternal; they are created, not to be served, but to serve. This is the mandate under which they function.” (P. 127)

Von Rad thinks this statement concerning the light-bearers in the heavens is “prosaic and degrading.” (**Genesis**, p. 55) We agree with him, thinking that it is the purpose of the author of **Genesis 1** to “degrade” the heavenly bodies from Deities to servants, from objects of worship to functional creatures of the one God of creation.

Westermann states that “The utter creatureliness of the heavenly bodies has never before been expressed in such revolutionary terms.” (**Creation**, p. 44)

We agree with Westermann, holding that this is one of the primary motifs of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, to down-grade the heavenly bodies from Divine objects of humanity’s worship, to
(continued...)

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

And so it happened.⁶⁴

1.16 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַמְּאֹרֹת הַגְּדֹלִים

And God made the two light-bearers, the great ones⁶⁵–

אֶת־הַמְּאֹר הַגְּדֹל לְמִמְשַׁלַּת הַיּוֹם

the light-bearer, the great one, for rule of the day,

⁶³(...continued)

Divinely created servants of human need. Believers in this **Genesis** cosmology will never again have to fall in worship of, or in terror before, the heavenly bodies. They exist to serve humanity; human beings do not exist to serve them. With this kind of theological understanding, the fear of certain phases of the moon, or “days of evil omen” (compare the Mesopotamian *shapattu*) common in the Near East, disappears, and the heavenly light-bearers are looked upon with thankfulness to their Creator, rather than being trembled before in superstitious fear.

⁶⁴

See **verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24** and **30** for this same phrase, “so it happened.” What God says will happen, happens.

⁶⁵

As the author of **Genesis 1** puts it, there are two “great light-bearers”–and although the author of this ancient story will not call those light-bearers by name, it is clear that he means the sun and the moon; then in a comparison between these two light-bearers, there is the statement that the sun is “the great one,” while the moon is “the small one”--both of which statements are certainly true from the standpoint of modern science.

Here again the author uses the phrase וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים, **wayya(as elohiym**, “and He made, God (did),” instead of the earlier “God created”–see the occurrence of this verb עָשָׂה, (**asah**, in **verses 11** (the fruit-tree “makes” fruit), **12** (same), **16** (God made), **25** (God made), **26** (God says “let Us make”), **31** (God saw everything He made), **2:2** (God’s work which He made), **3** (God rested from all His work which He created to make), and **4** (the day of YHWH God’s making earth and heavens, i.e., in one day, not in six or seven).

וְאֶת־הַמְּאֹרֹת הַקְּטָנִים לְמִשְׁלַת הַלַּיְלָה

and the light-bearer, the small one, for rule⁶⁶ of the night–

66

Both the sun and the moon, in addition to the task of separating, are given the task of “ruling.” Fretheim comments that “The tasks of separating and ruling (משל, **mashal**) are, notably, also Divine roles, here delegated to certain creatures. Once again, the involvement of the non-human in the continuing ordering of the world achieves prominence.” (P. 344)

Compare a similar function given to the moon in **Enuma Elish**, tablet 5: “The moon (Marduk) caused to shine, the night (to him) entrusting. He appointed him a creature of the night to signify the days...” (Pritchard, p. 68)

The parallel statement in **Psalms 136:7-9** gives praise “to Him Who makes the great lights...the sun to rule over the day...the moon and the stars to rule over the night...”

Of course, this is the role given to the “great lights” from the standpoint of what we know today to be the tiny planet earth, and not by any means the role of the sun, in terms of our galaxy or the stars in terms of the universe with its untold number of galaxies. Here, Hiebert’s statement that the creation story in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** “takes in the whole cosmos as viewed from earth” is seen to be fully justified. See footnote 13.

Commentators such as Gunkel have pointed out that there are remnants of an earlier view, in which the heavenly bodies were treated as living beings, and considered “Lords” or “Gods.” Here, however, as this greater and lesser light-bearer are described as the creatures of God, subject to His command, Westermann holds that “We are dealing here with the more abstract notion of ‘rule, dominate,’ which we use to describe an elevation that dominates a landscape or of ‘predominating influences.’ Day and night are dependent on the sun and the moon inasmuch as they are dominated by them.” (P. 132) This is another example of the creatures of God sharing in his Divine work of creation.

Westermann notes that in **Enuma Elish**, “Marduk’s action consists in constructing stations for the great Gods and fixing their astral likenesses as constellations. The reason for this is that the heavenly bodies are Gods and the Gods of the Pantheon already exist in the plan of **Enuma Elish**. So there can be no account of their creation...”

“There is here a very notable difference between the biblical and Babylonian accounts of creation: in the biblical accounts everything created, whatever it may be, can never be anything else than a creature; the state of being a creature is and remains decisive for everything that is created. In the Babylonian Epic the Gods are parts of what Marduk has created...The star Jupiter (that is, Marduk) stands in the center and rules over the other heavenly bodies; in the biblical account, the sun and the moon, creatures of God, rule over a limited area of creation, day and night.” (Pp. 133-34)

(continued...)

וַיֵּאֱתָר הַכּוֹכָבִים:

and the stars.⁶⁷

⁶⁶(...continued)

Here we see another example of the biblical story's "demythologization" of the Near-Eastern world-view.

Bereishis 1, pp. 58-59 states that "The concept of domination differs from the function of illumination...This 'domination' refers to the sun's power, by its rule during the day, to cause sprouting, etc...while the moon by its domination at night affects the tides of the oceans... Included, also are the astrological powers of the constellations (Ramban)."

What do you think? Is there any truth to astrology? There are many biblical passages which warn against attempting to determine the will of God from such "sciences" (see, for example, **Deuteronomy 18:9-23**); but there are also other passages that seem to show that genuine knowledge can be gained from such sources—see **1 Samuel 28:3-25** (Saul and the witch of Endor), and in the story of the wise men who followed a star to find the infant Jesus (**Matthew 2:2**).

67

Hamilton comments that "The author's polemical concerns continue in these verses as indicated, first of all, by his choice of terminology. He uses the unusual expression *the greater luminary* instead of the normal word for sun—שֶׁמֶשׁ, *shemesh*—of which he was undoubtedly aware. In the same way he opts for *the lesser luminary* instead of the familiar יָרֵחַ, *yareach*, 'moon.' The reason for this choice of terms may be due to the fact that these words—which are very similar in other Semitic languages—are the names of Divinities. Thus the text is a deliberate attempt to reject out of hand any apotheosizing ['making Divine'] of the luminaries, by ignoring the concrete terms and using a word that speaks of their function." (P. 127)

Additionally, Hamilton states that "The anti-mythical thrust of this section is indicated by the order in which the luminaries are listed: sun, moon, stars. This order contrasts with the order in **Enuma Elish**, in which priority is given to the stars, following which Marduk organizes the calendar and fixes the pole-star. Only then do the moon and sun (in that order) come into play: 'He bade the Moon come forth; entrusted night (to Him); assigned to Him adornment of the night to measure time.' In fact, **Enuma Elish** does not record the creation of these Lights, for they are 'great Gods.' They are simply placed in their cosmic positions as Constellations (Stars) or instructed by Marduk (Moon and Sun). It is significant that in **Genesis 1** the reference to the stars, which are so prominent in pagan cosmogonies, is touched on so briefly and quite anti-climactically. Given the Hebrew text's word order in **verse 16**, one may safely describe the creation of the stars as almost an afterthought or a parenthetical addition." (P. 128) Yes—hardly a mention!

Bowie comments that "The solar system shrinks to a small thing as measured by the
(continued...)

⁶⁷(...continued)

majesty of the stars and the fathomless depths of space in which they move. The sun is estimated to be a little less than ninety-three million miles distant from the earth. But the distance to Alpha Centauri, one of the nearest of the stars, is twenty-five million millions of miles. Arcturus, the star to which the handle of the Dipper points, and which shines in the northern sky hardly bigger to human eyes than the golden flicker of a candle, has a diameter of ten million miles...

“In 1933, through a photo-electric cell which had caught the light of Arcturus through the telescope of the Yerkes Observatory and actuated electric relays, the lights were turned on to open the Chicago World’s Fair. It was estimated then (though these calculations have been slightly revised) that these beams from Arcturus reaching the earth in 1933 had left that star in 1893, when the first Chicago World’s Fair was opened. The beams had taken forty light years to reach the earth; and the distance traveled by light in one year is six trillion miles.

“As we contemplate these facts, what is brought home to our awareness? First, a sense of awe before the majesty and mystery of God. The men [and women] of the **Old Testament** felt this (see **Psalms 8; 19; 104; 148; Isaiah 40**). Who can contemplate without a hushed and humbled reverence in mind and soul the universe which modern knowledge has unfolded? [Bowie wrote this in 1952; now, in 2020, with the constantly enlarging vision of the universe of the stars being unfolded by the Hubble Telescope beyond the dust of earth’s atmosphere, how much more powerfully can this question be asked!]...

“If men instinctively recognized the reality of God and bowed down before the grandeur of the Creator as they looked up at the firmament of their contracted thought, what of the compulsion to a more immense religious awe which reaches out from the infinity of the skies as they are now perceived?” (P. 476)

Bereishis 1, p. 58 notes that “Here, again, the **Torah** presents creation from man’s perspective on earth. The stars are much greater in size and intensity than the moon, and many of them dwarf even the sun, but since they are mere ‘specks’ from man’s vantage point and play a subordinate part in his life when compared to these two bodies, they are mentioned last, and without elaboration.”

What do you think? If the **Genesis** creation story is being told from an earth- and human-centered view point, is it no longer relevant in the light of our modern knowledge of the immense size of the universe, in which the earth and human beings shrink into tininess—our tiny planet earth being only one of many planets encircling the sun, which is only one star among billions and billions of stars in the universe of galaxies? How will you deal with this question? Is the **Genesis** story of creation any less true because it is told from humanity’s viewpoint?

1.17 וַיִּתֵּן אֱלֹהִים בְּרָקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם

And God gave / placed them in the expanse of the heavens,

לְהַאֲרִיר עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

to give light over the earth,

1.18 וּלְמַשֵּׁל בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה

and to rule / reign over the day and over the night,

וּלְהַבְדִּיל בֵּין הָאוֹר וּבֵין הַחֹשֶׁךְ

and to divide between the light and (between) the darkness.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי-טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.⁶⁸

1.19 וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב

And there was evening,

וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר

and there was morning--

יוֹם רְבִיעִי:

a fourth day.⁶⁹

⁶⁸

See **verse 4** for the beginning of this motif of the “goodness” of all creation. This seven-fold repetition indicates the great importance this holds for the biblical story of creation, and for the subsequent understanding of the world by those of us who accept this creation story as the truth.

⁶⁹

Again we are reminded how the creation-story is being told in terms of a seven-day week.

Westermann comments on **verses 14-19** that “The account of the fourth day of
(continued...)

⁶⁹(...continued)

creation is notably longer than the accounts of the other days. A closer examination of the text shows that this is due not to a more detailed description but to a succession of repetitions which are concerned wholly and exclusively with determining the function of the sun and the moon...presented in **verses 14-18** in seven sentences, some long, some short. There are four functions: to separate, to indicate, to give light, to rule; each is mentioned twice, with the exception of the second, to indicate, which is mentioned only once.

“The reason for this unusual repetition is that of all the works of creation mentioned in **Genesis 1**, only the sun and the moon were Divinities in the world in which Israel lived, and Divinities of the utmost importance...

“What distinguishes the priestly account [we say, ‘visionary story] of creation among the many creation stories of the ancient Near East is that for [the priestly writer] there can be only one Creator and that all else that is or can be, can never be anything but a creature. [The priestly writer] thereby contested a well-established point of view, taken for granted and beyond discussion in the world in which Israel lived. [The priestly writer] is speaking polemically; he must establish in every way possible his thesis that the sun and the moon are creatures and nothing more...

“How difficult this was is demonstrated by one of the functions assigned to the sun and the moon: they are to rule [לְמִנְשֵׁלֹתָ], **verses 16** and **18**. Man too is destined to rule [רָדָה], **verses 26** and **28**...Ruling is a personal function; even in **Genesis 1** there persists an echo, however faint, of the Divinity of the sun and the moon, so deeply ingrained in the ancient Near East.” (P. 127)

We agree with Westermann in principle, but question his statement that *only* the sun and the moon were worshiped in the ancient Near East as Divinities—they were, of course, important Divinities in Israel’s surrounding world; but they were not the only Divinities (we need mention only Marduk or Baal or Chemosh), and especially in Egypt, where there were literally hundreds of Gods.

70

Alexander states concerning **verses 20-23** that “Having previously described the creation of the waters and the expanse of the heavens, this section focuses on how they are filled with appropriate creatures of different kinds. As reproductive organisms, they are blessed by God so that they may be fruitful and fill their respective regions.” (P. 51)

Hiebert notes that “On the *fifth day*, God populates the realms of sky and sea, created on the second day, with the animals that inhabit these realms. These two realms, together with earth, populated on the sixth day, separate the animal world into three categories—sky, water, and land animals—categories used by Israel’s priests to distinguish clean from unclean animals (**Leviticus 11:1-19**).” (P. 6)

(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם

And God said, Let the waters swarm--⁷¹

⁷⁰(...continued)

But there is no such distinction here in **Genesis 1**—where everything that God created, including these three categories of the animal world—is “exceedingly good”!

What do you think? How do you explain this difference between **Genesis 1** and **Leviticus 11**? It is important for Christian theology that Jesus rejected the teaching that certain foods are unclean, and insisted that uncleanness comes from the heart, not from touching or eating things considered unclean, that is, returning to the view of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** while rejecting the teaching of **Leviticus 11**. See **Mark 7:1-23**.

The author of these notes has a long-time Jewish friend, whom he helped to get a teaching position in an international university in Seoul, Korea. There, my friend was shocked to learn that the Koreans butcher dog and eat their meat, and it was quite a problem for him in relating to the Korean students—finally resulting in his losing his position in the university. Jesus sent His disciples out into world-wide mission, to proclaim the good news of God, refusing to let them get side-tracked by such things as Kosher food laws. What would you do in such a situation?

71

Or, “abound.” As Fretheim notes, there are two different possible understandings of the verbal form **יִשְׂרְצוּ**, **yishretsu**. It can be taken as a simple imperfect (or “future”) verb, stating that the waters “will swarm.” But it can also be taken as “jussive” [‘commanding’] in meaning, “let the waters swarm...” The verb “swarm” shows the close relationship with the following noun “swarm[s].” (P. 344)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) changes this to the verb ἐξαγαγέτω, **eksagageto**, “let them bring forth” (compare **verse 11**), giving the waters of the sea the command to “generate” the living marine beings. But this is not what the Hebrew word means.

Westermann quotes W. H. Schmidt as saying “**Verse 20a** is not stating that the sea is to generate the water animals, but merely that these animals are to swarm in the water, that is to be present there.’ Nothing more than this is intended.” (P. 136)

Rabbi Hirsch concludes that “the phrase **יִשְׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם**, **yisretsu hammayim**, can be taken transitively—*the water shall germinate*; or intransitively—*the water shall swarm with*...In the intransitive form, the existing floating material with the potential for marine life would...

(continued...)

שָׂרֵץ נִפְשׁ חַיָּה

swarm(s) of living beings,⁷²

⁷¹(...continued)

become living bodies; in the transitive form, the water would ‘produce’ them (Munk, p. 82).” (Bereishis 1, p. 60)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) here joins in with other statements in the creation-story which point to the role of creatures in furthering creation, “bringing forth living beings.”

⁷²

The author of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** calls the marine animals “living being(s)” using the phrase נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, **nephesh chayyah**; in Greek the translation is ψυχῶν ζώσων, **psuchon zoson**, literally “souls / innermost beings, living ones,” the same phrase that is used in **Genesis 2:7** for the first human being, נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, translated in Greek (**Rahlfs**) by ψυχῆν ζώσαν, **psuchen zosan**, literally “soul / innermost being, living one”).

It is a mistake to think that **Genesis** teaches there is a distinction between human beings and dolphins (for example), since human beings are “living souls,” the **King James** translation of **nephesh chayyah**, which is changed by **New King James** to “living being(s).” No, according to **Genesis 1**, human beings have it in common with fish and birds and animals of all sorts that they (and we) are all “living beings.” See **verses 20, 21, 24, 30**; also **2:7** and **19**.

Hamilton comments that “The occurrence of this same expression— נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, **nephesh chayyah**—to describe man in **2:7** should provide sufficient evidence against seeing any uniqueness in man because of a ‘soul’ (as **nephesh** is often translated). It is unwise to translate as ‘living being, creature’ (‘animals’) in **1:20** and ‘living soul’ (man) in **2:7**.” (P. 128)

Westermann holds that “The expression נִפְשׁ חַיָּה, **nephesh chayyah**...can describe the animals in general, animals and humans together as living beings, and finally that which makes the animals and humans living beings, namely the breath of life...The animals and people are what they are because of the breath that gives them life; they are living beings and this, or life as such, is the determining characteristic they have in common.” (P. 136)

Westermann further comments that in **verses 20-23**, “The structure...differs from the pre-ceding by the introduction of a new element—the blessing...The creation of a living being is entirely different from the creation of everything mentioned so far, and so we can expect at once a different structure. God’s creative action now takes place in two stages instead of one...God created— and God blessed...” (P. 134)

וְעוֹף יְעוֹפֵף עַל־הָאָרֶץ

and bird(s) let them fly over the earth,

עַל־פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ הַשָּׁמַיִם:

over (the) expanse of the heavens' surface!"⁷³

1.21 וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הַתַּנִּינִים הַגְּדֹלִים

And God created⁷⁴ the sea-monsters, the great ones,⁷⁵

73

We are uncertain how to translate the preposition **עַל**, (**al**, which occurs twice in this sentence. In the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**), the first preposition is translated ἐπί, **epi**, “upon,” while the second is translated κατά, **kata**, which, when used with the accusative case means “over” or “throughout.”

Westermann suggests that the preposition in Hebrew has the two different meanings in this verse: “above (the earth),” and “across (the firmament of the heavens).” He thinks that what is intended is “over the earth and under the vault of heaven.” (P. 137)

Bereishis 1, pp. 61-62, comments on this second usage of the preposition that “Again the **Torah** speaks in the language of man, and this phrase, literally *in front of the expanse of the heavens* views the birds’ flight from the vantage point of man gazing up from earth...The entire air space above the ground is referred to as *across the expanse of the heavens* (Ahavas Yonasan)...N’tziv observes that the verse speaks of two kinds of flying creatures: those that fly **עַל־הָאָרֶץ**, (**al-ha**)arets, *low, near the ground*; and those that fly **הַשָּׁמַיִם** **עַל־פְּנֵי רִקִיעַ**, (**al peney raqiy(a hashshamayim**, *high in the sky* [literally ‘upon faces of expanse of the heavens’].” Wenham’s comment is similar to that of Ahavas Yonasan (P. 24).

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) interpolates the phrase καὶ ἐγένετο οὕτως, **kai egeneto houtos**, “and it was so,” or “and it happened in this manner,” taken from **verses 6, 11, and 15**. It is possible that the phrase was found in the original text; it is also possible that the Greek translator has added in the phrase for the sake of uniformity. More than likely, this indicates that the Greek translators were working with a slightly different form of the Hebrew text from that of the later Masoretes.

74

Here the verb **וַיִּבְרָא**, **wayyibr)a**, “and He created,” from the root **בָּרָא**, **bara**), occurs for the first time since **verse 1**. The verb is found 7 times in **Genesis 1:1-2:4: verses 1, 21,**
(continued...)

⁷⁴(...continued)
27, 27, 27; 2:3 and 4.

75

Fox translates by “the great sea-serpents,” and comments that “The rebellious primeval monster of **Psalm 74:13** (and common in ancient Near Eastern myth) is here depicted as merely another one of God’s many creations.” (P. 15)

Hamilton comments that “Much discussion has focused on the identity of the enormous marine creatures (Hebrew **הַתַּנִּינִים**, **hattanniynim**, **verse 21**), which particularly in three **Old Testament** texts are juxtaposed with the name of dragonsque creatures who have met, or will meet, defeat at God’s hands:

Psalm 74:13-14 relates that God ‘broke the heads of the dragons on the waters,’ thus including ‘dragons’ as one of the powers subjugated by God (others are the sea and Leviathan). **Verses 15-17** continue the allusion to the creation event;

Isaiah 27:1 announces the eschatological [final] day on which Yahweh will both punish Leviathan ‘and slay the dragon that is in the sea’;

Isaiah 51:9 also refers to the past when God cut Rahab to pieces, pierced the dragon, and dried up the sea and the waters of the great deep (**תְּהוֹם רַבָּה**, **tehom rabbah** [**Isaiah 51:10**]).

We think all three of these passages refer to the Near-Eastern cosmology myths, and claim that it is YHWH Who killed the dragon / dragons / Leviathan / Rahab—He is the real God! What do you think?

Hamilton states that, “Of the nine other **Old Testament** references to **tanniyn**, most indicate simply some land or sea creature (serpent: **Exodus 7:9, 10, 2; Deuteronomy 32:33; Psalm 91:13**; perhaps ‘crocodile’ in **Ezekiel 29:3 and 32:2**). A very interesting text here is **Psalm 148**, a hymn which calls upon all created things—of which one is the **tanniyn**, **verse 7**—to praise Yahweh...

“Still, there are these three verses in which the **tanniyn** appear as an antagonist to God. Is this another literary parallel, ask the scholars, to **Enuma Elish** in which Marduk created the earth by first conquering, then slaying the monster Tiamat and then cutting her corpse in half? [We think it is, and the biblical texts are saying, ‘Not Marduk, but YHWH!’]

“Even more interest was drawn to the subject with the discovery of **tnn** in Ugaritic texts. Ugaritic **tnn** is another name for Yam (Sea), who is consistently pictured as an enemy of Baal. Thus in one text Baal’s sister-wife Anat says: ‘What enemies have arisen against Baal? What foe against the Rider of Clouds? Did I not crush El’s Beloved Yamm? Did I not destroy El’s
(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

Flood Rabbim? Did I not, pray, muzzle the Dragon [tnn]? I did crush the crooked serpent [ltn, that is, Leviathan], Shalyat the seven-headed'...

“Unlike **Enuma Elish**, the Canaanite Baal versus Yam (Sea) and Mot (Death) cycle has nothing to do with world origins. Instead the concern here is with the annual cycles in nature and whether there will be dearth or fertility in the land.

“**Genesis 1:1-2:3** does not even hint of a battle. The **tanniynim** are simply large creatures of the water and are created by God. Perhaps the reappearance in **verse 21** of the verb **בָּרָא, bara**), *create*, not used since **verse 1**, underlines this point. This is a verb whose only subject [this is overstatement—see **Joshua 17:15, 18; 1 Samuel 2:29**; but in 53 other instances it is only used with God as the subject] in the **Old Testament** is God, and whose accusative [or ‘object’] is always the product and never the material. Even some of the later texts that use battle imagery place such battles not at creation per se but rather ‘in days of old’ (**Isaiah 51:9**).

“The **Bible** obviously does not hesitate to use the language of myth. The references in **Psalms 74, Isaiah 27 and Isaiah 51** defy any other explanation. Curiously, **Genesis** does **not** use the language of myth in its narration of the creation story. **Genesis 1** could not be written with a more anti-mythical basis.” (Pp. 129-30)

This again is what we are calling “demythologization” of the Near-Eastern world-view. We agree with Hamilton in his view that this Near-Eastern myth of the Divine battle with monsters is not found in **Genesis 1**. But we also think that the **Genesis** story is itself a form of “myth,” in the best sense of the word—it is a vision-story that is told concerning how the world came to be, in pre-historic times, when no witnesses were present. **Genesis 1** is, in our view, the “true myth,” the kind of story that faith in one Creator God must tell, and which both corrects and dwarfs all the other surrounding myths from the Mesopotamian cultures.

Those who insist that **Genesis 1** is a historically accurate, scientifically true story, will dispute our view; but we think the evidence is clear that the story is not “scientific,” although it is the only story from the ancient Near East that makes room for science.

What do you think? How do you explain all of this? Would you call the statements of **Psalms 74:13-14, Isaiah 27:1 and Isaiah 51:9** “mythical”? Why? Why not?

The author of these footnotes is sometimes asked, “Do you believe **Genesis 1**?” His answer is, “Yes, indeed. I believe the story is profoundly true—not as a scientific description, but rather, as a profound vision-story experienced by some prophet, much like the vision-stories of **Ezekiel**—the valley of dry bones, brought back to life (**Ezekiel 37**) and the river of life flowing from the temple into the Dead Sea, bringing new life to the formerly dead (**Ezekiel 47**)—told in simple language, that is easily understood—in such a way that simple people all
(continued...)

וְאֵת כָּל־נֶפֶשׁ הַחַיָּה

and every living being--

הַרְמֵשֶׁת אֲשֶׁר שָׂרְצוּ הַמַּיִם לְמִינֵהֶם

the ones that glide about, with which the waters swarmed, of their kind;⁷⁶

וְאֵת כָּל־עוֹף כָּנָף לְמִינֵהוּ

and every winged bird, of its kind.⁷⁷

⁷⁵(...continued)

around the world, including myself, can understand and be led to worship the one Creator God.”

Similar questions can be asked concerning the parables of Jesus, for example that of the “Prodigal Son.” I certainly believe that parable is true, in the great lesson it teaches concerning God the Father’s love for His wayward children, and concerning how His other children cannot or do not have that same kind of forgiving love for their wayward brother(s). But this is a far different question from whether or not I believe that the parable is a historically true reporting of an actual event, or that the parable is intended to teach us concerning how we should distribute our inheritance to our youngest son. What do you think?

⁷⁶

Where the Hebrew text spells לְמִינֵהֶם, **lemiynehem**, which can be taken to mean “by their kinds,” the **Samaritan Pentateuch** corrects to לְמִינֵיהֶם, **lemiyneyhem**, “by their kinds” (notice the additional ם, *yodh*), making it very specific that the plural is intended. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) likewise has κατὰ γένη αὐτῶν, **kata gene auton**, “according to their kinds,” as does the Latin Vulgate, **in species suas**, “in their species (or ‘kinds’).”

⁷⁷

Hamilton comments that “Those creatures who live in water are divided into two categories:

- (1) extremely large and mostly water-related mammals or reptiles (crocodile, whale, large snakes; hence **Revised Standard Version’s** ‘the great sea monsters’);
- (2) smaller fish and other more diminutive aquatic creatures, who either glide through the water or creep along its bed.” (P. 129)

(continued...)

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.⁷⁸

⁷⁷(...continued)

Bowie comments, “Thank God for fish!...The whaling ships that went out from the seaports of New England and from other harbors of the world established an industry that in its day was as full of economic profit as it was of romance. Everyone who has read Melville’s **Moby Dick** will understand that, but not everyone may realize the whole immensity of the fisheries of the world. Before the outbreak of World War II, the fisheries were producing thirty-seven billion pounds of fish products annually, valued at almost a billion dollars. Some countries owe their very existence to their fishing fleets, e.g., Japan before 1941 controlled nearly a third of the fishery harvest of the world. As the United States Department of the Interior has stated: ‘The high nutritive quality and digestibility of protein class fish is among the more desirable food products...Much of the yield of the fisheries may be consumed directly as human food, while the remainder may be converted into such essential by-products as vitamin oils, livestock and poultry feeds, fertilizers, and industrial oils.’ (P. 478)

This statement can be greatly enlarged upon, more than fifty years after Bowie’s writing, as modern science continues to discover the hidden resources and wealth of the oceans and their creatures, to find ways to increase and protect their life-giving products, and to warn against the dangers of exploitation of the precious resource of fish.

⁷⁸

Again we see this important motif of the goodness of the created universe--this time including even the “great sea-monsters,” so feared (and worshiped) by the ancient Near East as humanity’s dreaded enemies, the sources of bondage, death and destruction. Not so, urges **Genesis**--they are God’s creatures, and are good. They need not be feared, or worshiped. All the living creatures of the seas are God’s creatures, created and known by God. The God of **Genesis** is the God of fish and all of the vast populations of the ocean-depths.

Hamilton comments that “Just as days one and four correspond [with the creation of light, and the placing of the light-bearers in the heavens], so days two and five are related. Day two brought into existence the necessary environment and habitat--the sky to separate the waters [i.e., the water in the clouds above, and the water in the oceans below]. Now on day five those creatures are created who inhabit the sky and the waters--birds and aquatic beings.” (P. 129)

What Hamilton says here had already been noted by Rabbi Hirsch, who “...prefaces the events of the fifth day with the observation that the creations of the first three days are paralleled by those of the subsequent three days. The light of the first day was provided with bearers...on the fourth day; the water and atmosphere of the second day were filled with life on the fifth day; and the dry land with its mantle of vegetation of the third day was provided with inhabitants on the sixth.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 59)

(continued...)

1.22 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים לְאָמֹר

And God blessed them,⁷⁹ saying,

פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

Be fruitful, and multiply,⁸⁰

וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים

and fill the waters in the seas!⁸¹

וְהָעוֹף יִרְבַּ בָּאָרֶץ:

And the birds,⁸² let them multiply⁸³ in the earth!

⁷⁸(...continued)

There is indeed order and harmony in this biblical story of creation—just as there is order and beauty and harmony in the universe. Do you agree? But, before drawing conclusions from this teaching, keep in mind that in the story that follows the existence of evil and death in the universe is also taught, just as is shown so emphatically throughout the rest of the **Bible**.

⁷⁹

Fox comments that this is “the first occurrence in **Genesis** of the key motif of blessing, which recurs especially throughout the patriarchal stories.” (P. 15)

⁸⁰

The Divine blessing of earth’s fertility is attributed to God the Creator--instead of belonging to the Baals and the Asherahs of the ancient Near East’s “fertility religions.” True fertility comes through knowing God, and accepting His gifts, not through the magical, orgiastic, bloody rituals of the fertility religions with their sacred prostitution and infant sacrifice. This is one of the major motifs of the **Hebrew Bible**.

For similar wording concerning, “being fruitful and multiplying,” see **Genesis 1:22, 28; 8:17; 9:1, 7; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4; Exodus 1:7; Leviticus 26:9; Jeremiah 3:16; 23:3** and **Ezekiel 36:11**. Fox translates by “be many.”

⁸¹

Westermann comments that “Fertility and increase point to abundance; abundance belongs to blessing; abundance, wealth and plenty are both signs and the effect of blessing. It is essential to the understanding of God’s blessing and its effectiveness to recall that it is the experience of those [?] who are speaking here that abundance, wealth and plenty are very positive; there is not as yet any indication that they can be dangerous.” (P. 141)

⁸²

(continued...)

1.23 וַיְהִי־עֶרֶב

And there was evening,

וַיְהִי־בֹקֶר

and there was morning--

יוֹם חַמִּישִׁי:

a fifth day.⁸⁴

1.24⁸⁵

⁸²(...continued)

The God of **Genesis** is the God of birds, just as he is of fish, and just as He is of the physical universe and human beings. And, following our study of the **Book of Job**, where YHWH reveals Himself as the God of the wild animals of the earth, including the fierce alligator, the hippopotamus, and all the other animals of the jungle, we should note that there are God-given laws that govern fish and not birds, laws that govern birds and not fish, just as there are laws that govern human conduct—and it is a mistake to think that the laws intended for humans are also intended for fish and birds (or for the jungle), as if God intended for the wild animals to live by the Ten Commandments.

83

Where the Hebrew text has the shorter form of the verb, **יָרָב**, **yirebh**, literally “it will multiply,” or “let it multiply,” the **Samaritan Pentateuch** has the longer form of the verb, **יָרַבָּה**, **yirebh**, with the same meaning, a spelling correction of our Hebrew text.

84

Again we see the artificial, “parabolic,” “story-like” division of the biblical story of creation into a week of seven days, which makes it so much easier to remember the entire story, and leads to the observance of the seventh / sabbath day of rest.

85

Wenham comments that “...Whereas the words of the third day are described quite succinctly, those of the sixth are set out more fully than any other. This fullness of description reflects the importance of the events on this day, for in it creation reaches its climax in the formation of [humanity] in the Divine image...

“All the standard formulaic elements are included; indeed, four Divine speeches are recorded (**verses 24, 26, 28, 29**), twice as many as on any other day.” (P. 25)

Alexander comments on **verses 24-25** that the “livestock and creeping things and
(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

And God said,

תּוֹצֵא הָאָרֶץ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה לְמִינָהּ

Let the earth bring forth⁸⁶ living being(s) of their kind--

בְּהֵמָה וְרֶמֶשׂ

cattle, and animal(s) that creep,⁸⁷

⁸⁵(...continued)

beasts of the earth...group the land-dwelling animals into three broad categories, probably reflecting the way nomadic shepherds would experience them: the domesticable stock animals (e.g., sheep, goats, cattle, and perhaps camels and horses); the small crawlers (e.g. rats and mice, lizards, spiders); and the larger game and predatory animals (e.g. gazelles, lions)." (P. 51)

⁸⁶

Here again we see the **Genesis** story's motif of how God's creatures are given a role in continuing God's creative work. God involves the earth itself as His "co-worker" in the production of life. As Westermann states, "The earth has part in the creation of the land animals just as it does in the creation of the plants."

But Westermann holds that this does not mean there is a direct participation of the earth in the creation of the land-animals—the statement, he thinks, only means that the animals belong to the earth. "The mythical view that the earth gives birth to the animals, which occurs in a number of cosmogonies, is well in the background." (P. 142)

But we insist that it is still there in that background. It is in just such statements as this that the coming together of "creation and evolution" can be accomplished: God creates, with only a word; but He also calls to the earth to share in the on-going bringing forth of living beings. And when the earth so cooperates, it is God's "making," the furtherance of His creation.

What do you think? Do you think creation and evolution can be combined? Why? Why not? See Francis S. Collins, **The Language of God** (New York: Free Press, 2006) for a resounding positive answer to this question.

⁸⁷

Fox translates by "herd-animals, crawling things."

וַחַיֵּתוֹ-אֶרֶץ לְמִינָהּ

and earth's wild-life of its kind!⁸⁸

וַיְהִי-כֵן:

And so it happened.⁸⁹

1.25 וַיַּעַשׂ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-חַיֵּית הָאָרֶץ לְמִינָהּ

And God made the earth's wild-life, of its kind,⁹⁰

88

Just as has been stated concerning earth's fish, so here it can be said, "Thank God for the cattle, and for all land-animals!" When we think of the buffaloes that once roamed the prairies where our modern cities now rise, and when we consider the meat industry, as well as the dairy industry, we have great and compelling reason to bow in awe at the Divine provision of animal life that has contributed so much to the life of the world.

89

See **verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24** and **30** for this repeated phrase in the creation-story.

Westermann states that the affirmation "so it happened," occurs, as subsequent events confirm the dynamic power of the Divine word...The development in creation is now from aquatic and aerial animals (fifth day) to terrestrial animals (sixth day)...Three categories of land creatures are described in these two verses. By cattle is meant primarily large quadrupeds which are domesticated. Reptiles (literally, 'creeping [or crawling] things)' designate the legless creatures such as...snakes. The third category, *every kind of wild animal*, is simply the Hebrew word for 'living thing.'" (P. 132)

90

Though the text states that God gave the task of bringing forth living beings to the earth, it is still an act of God (using the verb עָשָׂה, **asah**, "made" again). **Genesis** will not accept the kind of "either / or" between "natural and Divine," or between "creation and evolution," so common in some modern religious thought. If there is evolution, it is "Theistic evolution."

Creative evolution is generally accepted by major Christian churches, including the Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodox Church and some mainline Protestant denominations--Anglicanism, including the Episcopal Church in the United States of America, the United Methodist Church, the Church of the Nazarene, the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church (although there are dissenting voices within the groups, especially among Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox). Many in Reformed Judaism accept such a view.

(continued...)

וְאֶת־הַבְּהֵמָה לְמִינָהּ

and the cattle of its kind,

וְאֵת כָּל־רֶמֶשׂ הָאֲדָמָה לְמִינֵהוּ

and all animals creeping on the ground,⁹¹ of its kind.⁹²

⁹⁰(...continued)

Theistic evolutionists typically argue as I have in these notes that it is inappropriate to use **Genesis** as a scientific text, since it was written in a pre-scientific age which had no access to modern scientific language and concepts, and was originally intended for religious instruction, including denial of the polytheistic cosmologies of Israel's neighbors. As such, the seven-day framework of the vision-story should be thought of in terms of a literary framework, like a parable or mnemonic (memory-enhancing) device, that leads up to the observance of the seventh-day sabbath.

Theistic evolutionists typically believe that creation is not literally a week long process but a process beginning with the "big bang" (God's spoken word, calling the universe into being), and continuing through all of time, including today. This view affirms that God created the world and was the primary causation of our being, while changes through development and adaptation are part of continuing creation which is still occurring in the never ending process of creation.

With reference to "continuing creation," Hamilton states, "Like the plants, all living creatures—terrestrial, celestial, and aquatic—are created according to kind. They are created to be self-propagating. The Creator makes creators." (P. 132)

⁹¹

Ha'amek Davar notes that "The term אֲדָמָה, **adamah**, *ground*, is introduced here in distinction to אֶרֶץ, **erets**, *earth*. The difference between them is that *earth* is a general designation that includes the waters in addition to dry land, while *ground* refers specifically to the dry land." (**Bereishis** 1, p. 67)

"Note that for some unexplained reason, the sequence in this verse is different from that of God's decree in the previous verse. Additionally נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, **nephesh chayyah** (which is understood by the *Midrash* to refer to man) is omitted here entirely. The creation of man, the crown and pinnacle of creation, is separate from the animals, and is detailed beginning with the next verse." (**Ibid.**)

⁹²

Again **Genesis 1** emphasizes the differing "kinds" of God's orderly creation.

וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים כִּי־טוֹב:

And God saw that (it was) good.⁹³

1.26⁹⁴

93

Again the motif that all the created universe is “good” is expressed. It is not Divine, and therefore to be worshiped (as in ancient Near-Eastern religions); neither is it demonic, and evil, and therefore to be dreaded and propitiated (as in ancient Near-Eastern religions). It is good—and as the creation of God, is to be received as God’s gift, and it is to be overseen by human beings. See **verses 26-28**.

We agree with Westermann in one of his closing comments on **Genesis 1** when he says that “The simple fact that the first page of the **Bible** speaks about heaven and earth, the sun, moon and stars, about plants and trees, about birds, fish and animals, is a certain sign that the God whom we acknowledge in the creed as the Father of Jesus Christ is concerned with all of these creatures, and not merely with humans. A God who is understood only as the God of humankind is no longer the God of the **Bible**.” (P. 176) What do you think? We believe that Christians need to heed this!

94

Wenham comments on **verses 26-30** that “With the creation of man the creation account reaches its climax...Now with man’s creation, the narrative slows down even more to emphasize his significance.” (1, p. 27) Fox states that in these verses, “The narrative breaks out into verse, stressing the importance of human beings.” (P. 15)

Hiebert notes that “Although they share the sixth day with other animals, humans are God’s final and climactic creative act in this account. Humans alone are made in God’s image and are given dominion over other animals.” (P. 7)

We partially agree with these comments, in that the creation of humanity, male and female, is certainly emphasized in the text. But the biblical story’s own “final and climactic creative act” does not come until the seventh day, when God rests, and blesses that day as a source of blessing for humanity. What do you think?

Bereishis 1, p. 67 comments on **verse 26** that “Having completed all forms of creation, God then said: *Let us make man!* Like a person who builds a palace and, after having furnished and decorated it, ushers in its owner so it is ready for his immediate dwelling (Rav Saadiah Gaon)...This preamble indicates that man was created with great deliberation and wisdom. God did not associate man’s creation with the earth by decreeing, *Let the earth bring forth* as He did with other creatures, but instead attributed it to the deepest involvement of Divine providence and wisdom (Abarbanel).”

(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ

And God said,⁹⁵ Let us make⁹⁶ humanity in our image,

⁹⁴(...continued)

“**Sanhedrin** 38a in the **Babylonian Talmud** states that “Man was created last...so he should find all things ready for him. If he is worthy, he is told: ‘All things were created in your behalf.’ At the same time his late appearance on earth conveys an admonition of humility: If man becomes too proud he is reminded: Even gnats preceded you in the order of creation.”

“**Sanhedrin** 4:5 in the **Mishnah** offers ethical reasons why only one man (i.e., one pair) was created: ‘In order to prevent feuds...so that one man should not be able to say to his fellow, ‘my ancestor was greater than yours!’...”

“Finally, the creation of only one man exhibits the power of God, Who, by means of only one ‘mold’ produces so many various types. Adam is the single progenitor of all mankind, and how different men are from one another!” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 67)

Westermann comments on **verses 26-31** that “The second work of the sixth day stands apart from what has gone before both by its length and the solemn introduction ‘Let us make man’...the most striking feature of the creation of humans, and in this it differs markedly from the other works of creation...A further difference is that the judgment expressed in **verse 31** is not directed to the creation of people, but to everything. The pattern which frames the other works of creation is not to the fore here.” (P. 143)

What do you think? Is the creation of humanity the high-point, the climax of the **Genesis** story of creation? Or is the real climax God’s resting on the seventh day, making the story God-centered rather than humanity-centered? We choose the latter. Do you?

⁹⁵

Verse 26 reports Divine language, rather than the narrator’s language that has preceded in **verse 25**.

⁹⁶

Again we note here the use of the verb עָשָׂה, (**asah**, “to make,” and then later in **verse 27** the use of the verb בָּרָא, **bara**), “to create.”

Westermann notes that the same kind of Divine decision is found in other creation narratives. (P. 144) The Babylonian **Enuma Elish** has a similar decision on the part of the Gods to create humanity: “When Marduk hears the words of the Gods, His heart prompts (Him) to fashion artful works. Opening His mouth, He addresses Ea to impart the plan He had conceived in His heart: Blood will I mass and cause bones to be. I will establish a savage, ‘man’ shall be his name. Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the Gods that they might be at ease.” (Pritchard, tablet VI, p. 68)

(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

The three-fold use of the plural pronouns here in **verse 26** is striking. We are reminded of how the Hebrew noun for “God” is אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym**, in actuality a plural noun, but one that is used normally with singular verbs (as in the first line of **verse 24**, “And God said...” Here a plural verb is used, followed by plural pronouns, נַעֲשֶׂה, **na(aseh**, “let *us* make...in *our* image, like *our* likeness.”

Compare **Genesis 11:7** and **Isaiah 6:8** where the same problem is found of the use of a plural verb with אֱלֹהִים, **elohiym**, “God / Gods.” How are we to understand this use of the plural?

Fretheim comments that “Those who are not God are called to participate in this central act of creation...God is not in heaven alone, but is engaged in a relationship of mutuality within the Divine realm, and chooses to share the creative process with others. Human beings are the product of such a consultation...The ‘let us make’ thus implicitly extends to human beings, for they are created in the image of One Who chooses to create in a way that shares power with others.” (P. 354)

Targum Yonasan paraphrases: “*And God said to the ministering angels’...Ramban is of the opinion that the plural denotes God and the earth: ‘Concerning the living soul God commanded: Let the earth bring forth. But in the case of man He said Let us make—i.e., I and the earth: the earth to produce the animal body from its elements as it did the cattle and beasts...and the higher spirit would come from the ‘mouth’ of God’...*

“Many see the plural form as *pluralis majestatis* (the royal ‘we’)...with which human kings proclaim their will to their subjects, [and which] suggests that the ruler does not issue orders to satisfy his personal whim, but only for the general interest and well-being. It is only as representative of the people that the king rules. Similarly the Creator announces to the world the appearance of its master—man—as an act of consideration for the world’s interest (Rabbi Hirsch).” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 69)

Wenham comments that “From Philo onward, Jewish commentators have generally held that the plural is used because God is addressing His heavenly court, i.e., the angels (compare **Isaiah 6:8**).” (P. 27) A number of modern Christian commentators also adapt this view of the text.

Many Christian interpreters, from the time of the **Epistle of Barnabas** (early 2nd century C.E.) and Justin Martyr (about 165 C.E.) take this plural verb to be an obvious reference to the “Trinity”—God is speaking with the Spirit and the Son.

Wenham states that “It is now universally admitted that this was not what the plural meant to the original author.” (P. 27) But this is obviously overstatement, since there are
(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

many Christian interpreters who continue to hold to this view.

Genesis 1:1-2:3 has described the creative activity as being that of both אֱלֹהִים, **Jelohiyim** and of the “hovering” רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, **ruach)eloyiym**, Spirit of God,” and it is not reading later ideas into the text to understand the plural in this way—i.e., that God is speaking to the Spirit to share in the creation of human beings. **New Testament** passages hold that Jesus Christ was present with God the Father in creation—see:

John 1:1-3, At first / In beginning was being the Word, and the Word was being toward the God, and God was being the Word; this One was being at first / in beginning towards the God. All things through Him became, and without Him not one thing became that has become.

Colossians 1:16, by God’s Son, All things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...

Add to this the teaching of **Proverbs 8**, that Wisdom was the first of God’s works, and was present with God in creation (see footnote 14).

Others suggest that this is an example of the “plural of majesty” (see **2 Samuel 16:20**, where Absalom asks Athithophel to tell him “what we shall do”), as Hirsch does. Still others take the plural “us” and “we” as referring to other Gods, and think that the plural usage is a remnant of an earlier polytheistic form of the story (so, Gunkel), which has escaped the later

editor’s knife. Still others hold that the “many Gods” of polytheism have been replaced by the idea of the “heavenly council” (as is found in **Job 1-2**).

Sarna holds that “The extraordinary use of the first person plural evokes the image of a heavenly court in which God is surrounded by His angelic host...This is the Israelite version of the polytheistic assemblies of the pantheon--monotheized and depaganized.” (P 12)

Wenham likewise comments that ““Let us create man’ should...be regarded as a Divine announcement to the heavenly court, drawing the angelic host’s attention to the master stroke of creation, man.” (P. 28)

Still others have suggested that God is speaking to the creatures that he has just finished creating—the earth with its inhabitants, and this is certainly a very possible understanding of the text. Hamilton comments, “Thus man owes his origin to both God and the ground.” (P. 133).

We would say that there is a great emphasis in **Genesis 1** on the Divine Word as the
(continued...)

כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ

like⁹⁷ our likeness⁹⁸

⁹⁶(...continued)

origin of creation, and still, side by side with that Divine Word, there is the cooperative work of others in furthering the work of creation—and we think it very possible that the story means that God speaks to all that He has created thus far, calling upon the created universe to join with Him in creating / making the most unique form of life yet—humanity—and of course, after the creation of the first man and woman, human beings themselves are instrumental in the bringing forth new life.

At the very least, it becomes apparent in reading the **Hebrew Bible** that some of the rigid distinctions that are sometimes made between “singular and plural,” or “here and not there,” or “then but not now,” to which we are so accustomed in normal human thought, are simply not applicable when dealing with the God Who transcends both time and space, and Who uses His creatures to further His creation.

Genesis 1 makes room for instantaneous creation by the Word of God right alongside a slowly growing gradual development (“evolution”) under the guidance of the hovering Divine Spirit, and with the cooperation of others, including the creatures already made.

What do you think? How do you explain this use of the plural, “Let us make,” not only here, but in other passages such as **Genesis 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kings 22:19-23** (where numerous voices are heard speaking in the heavenly council); **Isaiah 6:8** and **Jeremiah 23:18** (others who stand in YHWH’s council)?

We think the view that the plural refers to the Trinity is an anachronistic reading back of Nicene theology into this ancient, pre-Christian document.

⁹⁷

The **Samaritan Pentateuch** interpolates the conjunction וְ, “and,” before כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ, **kidhmuthenu**, i.e., “and like / according to our likeness,” as does the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**), καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν, “and according to likeness” and the Latin Vulgate, **et similitudinem nostram**, “and our likeness.”

⁹⁸

It is a mistake to concentrate all our attention on this matter of the plural verb and pronouns, and overlook the great affirmation of this part of the creation-story—it is that human beings, in distinction from the sun, the moon and the stars; and in distinction from the fish, the birds and the animals, have been created in the Divine “image” and “likeness.”

The Hebrew phrase is בְּצִלְמֵנוּ כְּדִמוּתֵנוּ, **betsalmenu kidhmuthenu**, “in Our image, like (or ‘according to’) Our likeness.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is κατ’ εἰκόνα
(continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ' ὁμοίωσιν, “according to Our image and according to likeness.”

The noun **צֶלֶם**, **tselem**, “image,” occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

Genesis 1:26 (here), **27, 27** (all three with reference to the Divine image);

Genesis 5:3 (the first human being gives birth to Cain, in his, the human’s image and likeness);

Genesis 9:6 (the reason for capital punishment for murder is that human beings are made in the image of God—still, long after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the tree of lives);

Numbers 33:52 (molten images worshiped by the nations surrounding Israel);

1 Samuel 6:5, 5, 11 (the Philistines make images of mice and tumors);

2 Kings 11:18; 16:17; 2 Chronicles 23:17 (the people of Judah tear down the images of Baal);

Ezekiel 7:20 (abominable images);

Ezekiel 23:14 (images of the Chaldeans);

Amos 5:26 (images the northern Israelites have made for themselves);

Psalm 39:7 (אֵךְ-בְּצֶלֶם | יִתְהַלֵּךְ-אִישׁ, literally, surely in or like(?) an image a man walks about);

Psalm 73:20 (you or You despise their image?)

The noun **דְּמוּת**, **demuth**, “likeness,” occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

Genesis 1:26 (here, of God’s likeness); **5:1** (similar);

Genesis 5:3 (the first human being gave birth to Seth בְּדְמוּתוֹ כְּצֶלְמוֹ, “in his likeness, like or according to his image);

2 Kings 16:10 (a sketched likeness of the altar in Damascus);

Isaiah 13:4 (likeness of a great multitude);

Isaiah 40:18 (the question is: אֵל-מִי תִדְמִיּוּן אֵל וּמַה-דְּמוּת תַּעֲרֹכוּ לוֹ, to whom will you liken God? And what likeness will you arrange for Him?);

Ezekiel 1:5, 5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 26, 26, 28 (ten times Ezekiel uses the noun “likeness” in describing his vision of YHWH); **8:2** (similar); **10:1, 10, 21, 22** (used four times in another, similar vision);

Ezekiel 23:15 (portrayals of men with the likeness of Chaldeans);

Psalm 58:5 (venom in the likeness of a snake’s venom);

Daniel 10:16 (one in the likeness of the children of men touches Daniel’s lips);

2 Chronicles 4:3 (a likeness of oxen used in construction of the bronze sea in Solomon’s temple).

It is this--only this--that distinguishes between human beings and the other living beings: the “image and likeness of God.” The “mark” of God is upon humanity; human beings (continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

are in some mysterious way “in the image and likeness” of God, “similar” to God, or to “the Gods.” But what does this phrase mean?

Literally thousands of pages have been written in an attempt to fathom the meaning of this intriguing statement (see Westermann, pp. 146-55 for the history of exegesis of **Genesis 1:26-27**).

Westermann states that “What is striking is that one verse about the person, almost unique in the **Old Testament**, has become the center of attention in modern exegesis, whereas it has no such significance in the rest of the **Old Testament** and, apart from **Psalm 8**, does not occur again. This interest does not derive from the **Bible** itself [But what about interest in **Genesis 1:26** and **Psalm 8**—are these not part of the **Bible** itself?] but from certain presuppositions in the spiritual order which we cannot overlook...This interest has been confined almost exclusively to the area of church doctrine from Irenaeus to Karl Barth.” (P. 148)

We are not sure we understand Westermann at this point—and insist that throughout the **Hebrew Bible**, the way that human beings are addressed by YHWH God, in a way uniquely different from any other creature, is rooted in just this teaching in **Genesis 1** and **Psalm 8**.

Hamilton asks, “What then, does **Genesis 1** signify by designating man as one made *in the image of God*? We have mentioned...several ways in which **Genesis 1** narrates the creation story in a way radically different from the creation accounts of neighboring cultures. Perhaps such polemicizing continues here. It is well known that in both Egyptian and Mesopotamian society the king, or some high-ranking official, might be called ‘the image of God.’ Such a designation, however, was not applied to the canal digger or to the mason who worked on a ziggurat. **Genesis 1** may be using royal language to describe simply ‘man.’ In God’s eyes all of mankind is royal. All of humanity is related to God, not just the king. Specifically, the **Bible** democratizes the royalistic and exclusivistic concepts of the nations that surrounded Israel.” (P. 135) So also, Sarna (**Genesis**, p. 12)

With this view, the statement takes its place alongside the other elements of the creation-story which “demythologize” the ancient Near East’s world-view.

Hamilton adds that the second phrase in this statement concerning humanity’s creation, “similar to us,” or literally “like [or, ‘as’] our likeness” (כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ, **kidhmuthenu**, in Greek, καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν, **kath’ homioisin**, “according to likeness”) means that “Man is created in the image of God, but to avoid the possibility that man be viewed as an exact image of God, the word *likeness* is appended. The physical nuance of the concrete term ‘image’ is toned down by the more abstract term ‘likeness’...

(continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

“Some support for this view is found in the extensive use of דְּמוּת, **demuth** (‘likeness’) in **Ezekiel 1:5, 10, 13, 16, 22, 26, 26, 26, 28**, where the prophet never says that he saw God, but only the likeness of God or the likeness of something associated with God...” (Pp. 135-36)

We agree with Hamilton, and add that the language is even stronger, in that it states “*like Our likeness*,” a double affirmation of the non-literal or symbolical understanding of the image. Hamilton points out that the attempt to define exactly what is meant by the “image” and “likeness” of God has led to many different conclusions, such as: conscience, the soul, original righteousness, reason, the capacity for fellowship with God through prayer, posture, etc.

“Most of these definitions are based on subjective inferences rather than objective exegesis. Any approach that focuses on one aspect of man—be that physical, spiritual, or intellectual—to the neglect of the rest of man’s constituent features seems doomed to failure. **Genesis 1:26** is simply saying that to be human is to bear the image of God. This understanding emphasizes man as a unity. No part of man, no function of man is subordinated to some other, higher part or activity.” (P. 137)

Westermann holds that even though the two nouns have their own proper meaning, “The fact that they are interchangeable (both nouns are used, now the one and now the other) shows clearly that we have here one expression which further determines the creation of humans” (1, pp. 145-46), i.e., the two nouns [image and likeness] mean essentially the same thing.

On pages 148-55 Westermann mentions a number of differing understandings of the image and likeness of God in human beings:

- (1) the two phrases refer to the natural and supernatural likeness to God;
- (2) the likeness to God consists in spiritual qualities or capacities (power of the soul, memory, intellect, will, spiritual capacities, freedom, religious and moral personal life; personality, understanding, self-consciousness, the immortality of the soul);
- (3) the image and likeness of God consists of the external form of the human, i.e., the upright carriage;
- (4) the totality of the individual, both spiritual and corporeal, the whole person;
- (5) the person as God’s counterpart, who can address God as “You,” and who is responsible before God (‘The human being stands apart from other living beings because of a special relationship to God...that of the child toward the father...because it is with him alone that God has a direct and personal relationship... [T.C. Vriezen]);
- (6) the person as representative of God on earth (‘As earthly rulers...erect images of themselves in the provinces as signs of their presence, so too has God put human beings on earth in his image and likeness as a sign of his majesty’--G. von Rad);

(continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

(7) other explanations include: humanity's dominion over creation; a call to holiness of life; the Christ-image in human beings.

Westermann spends a great deal of space in dealing with # 6, the person as representative of God on earth, referring especially to the works of H. Wildberger and W.H. Schmidt, both of whom have "confirmed this explanation and given it a new dimension by means of a number of Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts which speak of the king as the image of God" (p. 152), as is found in the "royal ideology" of the ancient Near East. "A person as the image of God corresponds to the king as the image of God; both are God's viceroy or representative." (*Ibid.*) This is also Sarna's and Hamilton's view.

Westermann, however, rejects this understanding, holding that "...It is...inconceivable that [the priestly writer] could have meant 'wherever a human being appears, there God appears'...God appears in his **כְּבוֹד**, **khabhodh** ['glorious radiance'], and that is a manifestation before man, not in man. [The priestly writer] could conceive of an appearance, manifestation, or representation of God only as a holy event, completely outside the range of ordinary events. He could not possibly think of a human being as standing in the place of God on earth." (P. 153)

We think Westermann is being too dogmatic at this point. How does he know the author of the vision-story was a priest? How can he know what a priestly writer could or could not have said? The priestly writer, coming after the exile, and well acquainted with the prophets of Israel such as **Isaiah**, would have known and accepted the paradox that the high and holy One chooses to dwell within the lowly person of contrite heart (such as is seen in **Isaiah 57:15** and **66:1-2**). We think it too dogmatic to say what is possible for an ancient writer to conceive, especially if his language seems to express such a view.

Westermann finally settles for explanation # 5, "The Creator created a creature that corresponds to Him, to whom He can speak, and who listens to Him...The creation of human beings in the image of God is not saying that something has been added to the created person, but is explaining what the person is." (P. 157)

"God has created all people 'to correspond to him'; that is so that something can happen between Creator and creature. This holds despite all differences among people; it goes beyond all differences of religion, beyond belief and unbelief. Every human being of every religion and in every place, even where religions are no longer recognized, has been created in the image of God...Humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship to God." (P. 158)

We suggest a combination of views 5 and 6, that the human being, who can communicate with, and correspond to God, has been made the Divine representative on earth, called to share in the creative Divine rule over the rest of creation (through ruling and serving). Human beings are intended by God to be His representatives, to act like God in sharing His
(continued...)

וַיִּרְדּוּ בְרֵגְתַּי הַיָּם

and let them rule over⁹⁹ the sea's fish,

⁹⁸(...continued)

rule over the earth—especially His accepting love and forgiveness.

We agree with Fretheim in his comment that “The image functions to mirror God to the world...to be an extension of God’s own dominion.” (P. 345)

Rambam states that “Man alone among the living creatures is endowed—like his Creator— with moral freedom and will. He is capable of knowing and loving God and of holding spiritual communion with Him; and man alone can guide his actions in accordance with reason. He is therefore said to have been made in the form and likeness of the Almighty.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 70)

“Taken in sum total, then, the two parallel terms...describe man in his spiritual resemblance to his Creator: his endowment with the intellectual perception that gives him preeminence over the animals, that guides him consciously in the exercise of his free-choice, his moral sense of right and wrong, and finally that gives man his fundamental distinction of approximating some spiritual resemblance to his Creator.” (**ibid.**, p. 71)

What do you think? What is the distinction between a human being and an animal? And we add that all of this discussion concerning the meaning of a simple phrase in the text is demonstration of the enigmatic, puzzling character of the vision-story. It is a simple story, easily understood, even by children. But it is also puzzling, and deep, challenging the best thinking of any who read it!

⁹⁹

Or, “and they will rule over...”

Alexander comments on what this “ruling over” means, that “The man and woman are to make the earth’s resources beneficial for themselves, which implies that they would investigate and develop the earth’s resources to make them useful for human beings generally. This command provides a foundation for wise scientific and technological development...As God’s representatives, human beings are to rule over every living thing on the earth. These commands are not, however, a mandate to exploit the earth and its creatures to satisfy human greed, for the fact that Adam and Eve were ‘in the image of God’ (**1:27**) implies God’s expectation that human beings will use the earth wisely and govern it with the same sense of responsibility and care that God had toward the whole of His creation.” (P. 52)

Bereishis 1, p. 71, states that “The plural form וַיִּרְדּוּ, **weyirdu**, and they shall rule implies that this does not refer to the original man as an individual—but to mankind as a whole (Radak).” It seems typical of male chauvinistic Jews to not recognize that man as male and
(continued...)

וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

and over the heavens' birds,

וּבַבְּהֵמָה

and over the cattle,

וּבְכָל-הָאָרֶץ

and over all the earth,¹⁰⁰

וּבְכָל-הַרֶמֶשׂ הַרֶמֶשׂ עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

and over all the swarm(s) that swarm upon the earth!¹⁰¹

⁹⁹(...continued)

female is being addressed.

Westermann notes that “It is characteristic of the stories of the creation of human beings that they are there for a definite purpose or goal.” (P. 158)

Here, that purpose is one of “ruling,” and that means sharing in the Divine governance of the created universe. Compare the earlier statement made concerning the heavenly bodies, as likewise sharing in that “rule.” Here is a task that is given to humanity, and in that assignment of task we may see how the *Torah* gives legislation.

We think this “ruling over” means caring for the entire earth and its creatures as wise and responsible caretakers, like good gardeners or farmers, using all possible skills creatively, to make the earth productive and fruitful for all.

What do you think? Do you think that what the scientists at NASA are doing is an example of humanity’s “ruling” over God’s creation—seeking to know it better and better, constantly looking for ways to benefit humanity through their discoveries? Do you think of other, better examples?

¹⁰⁰

The Syriac translation interpolates “living creature” before “the earth.” This variant reading hardly changes the meaning of **Genesis**.

¹⁰¹

According to the vision-story of creation, God the great King and Creator commands the sharing of His “rule” with His human creatures, who bear His image and likeness (and who, through communicating with Him, can know His will for creation). This is, we believe, the basic way that human beings differ from the other “living beings”—the humans are called to share in
(continued...)

¹⁰¹(...continued)

the Divine rule over the earth and all other creatures.

We agree with Hamilton in his comment that “**Verse 26** has begun by stating man’s relationship to the Creator. It now progresses to spelling out man’s relationship to the rest of the created order. He is to exercise dominion [וַיְרִדוּ], **weyirdu**, ‘and let them rule, have dominion, dominate’] over all other living creatures.” Indeed, the statement is even broader than that—it is a dominion over the entire earth.

We believe that this vision-story may well be intended to be the story of the Great King’s creative activity, the story of the Divine kingdom (the universe) which God has created, and over which God exercises dominion (see footnote 14). Now, the Great King of all creation hands over responsibility for rule and dominion to His tiny human creatures who bear His image, who are in some way “like God”—to take charge of the earth and all its varied animal life, as God’s representatives. Here again is the theme of God’s creatures sharing in the on-going tasks of creation.

Hamilton comments that “...Like ‘image,’ *exercise dominion* reflects royal language. Man is created to rule.” (P. 138)

Psalm 8:7-9 expresses a very similar thought:

7 תִּמְשִׁלֵּהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדֶיךָ
You will cause (the human) to reign over Your hand’s works;

כָּל שֵׂתָה תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו:

You placed everything under his feet:

8 צֹנָה וְאַלְפִים כָּלֵם
flock(s) and cattle, all of them;

וְגַם בְּהֵמוֹת שָׂדֵי:
and also beasts of (the) field;

9 צִפּוֹר שָׁמַיִם
bird(s) of the heavens,

וְדָגֵי הַיָּם...
and fish (plural) of the sea...

Westermann comments that this assignment given to the human beings “...Replaces the destiny assigned to a person at creation in the Sumerian and Babylonian narratives. There the person is created ‘to bear the yoke of the Gods,’ to minister to the Gods, to relieve (continued...)”

¹⁰¹(...continued)

the Gods of the burden of everyday work...The creation of humans in this context is directed towards the cult [that is, to serving in the manifold temples erected to serve the Gods]...

“In **Genesis 1:26** the goal of humans is within this world—dominion over the animals [this to be sure, but, more than this!]. The creation of human beings introduces the possibility of a hierarchical order which is characteristic of ‘being in this world.’ The goal of the creation of humans is detached from the life of the Gods and directed to the life of this world.” (P. 159) Here again the theme of the “demythologization” of the Near Eastern world-view appears.

Sarna comments on this that “Contrary to the common beliefs of the ancient world that the forces of nature are Divinities that may hold the human race in thralldom, our text declares [humanity] to be a free agent who has the God-given power to control nature.” (P. 13) That is, not “slaves to the Gods”—but rather, people made in the Divine image, who share in the Divine rule over the earth. What a difference!

What do you think? Sometimes deeply religious people assume that human beings were created to worship and pray and participate in religious services all the time. This vision-story says nothing like this. Humanity is created by God to act like God, obeying His command to rule creatively over the earth that God has made and given into their hands. You could almost call this a “secular” view of human responsibility. How do you understand it?

If a human being hears the call of God, what does that involve? Does it mean becoming an ordained minister or rabbi or imam? Or can it mean becoming a scientist, a teacher, a farmer, a doctor, a nurse, an inventor, a builder, a soldier, a creator of new products that can heal, and improve health, and rid the earth of disease? How can humanity best reflect the Divine image and likeness in this world?

¹⁰²

Youngblood notes concerning **verse 27** that “This highly significant verse is the first occurrence of poetry in the **Old Testament** (which is about 40 percent poetry).” (P. 8)

Remember that Hebrew poetry ordinarily consists of short, parallel lines, not in making words sound alike. We certainly agree that this verse is Hebrew poetry—but are convinced that much more of the **Hebrew Bible** is poetic in its language than most translations indicate—as is evident from our attempt to translate the entirety of **Genesis** with short lines, often indicative of poetry. Many will disagree with us—but it is our experience in translating the **Hebrew Bible** that even those passages that are considered prose are much more easily understood when divided into short lines, rather than the continuous lines of prose.

וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־הָאָדָם בְּצַלְמוֹ

And God created¹⁰³ the human being¹⁰⁴ in His likeness;¹⁰⁵

בְּצַלְמֵם אֱלֹהִים בָּרָא אֹתוֹ

in God's likeness He created him.

103

In **verse 27**, once again the narrator uses the verb וַיִּבְרָא, **wayyibra**), “and He created,” from the verb בָּרָא, **bara**) which is found at **Genesis 1:1, 21**, three times in **verse 27; 2:3, 4; 5:1**, (twice) and **6:7**. See footnote 15 for occurrences of this verb in the **Hebrew Bible**.

Malbim claims that “The verb וַיִּבְרָא, **wayyibra**), ‘[and He] created,’ is used because it refers to the creation—ex nihilo [‘out of nothing’]—of man’s living soul, something unprecedented in creation. נַעֲשֶׂה, **na(aseh**, ‘[let us] make,’ is used in **verse 26** because that refers to the formation from existing material of man’s body.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 72)

But this exact phrase “living soul,” is the name given to animals in the stories, both **chapters 1 and 2**. Certainly in this respect humanity’s creation is not unprecedented. See footnote 85.

104

Wenham comments that “Whereas **verse 26** used the anarthrous (without the definite article) אָדָם, **adham**, “Adam,” or “Humanity,” here in **verse 27** the definite article הָאָדָם, **ha)adham**, “the Adam,” or “the humanity,” is used, and clearly means ‘humanity’ in general, ‘male and female,’ not an individual is meant.” (P. 32)

Youngblood notes that “Alike (male and female) bear the image of God, and together they share in the divine benediction that follows.” (P. 8) This is, we think, distinctive for the vision-story of creation, not found elsewhere in the Near Eastern cosmologies, which are marked by male chauvinism, even though worshiping Goddesses!

105

In the phrase בְּצַלְמוֹ בְּצַלְמֵם אֱלֹהִים, **betsalmo betselem)elohiym**, “in His likeness, in likeness (of) God,” the noun צֶלֶם, **tselem** is repeated twice, emphasizing the unique relationship of humanity to God. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) omits the first בְּצַלְמוֹ, **betsalmo**, “in His image.”

זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה בָּרָא אֹתָם:

Male and female He created them.¹⁰⁶

106

The two nouns זָכָר וְנִקְבָּה, **zakhar uneqebhah**, “male and female,” are rooted in the sexual anatomy of human beings, in which the cavity of the vagina in the female, as “being pierced,” is the basic meaning of the second noun, while the meaning of the first noun is most probably “sharp,” or “pointed.”

See R. E. Clements’ article on these two words in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** IV, pp. 82-87, where he states that “The etymology of זָכָר, **zakhar** is obscure; we can conjecture that the root conception is ‘be sharp, pointed.’ The evidence of Arabic **dakar**, meaning both ‘male’ and ‘penis,’ supports what is in any case the probable conclusion that the basic reference is ‘penis’...The derivation of נִקְבָּה, **neqebhah** from the root נִקַּב, **nqb**, ‘bore,’ ‘pierce,’ understood in a sexual reference is reasonably clear...” (P. 83)

Clements states that **Genesis 1** “...Records that when God created humans, He created them זָכָר, **zakhar** and נִקְבָּה, **neqebhah** (**Genesis 1:27**), thus implying that the two sexes together form the species. This must not be taken to mean that man as originally created was bi-sexual [as the *Midrash* maintains, ‘man was created originally with two...faces—i.e., male and female halves—and afterwards He divided them,’ **Bereishis** 1, p. 72] but that male and female together make up mankind, and that God stands above sexuality [or, we may add, contains both the male and female natures within Himself / Herself]. It does, however, express the view that a basic equality exists between the sexes and that they form a necessary complement to each other.” (P. 84)

The vision-story affirms that both male and female share in the Divine image and likeness. See **Genesis 5:2** and **3** with accompanying footnotes. In the light of this story, we have to be appalled at the male chauvinism that has so often characterized religious history, with its assumption that males are superior to females. And we can affirm that anyone who takes the **Genesis** vision-story seriously as the truth, will be compelled to reject male chauvinism—such as has all too often characterized many self-styled believers!

Westermann comments that “...There can be no question of an ‘essence of man’ apart from existence as two sexes. Humanity exists in community, as one beside the other, and there can only be anything like humanity and human relations where the human species exists in twos...A human being must be seen as one whose destiny it is to live in community; people have been created to live with each other. This is what human existence means...Every theoretical and institutional separation of man and woman, every deliberate detachment of male from female, can endanger the very existence of humanity as determined by creation.” (P. 160)

(continued...)

1.28 וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֹתָם

And God blessed¹⁰⁷ them,

¹⁰⁶(...continued)

We think that Westermann's statement is aimed at the Roman Catholic insistence on the celibacy of the priesthood—we think it certainly applies there. And we think that the on-going problem of sexual deviance in the priesthood is an ample demonstration of this truth. What do you think?

Fretheim comments that since “both male and female are so created (see also **Genesis 5:2**) means that the female images the Divine as much as the male...the emergence of both male and female images for God could be grounded in this text.” (P. 345)

Do you agree with Fretheim? Do you think the picture of a loving Mother can accurately reflect this biblical teaching concerning God? Is God in fact sometimes viewed in the **Hebrew Bible** as the Great Earth Mother? See **Psalms 90:1**, which in the Hebrew states that God brought forth the earth through labor-pains.

¹⁰⁷

This phrase, “God blessed...” is found some 73 times in **Genesis**, and three of those times are in the Creation narrative of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**, specifically in **verses 22, 28, and 2:3**. See also **5:2** and **9:1**. It is the piel imperfect with “waw conversive / consecutive,” וַיְבָרֶךְ, **wayyebarek**, “and He blessed.” Josef Scharbert, in his article on the verb בָּרַךְ, **brk** in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament II**, pp. 279-308, states that “The Priestly document [his term for Genesis] knows a blessing of God with accompanying words in **Genesis 1:22, 28; 5:2** and **9:1**, where God blesses living creatures or [humanity]...He presents it in stereotyped formulas like, ‘Be fruitful and multiply,’ or, ‘I will make you fruitful and multiply your seed’...All these passages have in mind an immediate gift of fertility, wealth, respect, etc. This also seems to be the case with all other traditionists of the **Old Testament**, in whose works ‘bless’ can always be translated in the sense of ‘giving vitality, prosperity, abundance, or fertility.’” (P. 294)

Westermann notes that “...It is characteristic of living beings, both humans and animals, that they are blessed. The power of fertility that is bestowed on living beings, and on them alone enables them to continue their species through conception and birth.” (P. 158)

Westermann goes on to state, “Only rarely does the **Old Testament** say that God blesses things or animals...In **Genesis 1:22**, God blesses the animals with the multiplication formula common to [the priestly writer]. In **Genesis 2:3** and **Exodus 20:11**, He blesses the Sabbath, which probably means that through it He mediates the Divine blessing to the person who keeps it.” (P. 295)

(continued...)

וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים

and God said to them,¹⁰⁸

פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ

Be fruitful, and multiply,¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷(...continued)

Here the **Genesis** story of creation affirms that God, the Creator, is the unique Source of fertility—over against the many Gods of the Canaanite fertility religions. We think it is imperative for the student of **Genesis** to make a study of the fertility religions of the ancient Near East in order to understand the greatness and meaning of the **Genesis** creation story.

¹⁰⁸

Hamilton notes that in **verse 27**, “The direct discourse of **verse 26** is replaced by narrated discourse. Thus in **verse 26** we heard the voice of God, and in **verse 27** we hear the voice of the narrator.” (P. 138) The Creator speaks to the female, just as well as to the male.

Sarna comments that “The transcendent God of Creation transforms Himself into the immanent God, the personal God, who enters into unmediated communion with human beings.” (P. 13)

We do not see any “transformation of God” in this passage; rather, the transcendent God Who speaks His word of command to the universe, and it obeys, is also the same God Who is close to His human creatures as well, and Who speaks His word of command to them, both male and female, thereby enabling their obedience, and the possibility of their being His representatives, sharing in His “rule” over the rest of creation, or the possibility of their refusing to obey, resulting in Divine judgment (as will be seen in the next section of **Genesis**).

¹⁰⁹

The Divine command to the non-human living beings—fish and fowl, פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ, **peru urebhu** in **1:22**, “be fruitful and multiply.” is word for word the same as the Divine command to the human beings—the humans as well as the fish and fowl are Divinely mandated to share in on-going creation. If the fish, fowl, and animals do not owe their fertility to the Baals and the Asherahs, neither do human beings.

Because God has created humanity and its sexual identities, human sexuality is not evil or debased—it is the Divine intention for humanity. Its use is God’s means of creating new human beings on the earth, by means of His co-creators.

Hamilton comments that in **verse 28** “God gives two assignments to the male and the female: procreation and dominion. Like the animals over whom they rule (**verse 22**), at the moment of their creation God gives them the power to reproduce themselves. In view of the
(continued...)

וּמְלֵאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

and fill the earth,¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹(...continued)

fact that, at least in Mesopotamia and maybe in Canaan, creation motifs were often employed in fertility rites, **Genesis 1** may be saying that reproduction is a blessing and gift from God, and is in no way dependent upon subsequent rites or activities.” (P. 139)

Westermann states that “The blessing works itself out in the succession of generations in the genealogies of **Genesis 5** which follows immediately on **1:1-2:4a** [that is, according to his theory concerning the nature of the Priestly writing]. The blessing conferred on humanity at creation is effective in begetting, conception, and birth and the succession of generations. [It is] a continuous, ever present power, effective into the future. The world in which Israel lived Divinized the vital and explosive power of fertility and so gave birth to a whole range of myths and cultic practices [specifically, sacred prostitution], and of highly colored poetic, literary and ritual images...It is of the greatest importance for its understanding of God that Israel completely subsumed and subordinated this power under the activity of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Yahweh alone is the Master of this power, He alone as Creator confers it on every living being, He alone remains Lord of creation, He alone disposes of the power...

“The blessing given to humanity in **Genesis 1:28** means that as long as humankind exists, God will remain effectively at work in them because of this action at creation.” (Pp. 160-61)

Yes, humanity, both male and female, are “co-creators” with God, and every child born in human history is a product of the blessing of God. Once again, the matter of demythologization of the Near-Eastern world-view becomes evident in this material.

Abarbanel states that this command means, “Though I created you in My image, do not be so engrossed in the spirit and intellect that you neglect the physical and thus destroy the world; My desire is that you populate the world, not destroy it.” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 74)

Again, we see evidence for **Torah** legislation in the creation-story, that the story expresses God’s normative desire for humanity—and the bearing of children is a Divinely given responsibility for humanity. What do you think? Do you agree?

110

Earlier, at **verse 22**, marine life was commanded by God to “fill the seas.” Here the human beings are given a similar Divine command, “fill the earth.” It is a challenging demand involving the great adventure of going throughout the planet earth, to fill it with human life, as human beings share in the on-going creation of new life.

Fretheim comments that “The command to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth immediately follows the word of blessing and involves a sharing of the Divine creative

(continued...)

וְכַבְּשׁוּהָ

and bring it under control;¹¹¹

¹¹⁰(...continued)

capacities... But should the point arrive at which the earth appears to be filled (the definition of which would need discussion), then the human responsibility in this area would need adjustment. New situations will teach new duties regarding the created order.” (P. 346)

What do you think? Do you agree with Fretheim? Is the biblical command to be fruitful and multiply still applicable when and if the population of the earth becomes so dense that there is no more room and resources for further growth? If the human beings are told to “rule,” do they not have the responsibility for making decisions concerning such things? What about when one’s family has all the children a mother and father can care and provide for—does the Divine mandate mean to nevertheless go on having all the children possible? We think such a conclusion is both irrational and irresponsible for humans who are mandated to “rule” the earth.

And we are thankful for the wisdom of Qoheleth in **Ecclesiastes 3** with its teaching that there is a time for everything. We think it exactly in line with that teaching to say that there is a time to give birth, and there is a time to refrain from giving birth—a time for birth control. Do you agree?

Bereishis states that this means, “...Do not congregate in one location but disperse yourselves throughout the globe. It was the sin of the...generation of the dispersion (**chapter 11**) that they defiantly wished to assemble in one place (Aderes Eliyahu)...Man’s mission on earth is thus not attached to any particular zone or climate...the whole world being meant to be...the human kingdom, ‘Adam’s earth’ (Rabbi Hirsch)...Man is thus the one of the few creatures who can acclimate himself to thrive in any part of the world (Malbim).” (1, p. 74)

When we come to **Genesis 11:1-9**, we will make much of this initial command to the humans, in agreement with this comment by Aderes Eliyahu, interpreting the reason for the Divine confusion of human languages to be rooted in disobedience to this command.

111

The verb **וְכַבְּשׁוּהָ**, **khabhash**, occurring here in the imperative form, **וְכַבְּשׁוּהָ**, **wekhibhshu-ha** “and you people bring it under control,” is found elsewhere some 13 times in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Numbers 32:22, 29, the armies of Reuben and Manasseh share in subduing the west bank, bringing it under Israeli control;

Joshua 18:1, the land of Israel is subdued, brought under control;

Jeremiah 34:11, 11, 16, freed Hebrew slaves are brought back and subdued, brought under
(continued...)

¹¹¹(...continued)

their control, by former owners;

Micah 7:19, (Who is a God like YHWH?)

יִשׁוּב יְרַחֲמֵנוּ

He will return, He will have compassion on us;

יִכְבֹּשׂ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ

He will subdue, take control of our iniquities;

וְתַשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם

and You will throw into the depths of the sea

כָּל-חַטָּאוֹתֵינוּ

all our sins!

Zechariah 9:15, as YHWH defends His people, they will subdue sling-stones, take them under control;

Esther 7:8, the Persian king accuses Haman of attempting to subdue / rape Esther;

Nehemiah 5:5, 5, some of the returned exiles are subduing, taking control of their fellow Jews, forcing them into debt-slavery;

1 Chronicles 22:18, David reminds Israel how the land has been subdued, taken under control, before YHWH and His people;

2 Chronicles 28:10, the people of Northern Israel are intending to subdue, take control their conquered enemies, the people of Judah, making them their slaves.

The word is used for conquest and subjugation of the promised land, or the subjugation of people as slaves, or the attempted rape of a woman--and sometimes just such an understanding of humanity's relationship to the earth has been practiced. We think this is a very wrong-headed understanding, and that the command to "subdue" the earth means taking control over it, and causing it to work on humanity's behalf, just as a wise gardener does his garden. It certainly does not mean "rape it," or "destroy it."

Hamilton agrees, stating that "Of the two verbs [רָדַח, **radhah** and כָּבַשׁ, **khabhash**]... the latter connotes more force. Thus it refers to subjecting someone to slavery...to physical abuse and assault...to treading (sins) under foot...and to militarily subjecting the population of a city. All these references suggest violence or a display of force. For reasons already indicated, it appears unlikely that we need to transfer the nuance of force and dictatorship into the use of כָּבַשׁ, **khabhash** in **Genesis 1:28**. Probably what is designated is settlement and agriculture: 'subdue the land' in **chapter 1** is a semantic parallel to 'till and keep the land' in **2:5, 15.**" (Pp. 139-40)

Again we note that here is an example of "**Torah** legislation" in the vision-story.

Fretheim comments that "The involvement in the creative process of those created in
(continued...)

וַיְרֹדוּ בְרִיגַת הַיָּם

and rule¹¹² over the sea's fish,

וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

and over the heavens' birds,¹¹³

¹¹¹(...continued)

the Divine image takes the form of a command (**1:28**). [This involves] a sharing of the exercise of power (dominion). From the beginning God chooses not to be the only One Who has or exercises creative power...This process offers to the human being the task of intracreation development, of bringing the world along to its fullest possible creational potential. Here paradise is not a state of perfection, not a static state of affairs. Humans live in a highly dynamic situation. The future remains open to a number of possibilities in which creaturely activity will prove crucial for the development of the world." (P. 346)

Do you agree with Fretheim? Is "ecology" genuinely rooted in the vision-story? As a result of our study of the **Book of Job**, we have concluded that Job's exercise of judicial authority in his community, seeking justice for the poor, is an excellent example of humanity's responsibility for "ruling," one that is approved by YHWH. What do you think?

¹¹²

Again we emphasize that this is royal language, as the Great King mandates a "royal role" to His tiny human creatures who bear His likeness, and who communicate with Him, and who will play the role of representing Him in the created earth.

Wenham comments that "...[Humanity] is told to 'subdue and rule' the earth and its animal inhabitants, thereby fulfilling [their] role as God's image-bearers on earth...Because [humanity] is created in God's image, they are kings over nature. They rule the world on God's behalf. This is of course no license for the unbridled exploitation and subjugation of nature...Mankind is here commissioned to rule nature as a benevolent king, acting as God's representative over them and therefore treating them in the same way as God Who created them." (P. 33)

¹¹³

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) interpolates the additional phrase καὶ πάντων τῶν κτηνῶν καὶ πάσης τῆς γῆς, "and all the animals and all the earth" at this point in the text, again indicating that the Greek translators were working with a text slightly different from the Masoretic text. The Syriac translation has a shorter, one word interpolation at this point in the text. Neither interpolation significantly changes the meaning of **Genesis**.

וּבְכָל-חַיָּה הַרְמֵשֶׁת עַל-הָאָרֶץ:

and over every living animal¹¹⁴ that creeps upon the earth!¹¹⁵

114

Where our text has חַיָּה, **chayyah**, “living animal(s),” or “wild life,” the **Samaritan Pentateuch** interpolates the definite article, reading הַחַיָּה, **hachayyah**, “the living animal(s),” “the wild-life.”

115

Hamilton comments that “In **Enuma Elish** the earth is created from one-half of Tiamat’s corpse. All the Deities who had sided with Tiamat against Marduk now receive as their sentence the opprobrious duty of maintaining the earth. Such manual labor is weary and beneath their dignity. In response to their pleas, and in return for building a house for him, Marduk proceeds to create man from the blood of a fallen God, Kingu: ‘Arteries I will knot and bring bones into being. I will create Lullu, man be his name. I will form Lullu, man. Let him be burdened with the toil of the Gods, that they may freely breathe. They bound him (Kingu), held him before Ea, inflicted the penalty on him, severed his arteries. And from his blood he formed mankind, imposed toil on man, set the Gods free.’ Man is created as an afterthought, and when he is created he is predestined to be a servant of the Gods. There is nothing of the regal and the noble about him such as we find in **Genesis 1**. Basically he is a substitute, one who is created from the blood of rebellious Deity. The anthropologies of **Genesis 1** and **Enuma Elish** could not be wider apart.” (P. 140)

Here again we sense how the **Genesis** creation-story is “demythologizing” the ancient Near Eastern world-view.

Westermann comments that in the creation narrative of **Genesis 1**, “There is a gradual progression in this arrangement: everything that God has created has a destiny; this destiny reaches its goal in humanity which God created as His counterpart; with human beings creation points the way into history.” (P. 88)

Again Westermann comments that “A further characteristic is that only among living beings is a hierarchy of order established; humans and the animals are put in relationship to each in that humans are entrusted with dominion over animals.” (P. 158)

However, we think that the final “goal” that is reached in the **Genesis** story of creation is not humanity, but rather God’s “rest,” in which humanity is invited to share—see **2:1-3**. In a further biblical picture of that final goal, the animal kingdom is included. See **Isaiah 11:6-9**.

1.29¹¹⁶ וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים

And God said,

הֲיֵנָה נִתְּתִי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב זֶרַע זֶרַע

Look--I gave to you people every herbage bearing seed,

אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ

that is upon the surface of all the earth,

וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ

and every tree¹¹⁷

אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ פְרִי-עֵץ זֶרַע זֶרַע

that has within it tree-fruit, bearing seed--

לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאֹכְלָהּ:

for you people it will be for eating;

1.30 וְלִכְל־חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ

and for all the earth's wild-life,

וְלִכְל-עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם

and for all the heavens' birds,

116

Wenham comments on **verses 29-30** that “God’s provision of food for newly created man stands in sharp contrast to Mesopotamian views which held that man was created to supply the Gods with food.” (P. 33) No, humanity was not created to provide the Gods with food; God provides food for humanity! So the biblical story responds to the Mesopotamian cosmologies / world views.

117

The Hebrew text reads **וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ**, **we)eth-kol-ha(ets**, literally, “and (+ sign of definite object) all the tree(s),” which we are translating “and every tree.” The **Samaritan Pentateuch** omits the definite article before the noun *tree*.

וּלְכֹל רֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָרֶץ

and for every creeper¹¹⁸ upon the earth,

אֲשֶׁר-בּוֹ נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

which have in them life's breath—¹¹⁹

אֶת-כָּל-יֵרֶק עֵשֶׂב לְאֵכֶלָה

every¹²⁰ green herb for eating!¹²¹

118

The **Samaritan Pentateuch** interpolates the definite article before the qal active participle רֹמֵשׁ, **romes**, i.e., reading הַרֹמֵשׁ, “the creeping (animals),” even though there is no definite article with the other two objects that are named in this **verse 30**.

119

Here the same phrase that has been used before is used--נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה, **nephesh chayyah**. Here, however, it seems strange to speak of the “living beings” as having within them “living being.” The phrase must be used in a slightly different sense, and we suggest something like “life’s breath,” or “living innermost being.”

120

Where the Hebrew text reads simply אֶת, **eth-**, the sign of the direct object, some Hebrew manuscripts and the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) add the conjunction, וְאֶת, **we)eth-**, “and + the sign of the direct object,” but this does not change the meaning of **Genesis**.

121

As the **Genesis** picture develops, the entirety of earth’s living beings (human and animal) is depicted as being “vegetarian” in diet--there is no killing of any sort, no taking of animal life by other animals, or by humans. It is only after the original order of creation has been destroyed by humanity’s disobedience that the eating of animal flesh is permitted by God--see **Genesis 9:2-4**.

Hiebert comments that “According to priestly tradition, humans were vegetarians before the flood; they are given food from the two traditional Mediterranean crops--grains and fruits--created on the third day.” (P. 8) As the story continues, meat is added to the human diet following the flood--see **Genesis 9:2-4**. But, we ask, are grains and fruits peculiar to the Mediterranean area? Are they not world-wide foods?

(continued...)

¹²¹(...continued)

Bereishis 1, p. 76 states that “Man was thus given dominion over God’s creatures only in the sense that he could harness them in his service (compare **Sanhedrin** 59b), but he could not slay them for his consumption. He was to subsist entirely upon vegetables, a prohibition which was modified after the Flood (**9:2-5**).”

Hamilton comments that “At no point is anything (human beings, animals, birds) allowed to take the life of another living being and consume it for food. The dominion assigned to the human couple over the animal world does not include the prerogative to butcher. Instead, humankind survives on a vegetarian diet. What is strange, and probably unexplainable (from a scientific position), is the fact that the animals too are not carnivores but also vegetarians.” (P. 140)

The picture drawn of life in the garden of Luxurious Place, or Eden in **chapter 2**, is that of all living beings at peace with one another, with no killing and eating—a picture that is found once again in the pictures of the ideal future drawn by the prophets of Israel (compare especially **Isaiah 11:6-9**), where the animals are once again at peace with humanity and with one another, and the carnivorous animals return to feeding only on vegetation, i.e., “the lion will eat straw like the ox.”

In the light of this, we may conclude that the world as we know it, in which there is so much taking of life and eating what has been killed, is a world that is less than it was originally intended to be by its Creator according to this biblical world-view, a world that is not now what it will one day become, and in which human beings are given the task of seeking to make it fulfill the Divine intention.

What do you think? Do you agree that in the world as God the Creator intended it, there will be no more taking of animal life by humans for food? Do you have a slight sense of unease when you realize that a living animal has been slaughtered to provide your steak or bacon or chicken sandwich? Have you visited a feed-lot in the Texas panhandle, or elsewhere, and witnessed the wholesale slaughter of cattle? How did it make you feel? Would you be willing to take the job of killing the animals? And if you did feel a sense of unease at the sight, is that an indication that in your heart you know that something is wrong in what is happening? How do you feel when you witness the killing of a beautiful buck deer? Do you have any sense that there is cruelty involved?

Westermann notes that “The human being in the world is acutely sensitive to a lack, to something wrong or contradictory; the killing of a living being touches the very existence of living beings. Such experience is linked with an awareness that the origin of all this must lie elsewhere, in a primeval period which is beyond the present...And so it becomes clear how this motif of primeval [belonging to the first or original] time finds its counterpart in the motif of end time. There are a number of texts which speak of peace between the animals, **Isaiah 11:2-9; 65:25; Hosea 2:10; Ezekiel 34:25...**” (Pp. 164-65)

(continued...)

וַיְהִי־כֵן:

And so it happened.¹²²

1.31 וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

And God saw everything that He made;¹²³

וַהֲנִה־טוֹב מְאֹד

and look¹²⁴--exceedingly good!¹²⁵

¹²¹(...continued)

Westermann also notes that “The provision of food [especially of vegetation, and not animal flesh] is an element often found in stories of the creation of humanity together with the role for which human beings were created, as also in **Genesis 2**.” (P. 162)

Westermann adds that “What is ‘common to humanity’ is the awareness that the killing of living beings for food by other living beings is not right, and so not in accordance with the will of the Creator at the beginning, although it is necessary in the present world...” (P. 164) Do you agree with Westermann?

¹²²

See **verses 7, 9, 11, 15, 24** and **30** for the repeated phrase “and so it happened.”

¹²³

Again the author uses the verb עָשָׂה, **asah**, “make,” in describing the Divine activity in creation.

¹²⁴

Alexander notes that “the additional ‘behold!’ invites the reader to imagine seeing creation from God’s vantage point. While many things do not appear to be good about the present-day world, this was not so at the beginning. **Genesis** goes on to explain why things have changed, indicating that no blame should be attributed to God. Everything He created was very good; it answers to God’s purposes and expresses His Own overflowing goodness. Despite the invasion of sin (**chapter 3**), the material creation retains its goodness.” (P. 52)

Compare **1 Timothy 4:4**, πᾶν κτίσμα θεοῦ καλὸν καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπόβλητον μετὰ εὐχαριστίας λαμβανόμενον, Every creature of God (is) good, and nothing (is to be) rejected, being received with thanksgiving.

The fact of Biblical Theology, we think, is that the **Bible** leaves us in this unresolved
(continued...)

¹²⁴(...continued)

tension—the original will of God is that there should be no taking of animal life; however, due to circumstances, it has been allowed. But this is not going to be the case in the long run. What do you think?

125

Here the previous statements concerning the created universe's being "good" are reemphasized, and made universal—everything that God has made is Divinely pronounced "exceedingly good!" See **verses 4, 10, 12, 18, 21** and **25** in addition to this **verse 31**.

Bereishis 1, pp. 78-9 comments that "Even the evil inclination [is pronounced 'good']... [Jewish theologians maintain that God created humanity with 'two inclinations,' a good inclination and an evil inclination] because, as the Sages teach, were it not for the evil inclination, man would neither marry nor have children, with the result that the world would remain barren (Chizkuni)...This verse includes the creation of those destructive forces which, when viewed in the context with the rest of creation, are necessary and integral (Ha'amek Davar)...Whereas each unit of creation was considered 'good' in isolation, now when creation was complete and all of its units perceived as part of a whole, it was recognized as 'very good'...Everything relatively evil appears so only when viewed separately, but even...suffering ...death...temptation...becomes good—even 'very good'—as soon as we view it in the context of the whole. Thus Rabbi Meir and the Sages comment: 'Very good' refers to death...to suffering...to temptation. If we could but perceive at one glance the entire picture of God's management of intertwining events as He sees it, we would indeed agree with His verdict...'behold it is very good!' (Rabbi Hirsch)."

What do you think? Are both the destructive hurricane and tornado and devastating forest fire "good"? Is even death itself "very good"? What about the "holocaust" of Jews and others in Nazi Germany? Of course, God did not create the holocaust, but His creatures did—and He could have stopped it—is He not then responsible for it? How do you explain these things?

And what if death is not the end? What if those who enter the grave / sheol / hades, in fact enter the Presence of God, Who has a wondrous future for them? Does that not change the whole matter? What if God the Creator looks upon death in a quite different way from the way we do?

And do you agree with the Rabbinic Sages that the desire for sex is an "evil inclination," that is only justified when it results in increasing the population of the earth? Does this have anything to do with the Roman Catholic teaching that all sexual intercourse must be open to the possibility of conception?

Because of this seven-fold repetition of the Divine judgment that the creation is good, indeed, 'exceedingly good,' we think that this is to be understood as the most important theological motif of this chapter. It is in sharp contrast to those world-views which view evil as inherent in the world, especially every form of dualism, in which there is an evil Divine Being as
(continued...)

¹²⁵(...continued)

well as a good Divine Being—as in Zoroastrian belief, and also in some Christian views in which the “Devil” or “Satan” is turned into a “second God.”

We think it is in sharp contrast to the view expressed in the Jewish dietary laws of **Leviticus 11:1-47** and **Deuteronomy 14:1-21**, according to which a large part of the earth’s living creatures—four-footed animals, birds, fish and creeping things are considered “abominations” and “unclean.” What do you think? Were all of these living creatures originally good and clean, but in the course of history became unclean, unacceptable as food? Why? What happened to them? Is the view that so many of God’s creatures are “unclean” a contradiction to this theological motif of **Genesis 1:1-2:3**?

Westermann comments that “The beauty (the being good) of what has been created is not something added to it after creation; being good for, suited to, belong to the state of creation. In the context of the creation of human beings, it means that human beauty, goodness, appropriateness, is something given in the very act of creation. One can draw attention to the beauty of a particular human being, but in effect this beauty is something that belongs to humanity as a creation of God.” (P. 166)

But, we ask, what about those creatures we consider harmful or ugly? Have they not also been created by God—for example, the man-eating shark, the malaria carrying mosquito, or the evil dictators such as Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin or Idi Amin?

Bowie comments that “A man may so plod through his existence as to see only the dusty road, or he may see also the flower growing there beside it. He may see only the hard street with its noise and clamor, or he may see the blue sky between the canyons of the crowded buildings and the white clouds floating above the city’s smoke. He may notice in the life around him only its ugliness and greed, or he may recognize with quick eye the little glimpses of courage and beauty which break like sunlight through the common fog...The man who looks at life with the eyes of God will be finding some worth in even the worst people and some goodness everywhere.” (Pp. 487-88) But is this the same as describing all of creation “very good”?

Do you agree with Bowie? Is finding some worth in even the worst people what this vision-story means? Can you see some good even in Adolph Hitler (helping to get Germany out of the great depression, helping to get Volkswagen developed)? Can you see good in the holocaust, or in the genocides that occur throughout human history, or in the terrifying physical sufferings that Job endured? One thing seems clear: the existence of evil in God’s good world is a test—a test of humanity’s patience and courage, a test that calls upon humanity’s will and choice—in a way that is hardly conceivable apart from the existence of evil.

What do you make of the vision-story’s conclusion that God saw everything that He had made, and pronounced it “exceedingly good”? Is that reality? Or is it only wild-eyed optimism? And if that’s the way creation originally was, what has gone wrong? What has caused
(continued...)

וַיְהִי-עֶרֶב וַיְהִי-בֹקֶר

And there was evening, and there was morning,

יוֹם הַשֵּׁשִׁי:

the sixth day.¹²⁶

¹²⁵(...continued)

all the evil in God's good creation? We think that **Genesis 3-4** gives the biblical answer to this last question—it is humanity's refusal to do the will of the Creator that has caused it, humanity's listening to the enticing voice of the creature rather than to the Divine command.

¹²⁶

Here again we see the creation-story's division into an artificial one-week story, made up of seven "evening and morning" days. See footnote 37.

Hamilton comments that "Two features distinguish this last verse of the chapter from the preceding verses:

First, 'beautiful' [our 'good'] now becomes 'very beautiful [our 'exceedingly good'].'

Second, the preceding five days are all referred to indeterminately—a second day, a third day, etc. But this day is called "the sixth day" i.e., using the definite article before the numeral.

"Both of these unique factors [as well as its lengthier treatment] help to mark the sixth day as the acme of God's creation thus far." (P. 141)

"The [Jewish] commentators note the unusual use of the definite article...*the*, before the word...sixth: it designates 'the day that is distinguished among the other days of creation as the day on which His work was completed (Chizkuni)...We are clearly meant to regard this day

as the culmination of the first five, the day in which the list of creations found a goal and were fulfilled (Hirsch)." (**Bereishis** 1, p. 79)

But is this actually what the text says? **Genesis 2:2** states, וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מֵלַאמְצוֹת אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה, "And God finished on the seventh day His work which He made," that is, God's work was not finished until on the seventh day. Is this a depiction of God working on the sabbath / Rest-Day? See our comments on this text, with the attempts by Jewish commentators to change its wording.

Bereishis 1, p. 79 notes that “The division of the **Bible** into chapters is of non-Jewish origin, introduced in [the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries C.E.] by Christian **Bible** printers. Most **Hebrew Bibles** follow these divisions for identification purposes. In Masoretic manuscripts the text is divided according to several traditional systems—some of which unfortunately have never found their way into printed editions. Most notable among them is the traditional system of פְּתֻחוֹת, **pethuchoth** (open line divisions), and סְתוּמוֹת, **sethumoth** (closed spaces) as found in ancient Hebrew manuscripts and... **Torah** scrolls...

“According to the Masorah [Jewish tradition], therefore, this verse does not begin a new chapter and a new trend of thought. Rather it is a continuation of the previous verses. Hence, the commentators view this verse in the context of the verses that preceded it and so interpret it.”

See **Wikipedia** on the Internet, “Chapters and verses in the **Bible**,” which states that “Churchmen Archbishop Stephen Langton and Cardinal Hugo de Sancto Caro determined different schemes for systematic division of the **Bible** in the early 13th century. It is the system of Archbishop Langton on which the modern chapter divisions are based.” The **Wycliffe English Bible** of 1382 was the first **Bible** to use this chapter pattern.

We think the Masoretes are correct, and that the division made between **1:31** and **2:1** is unfortunate. The chapter division, in our view, should come between **2:3** and **2:4**. The **Hebrew Bible** has the letter פ, “p,” standing for **pethuchoth** at the end of **1:5, 1:8, 1:13, 1:19, 1:23, 1:31** and **2:3**. The “open pethuchoth” stand for a change of thought, similar to our modern division of a text into paragraphs; the “closed semuchoth,” marked by the letter ס, “s,” stand for a smaller change of thought.

Westermann states that “The concluding verses, **Genesis 2:1-3** are very different from what has gone before. They are not part of the day-by-day succession which forms the framework of the first chapter. They do not describe the work of a day and the former structure is no longer there.” (P. 167)

We think this is over-statement—since the passage does report the activity on the seventh day, and reports God’s finishing His work on that seventh day, as a part of the artificial seven-day-week structure of the previous verses of chapter one. What do you think?

Westermann goes on to observe that “The background to what is said about the rest of God at the end of his creative action is a motif which is widespread in the history of religions, the leisure (**otiositas**) of the Creator God...”

(continued...)

וַיִּכְלֹוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ

And the heavens and the earth¹²⁸ were finished,¹²⁹

¹²⁷(...continued)

The **otiositas** belongs to the very nature of the Creator God, 'It is in a certain sense the completion of His creative activity' (R. Pettazzoni, **Myths of Beginnings and Creation-Myths**, p. 32). It means that the Creator God will not intervene any more in the work which He has completed so as to disturb His established order. Creation is thus set apart from all that follows as a unique, once and for all event...The motif was at hand, having come down from primitive creation stories. Creation as an act of making presupposes an activity which the rest complements." (P. 167)

This view of Pettazzoni is very close to the view of English Deism, and does not take into account the further statements throughout biblical literature concerning God's continuing "creation," both in the history of Israel and the nations (especially in **Isaiah 40-66**) and in Jesus Christ.

We conclude that while the vision-story reports the Divine "rest," it does not mean that God will not intervene any more in the work which He has completed—for the biblical story will go on to report the constant activity of God in His mighty acts in history, including new creations. The Spirit of God is never depicted as stopping its "hovering," Its powerful presence in human history.

Westermann continues by saying, "[The priestly writer] has modified the motif by joining the rest of the Creator with the work of the seventh day, that is, with his overall plan of seven days into which he has fitted the work of creation. So the rest of God after the completion of the works of creation has become the rest on the seventh day...The old motif is resumed, but the rest of God on the seventh day has become something entirely new. The language of these verses bears the seal of [the priestly writer]. Every sentence is evidence of [the priestly writer's] hand, especially the places where there is talk of the Sabbath." (P. 168)

Westermann is referring to the large role that "Sabbath legislation" plays in the priestly laws of **Exodus, Leviticus**, and elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** (we think of passages in **Isaiah, Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**, not to mention its huge importance for both the Jewish **Mishnah** and **Talmud**).

¹²⁸

The phrase "the heavens and the earth" means "the universe," the totality of creation. See **Genesis 1:1**, and contrast **2:4b**, with its "earth and heavens."

¹²⁹

Hamilton comments that "The point made by this [3rd person masculine plural pual imperfect with waw-conversive / consecutive] verb [וַיִּכְלֹוּ], **wayekhullu**, 'and they were

(continued...)

וְכָל-צְבָאָם:

and all their army.¹³⁰

¹²⁹(...continued)

finished'] is that the universe is no longer in [its initial] process of being created by God. What **Genesis 1** allows for is not additional creation but procreation and self-perpetuation." (P. 142)

But this is self-contradictory, for "procreation" is additional creation in itself, and the fact is that the biblical usage of the verb בָּרָא, **bara**), "create," does not end with **Genesis 1** (see foot-note 15 on **Genesis 1:1**, for all of the passages in the **Hebrew Bible** where this verb occurs). As we have seen time and again throughout these notes, God is depicted as having enlisted and commanded His creatures to continue the work of creating. Creation continues in time in the history of Israel and the nations of earth—as **Isaiah 40-55** makes abundantly clear.

For **New Testament** theology, one of the great motifs is that of the "new creation" that is taking place in Jesus Christ and in the worldwide proclamation of good news, which imparts forgiveness and newness of life. As biblical theologians have shown, one of the great themes of the **Hebrew Bible** is that of "The God Who Acts." The Divine work is not completed or finished with the initial creation—not at all. God continues to create through His ever-active and present Spirit, through His on-going Self-revelation to His people, in their history, and through the earth's bringing forth new life, as well as the animals and humans who are active in "pro-creating."

In the light of this biblical teaching, we think that the point made by the verb וַיִּכְלְוּ, **wayekhullu**, "and they were finished" is that the initial works of the seven-day creation were completed, not that creation was ended once and for all. See articles entitled "Creatio Continua" on the Internet. What do you think?

¹³⁰

Fox translates by "all their array."

Westermann points out that **verse 2:1** refers back to the opening statement of the creation narrative in **1:1**, as "the final summing up calls what God has created 'heaven and earth.'" (P. 169)

The final phrase, וְכָל-צְבָאָם, **wekhol-tsebha)am**, "and all their army," uses the noun צְבָא, **tsabha**), literally "army"—which normally denotes the large "crowd" or "host" of soldiers that makes up an "army," but here obviously is used for all the components that make up the created universe—all of which exist to do service to the great King and Warrior, God the Creator Who reigns over the entire universe and uses His creation as His "army" to

(continued...)

2.2 וַיִּכַּל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

And God finished¹³¹ on the seventh day¹³²

¹³⁰(...continued)
accomplish His victorious purposes.

“[The entirety of creation] totally subordinates itself ‘to the will of [its] Creator—as do royal troops who are totally obligated to fulfill the monarch’s will’ (Avraham ben HaRambam)...For, as Hirsch elaborates: ‘Everything created in heaven and on earth forms one great **צְבָא**, **tsaba**), *host* [our ‘army’], whose central point is its Creator and Master...Great and small we all stand on our post with powers given us to accomplish our task, all members of God’s one great host. His is the power and the greatness...ours the obedience, the punctuality, the loyalty’...

“Noting in this context that everything in creation serves a purpose, the *Midrash* comments: ‘God caused drugs to spring forth from the earth; with them the physician heals the wound and the apothecary compounds his preparations.’” (**Bereishis** 1, p. 81)

This is certainly, we think, true to the text, and points to the truth that the whole world is God’s Kingdom, subject to His command.

In our study of the **Hebrew Bible**, we have become well acquainted with the commonly used name of God, **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, **YHWH Tsebh)aoth**, “YHWH of Armies,” which occurs over 260 times, and which, in the light of the usage here, may mean “YHWH Who Rules Over the Universe,” i.e., everything in the created universe serves in His “army.” On some occasions the masculine plural noun **צְבָאוֹת**, **tsebh)aoth** refers to the armies of heavenly stars (**Isaiah 40:26**), or to YHWH’s heavenly armies. But here, while it undoubtedly includes “the heavens,” it also includes “the earth,” with all its inhabitants—all of which serve in YHWH’s “armies,” fulfilling His purposes—even, as the Spokespersons of Israel, especially Isaiah, will teach us, potentates such as the Kings of Assyria, Babylon, and Persia.

Westermann states that “The meaning is clear: ‘Everything that exists in heaven and in earth, even what is not expressly mentioned in **Genesis 1**, is included here’ [quoting A. Dillmann].” (P. 169)

Westermann holds that this verse, **2:1**, is “an obvious ending...a self-contained conclusion to the work of the Creator which goes back to a stage in the tradition when the works were not yet part of the seven-day structure.” (P. 168)

¹³¹(...continued)

Fox translates by “God had finished,” but the verb is the simple qal perfect, “God finished.” See the next footnote.

132

Bereishis 1, p. 81, translates the phrase **וַיְכַל אֱלֹהִים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי**, **wayekhal jeloiyim bayyom hashshebhiy(iy**, literally “and he finished, God (did), on the day, the seventh,” by “And by the seventh day God completed,” stating that “This phrase presents a difficulty noted by the [Jewish] commentators, for God completed His work not on the *seventh* day, but on the *sixth*!...As Sforno comments: God completed His work at the moment which marked the inception of the seventh day, but yet was not part of it, as the Sages commented... 'He entered into it by a hair's breadth.'”

We think that neither this, nor Fox's translation (preceding footnote) is an accurate translation of the text, and that the translation is the result of forcing the text to agree with Jewish ritual practices. What do you think?

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) (plus the **Samaritan Pentateuch** and the Syriac translation) of **Genesis 2:2** changes the text to read **ἐν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἕκτῃ**, **en te hemera te hekte**, “on the day, the sixth” instead of the **Hebrew Bible's** **בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי**, **bayyom hashshebhiy(iy**, “on the day, the seventh,” in order to make the text conform to Jewish practices in which no work was allowed on the seventh day, a rest-day.

This is a typical legalistic way of reading and translating the biblical text--if it does not say what you want it to say, or if it seems to go contrary to your practices (of absolutely no work on the seventh day), just change the text to read the way you want it to.

F. Delitzsch, for example, holds that “The meaning is not that God completed His still unfinished work on the seventh day.” Even Westermann holds that “...The sentence is saying that the work was by now completed...The verb ‘He finished it’ is a statement that the work has been completed, not the act of bringing it to a completion.” (Pp. 169-70).

Hamilton comments that “The rendering of **verse 2** in many modern versions suggests that God performed some creative act on the seventh day and only at the completion of this activity did He rest. In fact, both the **LXX** and the **Samaritan Pentateuch** read ‘sixth day’ in **verse 2**. The reading of these ancient versions is probably a deliberate emendation rather than a reflection of a **vorlage** [‘original reading’] to the Masoretic Text. The most simple and legitimate solution is to read the verb as a pluperfect, ‘God had completed his work...on the seventh day.’” (P. 142) Wenham holds a similar view (1, p. 35)

But, we ask, if such a solution is so simple and legitimate, why did the Greek and Samaritan translators feel it necessary to change it?

(continued...)

¹³²(...continued)

Obviously, those advocating the legalistic observance of the seventh-day “Day of Rest” find it difficult to allow their **Bible** to describe YHWH God Himself as working on, and thereby violating, His Own set-apart day of rest. As we have said many times concerning Luke, the author of the **New Testament Gospel of Luke** and the **Book of Acts**, so also we say concerning the author of **Genesis**: this author is no legalist, who is concerned to make his text conform to legalistic practices.

Here again the author of this vision-story uses the definite article, “the seventh day,” in the same way that he has used the definite article with “the sixth day,” while with the first five days no definite article is used, seemingly pointing out the special nature of these last two days.

Westermann asks, “What is the meaning then of this seven-day pattern, this ‘creation-week’ as some call it, which [the priestly author] has arranged?...There is no [other Near-Eastern] creation story that is arranged in a succession of days. [The priestly author] wanted to say something that was in accordance with his own understanding of creation. The succession of the seven days becomes a self-contained unit by means of the seventh day. It is clear that there is a reference to the Sabbath[-Day] even though [the priestly author] does not name it...

“It is not the number 7 that links the seven-day pattern with the work of creation, but the meaning of the seventh day. The rest of creation does not belong to the tradition of creation by Word, but rather to that of creation by making or acting. Rest has meaning only in this latter context. The point of contact lies in the rest of the Creator which brings the work of creation to its conclusion. This was a tradition which came down to [the priestly author] and which is widely attested in creation stories previous to and beyond Israel. The rest of the Creator had nothing to do with a day of rest in the earlier traditions. [The priestly author] takes over the rest of the Creator from tradition and creates out of it something entirely new. He transforms it into a day of rest which concludes the ‘creation week’...

“By fitting the motif of rest into the creation week, [the priestly author] has given creation the character of an event that moves through time toward its goal...He is saying that it is always the same God in action, that God is the God of history as well as of creation. God’s action is directed toward a goal not only in history but also in creation, and the ultimate goal in creation is not the last work of creation, humanity, but what is hinted at in the description of the seventh day...the celebration of the holy [but does the text say anything about ‘celebration of the holy’?]....

“One does not just count up the seven days; they are rather like a parable. [The priestly author] wants to say that time, properly ordered and directed in carefully regulated periods toward its God-given goal, began with creation.” (P. 90)

What do you think? Do you think the 7 days must be understood literally of seven 24-
(continued...)

מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה

His work which He made.¹³³

וַיִּשְׁבֹּת בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

And He rested¹³⁴ on the seventh day

¹³²(...continued)

hour days? See on **Wikipedia's** article on Creationism, and the large literature referred to there defending the viewpoint of seven literal 24-hour days of creation some 7,000 years ago, rejecting scientific evidence for a much older creation.

Can you agree with Westermann concerning the seven days of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** being used by the author of **Genesis 1:1-2:3** as a sort of “parabolic framework” that should not be interpreted literally? See footnote 88. And if you insist on taking these days literally, and as an important element in this vision-story, are you willing to address honestly the numerous and serious problems that such a view raises with relationship to modern sciences such as geology, biology, archaeology and physics? Safarti certainly is not!

¹³³

It is easy to understand this statement as meaning that according to the vision-story, God's “creation” was totally completed in that first “week of creation,” and that therefore there can be no more Divine creation. But the **Bible** itself, by its use of the unique verb for “create,” **בָּרָא**, **bara**) in a number of later passages of in the **Bible**, especially in **Isaiah**, shows that this is a mistaken conclusion to draw from this story. See footnote 15 on **Genesis 1:1**.

Especially is this true, when we realize how **Genesis 1** depicts the creatures themselves sharing in the on-going work of creation, and then, for Christians, as we think of the “new creation” that the **New Testament** documents describe as taking place in God's saving actions in Jesus of Nazareth.

The verb used in this text, **עָשָׂה**, **asah**, “He made,” reminds us of the constant description of YHWH throughout the **Hebrew Bible** as the “God Who Acts,” describing the “mighty acts” or “doings” of the Creator God throughout world history.

¹³⁴

The verb **וַיִּשְׁבֹּת**, **wayyishboth**, means “and He rested.” This verb is related to the noun **שַׁבָּת**, **shabbath**, “rest,” which surprisingly is not used in this vision-story.

Hamilton comments that “It is readily apparent that the term “Sabbath day”...is absent from this paragraph, although the writer uses the verb...Instead, ‘the seventh day,’ **הַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי** (continued...)

¹³⁴(...continued)

י"ז, **yom hashshebhiy**(iy, literally 'day, the seventh' occurs. C. H. Gordon has suggested that the writer used the colorless 'seventh day' in his desire to continue to demythologize the story." (P. 142)

What Hamilton has in mind is the Akkadian **shapattu**, a day of evil omen, the day of the full moon, celebrated on the fifteenth day of a lunar month. "The deliberate omission of 'sabbath' in **Genesis 2** may be due to a desire to avoid any possibility of uniting the seventh day with the pagan festival." (Pp. 142-43)

The seventh day in Israel is one of glad rest and sharing with the Creator God—not one of fearful dread of evil omens, as is the **shapattu**.

Hamilton adds that "In both **Enuma Elish** and the **Atrahasis Epic** the Gods rest after the creation of man. With man to do the menial work of the day-to-day maintenance of the earth, the Gods are now free for less demanding administrative tasks in the world. In appreciation for release from this manual work, the Gods promise to build Babylon and its temple for Marduk. The Gods' surrogate is now man, who is 'charged with the service of the Gods that they might be at ease.' It is not difficult to see how different the Mesopotamian concept of rest for the Divine is from the biblical concept. Thus, not only the omission of 'Sabbath' but also the particular use of Divine resting demonstrate the uniqueness of the biblical story of creation." (P. 143)

We agree with this comment—and note that in Biblical Theology, humanity is urged to share in the Divine rest and relaxation. Indeed, biblical "eschatology" is rooted in just such desire of God to share with His people in "rest"—and in the **New Testament** the promise is given that those who "die in the Lord" will "rest from their labors" (**Revelation 14:13**).

Jewish commentators such as those in **Bereishis** 1 (p. 83) are concerned to avoid any misconception concerning this statement that God "rested." "...Undoubtedly, וַיִּשְׁבֹּת, **wayyishboth**, and *He rested*, implies nothing more than the discontinuance of creation...and production." Rambam, however, "explains that the concept of **shabath**, *rested*, is used here anthropomorphically." (**Ibid.**)

Alexander likewise comments that "These verses bring to a conclusion the opening section of **Genesis** by emphasizing that God has completed the process of ordering creation. The repeated comment that God rested does not imply that He was weary from labor. The effortless ease with which everything is done in **chapter one** suggests otherwise." (P. 52)

We agree with Rambam, and consider it somewhat evasive to deny that the text depicts God as a great Creator and Maker Who is tired from all His work, and so rests. Of course such language is anthropomorphic—describing God from a human view-point. But how else can we humans speak meaningfully of God? What do you think?

(continued...)

מְכַל־מְלֵאכְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה:

from all His work¹³⁵ which He made.¹³⁶

2.3¹³⁷

¹³⁴(...continued)

Alexander additionally comments that "...The motif of God's resting hints at the purpose of creation. As reflected in various ancient Near Eastern accounts, Divine rest is associated with temple building. God's purpose for the earth is that it should become His dwelling-place; it is not simply made to house His creatures. God's 'activities' on this day (He 'finished,' 'rested,' 'blessed,' made it holy') all fit this delightful pattern. The concept of the earth as a divine sanctuary, which is developed further in **2:4-25**, runs throughout the whole **Bible**, coming to a climax in the future reality that...John sees in his vision of a 'new heaven and a new earth' in **Revelation 21:1-22:5** [where God's dwelling-place is with humanity]." (P. 52)

This is a beautiful thought, bringing harmony to the beginning and end of our **Bible**, but does this vision-story depict God as building a "house" or "sanctuary" for Himself? We think not; this idea is being read into the text, and is not genuinely derived from it. What do you think?

¹³⁵

The noun מְלֵאכְתּוֹ, **mel)akhto**, "His work," is the word used for the ordinary daily work or occupation of human beings—see, for example, **Genesis 39:11**, where it is used in the statement that "Joseph went into (Potiphar's) house to do his work."

Wenham comments that "The phraseology of **Exodus 40:33**, 'And Moses finished the work,' is particularly close to this verse and suggests that the erection of the tabernacle is being compared to God's creation of the world." (P. 35) What do you think? Do you agree with Wenham?

Westermann comments that "This word is used here three times for the creation of heaven and earth...The stress on the completion of the work in **2:1-3** is directed toward humans, and this is confirmed by the echoes of the language of the Sabbath command." (P. 170)

¹³⁶

Once again the author of the biblical vision-story uses the verb עָשָׂה, (**asah**, "make," in describing the Divine activity in creation. See footnote 78.

¹³⁷Westermann holds that "**Verse 3a** is the real conclusion [of **2:1-3**]. It is this [half] verse that brings new meaning to the old motif [of the Creator's resting from the work of creation]. The sanctifying and blessing of the seventh day is a result of the rest of the Creator. It is a gift to human-kind...a gift that regulates human existence...The conclusion (continued...)

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֱלֹהִים אֶת-יּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

And God blessed the seventh day,¹³⁸

¹³⁷(...continued)

of creation has its effect in the history of humankind because the rest of the Creator has given rise to a day which has been sanctified and blessed.” (P. 169)

We agree—and think that it is one of the important conclusions to be drawn from this biblical story of creation—humanity must set apart one day in seven to rest from ordinary labor—another example of **Torah** legislation in the creation vision-story. What do you think?

¹³⁸The threefold repetition of “the seventh day” in this text indicates the emphasis that is being placed on this seventh day as the day of God’s “rest,” and therefore as being the proper time for human beings to refrain from work—six days for work, the seventh day for rest.

Legalistic insistence on “Saturday as the seventh day” needs to consider the fact that the **Bible** gives no instruction concerning which day is either first or seventh. Seventh-Day Adventists and observant Jews will dispute this, but where is the biblical evidence? See the numerous articles on the Internet under the heading “Seventh Day Sabbath.”

Westermann asks, “But what is the meaning of the...sentence, that God blessed the seventh day?” He then answers his own question by saying, “There can be no doubt that this third blessing in the course of the creation event is of the same kind as the blessing given to living creatures and to humans, **1:22, 28**, where it means the power of fertility. The meaning is essentially the same here though much more abstract. God’s blessing bestows on this special, holy, solemn day a power which makes it fruitful for human existence. The blessing gives the day, which is a day of rest, the power to stimulate, animate, enrich and give fullness to life. It is not the day in itself that is blessed, but rather the day in its significance for the community. In the context of creation it is for the world

and humankind [we add, including animals]. The power of the blessing, i.e., the power of enterprise and success, has its point of departure here.” (P. 172)

Sarna, in like manner, comments that “This blessing is undefined and pertains to time itself. The day becomes imbued with an extraordinary vital power that communicates itself in a beneficial way...God, through His creativity, has already established His sovereignty over space; the idea here is that He is sovereign over time as well. Through his weekly suspension of normal human activity, man imitates the Divine pattern and re-actualizes the original sacred time of God, thereby recovering the sacred dimension of existence.” (P. 15) Do you agree with Westermann and with Sarna?

We do—and think this is a most important thing for people—especially workers—to

(continued...)

וַיִּקְדַּשׁ אֹתוֹ

and He set it apart—¹³⁹

¹³⁸(...continued)

take into serious consideration all around the world. According to this vision-story, with its “world-view,” or “starting-point,” human beings need to take one-seventh of their time for “rest”—for stopping their labor, and “re-charging their batteries”! Notice that the text says nothing about “attending synagogue,” or “going to church,” or even “worship”—it only depicts humanity as joining with God in “rest”!

Bereishis 1, p. 84 states that “‘Blessing’ refers to abundant spiritual goodness, for on Sabbath there is a renewal of physical procreative strength [readers of Jewish literature on the Sabbath will quickly find numerous references to the Sabbath as the ideal time for marital intimacy!], and there is a greater functioning capacity in the power of reasoning and intellect...According to Radak, ‘blessing’ is the abundant well-being brought about by the Sabbath. It is the day when, free from mundane worry, man can immerse himself in wisdom and spirituality.”

Fretheim adds that “Human honoring of the work / rest rhythm has the capacity of deeply affecting life itself (as does its neglect). The setting aside of one day when human beings attend, not to their own responsibilities and freedoms, but to God’s ordering of life honors the larger creative purpose of God and integrating oneself into them. It acknowledges that God is indeed the Creator and provides for all things.” (P. 347)

What do you think? Do you consider it an important thing for modern society to set aside and honor at least one-seventh of its time as a time of “rest”? What about it, you “workaholic”?

¹³⁹Hamilton comments that “In addition to blessing those who are made in His image (**1:28**), God also ‘blessed the seventh day.’ Indeed, it is correct to say that the creation account moves to its conclusion on the seventh day, not the sixth day. It is not an appendage. All the preceding days God called either ‘beautiful’ [our ‘good’] or ‘very beautiful’ [our ‘exceedingly good’]. This day alone He sanctified. Nothing in the creation context that is connected with space is called ‘holy.’” (P. 143) We add, not sacred objects, or sacred places—but one day in seven!

Westermann notes that there are two conflicting interpretations of **Genesis 2:3a**. “The first refers the blessing and sanctification of the seventh day to God alone and to His work as Creator...The other explanation understands **Genesis 2:3** as a sort of preparation of the Sabbath, and so a preparation of something holy. G. von Rad writes: ‘...This means that [the priestly writer] does not consider it as something for God alone but as a concern of the world...The way is being prepared, therefore, for an exalted and saving good...Thus at creation God prepared what will benefit His people in this life...’” (P. 171)

(continued...)

כִּי בּוֹ שֶׁבַת מִכָּל-מְלַאכְתּוֹ

for on it He rested from all His work¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹(...continued)

Westermann himself holds that “The days each have their goal in a particular day which is different from the rest—a day which is holy and apart. Days of work are not the only days that God has created. The time which God created is structured; days of work have their goal in a day of rest...There is here much more than a mere reference to the Sabbath in later Israel. The sanctification of the Sabbath institutes an order for humankind according to which time is divided into time and holy time, time for work and time for rest...By sanctifying the seventh day God instituted a polarity between the everyday and the solemn, between days of work and days of rest, which was to be determinative for human existence...

“This is a gift of the Creator to His people and is not merely an anticipation of the Israelite Sabbath...” (P. 171)

“So this special day, this solemn day, which has been set apart cannot be determined by or limited to Israel’s Sabbath. There is more to it than the Sabbath...A new dimension is introduced with the sanctification of the seventh day: to give the holy a special place in the stream of events is to indicate the goal of creation, a goal which corresponds to that which God set for Himself. This goal is not part of the six ordinary working days, but a holy day set apart.” (P. 172)

Christian theologians need to take this emphasis with great seriousness!

¹⁴⁰It is a very “anthropomorphic” description—וַיִּשְׁבֹּת, **wayyishboth**, “and He rested”—depicting God as having become “tired” from all His “work” in creation, and stopping to “take rest.” We think that this is a priestly way of affirming the Divine authorization for humanity’s observance of a “rest” every seventh day. What God has done, according to the creation story, His creatures (both animals and humans, according to later day-of-rest legislation) should do. If God rested from His labors, how much more necessary is it for His animal and human creatures to likewise regularly rest from their labors. But to take the story literally, as teaching that God actually became “tired,” we think is unnecessary.

Youngblood comments that “God rested on the seventh day, not because He was weary, but because nothing formless or empty remained.” (P. 8) That is, the “rest” was because all the work was completed, finished—and there was nothing more to do. What do you think? Youngblood’s view implies that creation was finished, and there would be no more creating—but we think that is mistaken, as the creative works assigned to others by

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים לַעֲשׂוֹת:

which God created to make.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰(...continued)

God certainly continued, and the biblical story constantly depicts Divine creative activity throughout history. See footnote 134.

It is from this verb that the noun הַשַּׁבָּת, **hashshabbath**, “the Sabbath,” or “the Rest(-day),” has come—but surprisingly, the noun is not used in the **Genesis** vision-story, as Wenham comments, “It is striking that the Sabbath is not mentioned by name. Cassuto ...suggests that this is because the Babylonians termed the fifteenth day of the month, the day of the full moon, *Shapattu* [see footnotes 76 and 146]; so **Genesis**, not wishing to confuse the two, avoids the term...”

“In Mesopotamia the 7th, 14th, 19th, 21st and 28th days of each month were regarded by some as unlucky [that is, ‘days of evil omen’]. It seems likely that the Israelite Sabbath was introduced as a deliberate counter-blast to this lunar-regulated cycle. [The ‘seventh day’ has nothing to do with a lunar cycle.] The Sabbath was quite independent of the phases of the moon, and far from being unlucky, was blessed and sanctified by the Creator...The seventh day is the very first thing to be hallowed in Scripture, to acquire that special status that properly belongs to God alone. In this way **Genesis** emphasizes the sacredness of the Sabbath. Coupled with the three-fold reference to God resting from all His work on that day, these verses give the clearest of hints of how man created in the Divine image should conduct himself on the seventh day.” (Pp. 35-36)

This description of the seventh-day, while not legislating observance of the Sabbath, is just on the edge of commanding it, another indication of “**Torah** legislation” in the **Torah**.

¹⁴¹**Bereishis** 1, p. 86 states that “The [Jewish] commentators note the absence of the formula which marks the close of each of the first six days...*and it was evening and it was morning*...Since no creative activity took place on the Sabbath, the concluding phrase is unnecessary (B’chor Shor)...Thus, with the concluding phrase אֲשֶׁר-בָּרָא, (**asher-bara**), ‘which He created,’ reminiscent of the introductory phrase בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא, (**bere)shiyth bara**), ‘in beginning He created,’ the narrative of the seven days closes (Minchah Belulah).”

The two-fold use of “create” and “make” in this verse is somewhat puzzling. Does the author mean “which God created in order to work with and fashion”? We think it very likely that two ancient ways of describing the Divine activity are being combined in this one story. See Westermann, pp. 86-76.

Perhaps here again we should consider the matter of “creation versus evolution”—holding that God created in the beginning all of the materials with which He (and His

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¹⁴¹(...continued)

helpers—the earth, the seas, humanity and the animals) would continue His “making” and “fashioning” in the long aeons of slow growth and development which continue through time.

Wenham, like Minchah Belulah, notes that “The insertion of ‘God created’ into the phrase produces slightly ungainly Hebrew, but more significantly harks back to **1:1**, resulting in a fine inclusion indicating that the first section of **Genesis** ends here.” (P. 36)

Westermann notes how the use of the “seven days” as a parabolic frame of the creation narrative of **Genesis 1:1-2:4a**, unites the beginning of the story with its end. “The narrative of **Genesis 1** is characterized by its onward, irresistible and majestic flow that distinguishes it so clearly from the drama narrated in **Genesis 2:4b-3:24**. No tension is built up in **Genesis 1**, and the steady, onward movement is effected by constantly recurring sentences which begin in **1:3** and end in **2:4a**...

“In the epic **Enuma Elish**, we note something of which nothing but a suspicion remains in **Genesis 1**: the element of tension dominates the struggle between Marduk and Tiamat; it unfolds and it is only because of the struggle that Marduk is able to create heaven and earth. There is a profound difference here between the Babylonian story and **Genesis 1**.” (P. 80) Yes, here in **Genesis 1** everything is orderly, rhythmical, constantly moving toward its goal.

Westermann continues, stating that “All that takes place must follow a time sequence which is an essential part of the priestly narrative. Events must be fitted into the framework of the chronology which runs through the whole of the priestly work just as the fulfillment of the creation commands must be fitted into the basic framework of the seven days. By creating, God enters into time, and so time must be an expression of the action of God. From the very beginning creation is subordinated to an unbroken sequence of time which ultimately leads to God just as it took its beginning from His word: the succession of days leads finally to God’s day...

“[The priestly writer’s purpose] is to arrange God’s work of creation into a network of sentences whose succession follows the pattern of the fulfillment of a command. The word of command has a special significance that colors the whole...Everything that happens has its source in God’s word of command. The only difference between God’s action in history and His action in creation is that in the one case His command is directed to a person (Abraham) or a mediator (Moses), while in the other it is a command without an addressee.” (P. 85)

At the close of his comments on **Genesis 1:1-2:4a**, Westermann observes that “One can discern in **Genesis 1:1-2:3** a gradual ascent—toward the creation of human beings. It moves toward the decision to create humans and to the phrase that God created them in His image, to correspond to Him, so that something can take place between God

(continued...)

¹⁴¹(...continued)

and His people. This is the basis of the history that the **Old Testament** narrates, the history of God with His people...

“When what is told about Jesus Christ in the **New Testament** is understood as the fulfillment of the **Old Testament**, the reason is that something decisive for humankind has taken place in Him. When God created human beings so that something may happen between God and these humans, then what is told about Christ in the **New Testament** is the decisive middle point of this happening.

“[The priestly writer’s] account of creation does not end with the creation of human beings. The sanctification and blessing of the day of rest indicates that the story of humankind is not exhausted by the increase that comes from the blessing, not by humanity’s spreading over the earth, nor even by the exercise of dominion over the rest of creation; the holy day points toward a goal.” (P. 177)

That goal, we believe, is the goal of eternal rest with God—a rest that begins in weekly observances of rest in this life, but which point out into the future, when the terrible plagues of sin, suffering, and death, that are so graphically depicted in the following stories of **chapters 2:4-11:30** are finally overcome, and the created universe returns to the “rest” which it was Divinely intended to enjoy with God.

We note that there is no “seventh-day legislation” given in this passage, although this text is taken as a basic motivation for keeping the Day of Rest—see **Exodus 20:8-11**. While the text is not “legislation,” it certainly undergirds such observance, and can be seen as a not too subtle encouragement to its readers to share in such an observance, in order to participate in the Divine blessing.

So, what will you make of the creation vision-story in **Genesis 1:1-2:3**? Will you let it be determinative for your world-view? One thing we can know for sure—it is that everyone of us has a world-view. It may not be well thought-out, it may be simply assumed from cultural influences, or it may be very carefully considered and decided upon. But we will all have one. What is yours? The author of these notes has chosen to make the **Genesis** story his story, his world-view. What about you?