

## The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3

### Part I: Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony

Bruce K. Waltke

Until about a century ago, most persons living within Western culture found their answer to the question of cosmogony in the first words of the Bible: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." But today their descendants turn more and more to encyclopedias or other books on universal knowledge. There, both in text and in picture, an entirely different origin is presented. In place of God they find a cloud of gas, and in place of a well-organized universe they find a blob of mud. Instead of beginning with the Spirit of God, the new story begins with inanimate matter which, through some blind force inherent in the material substance, brought the world to its present state during the course of billions of years. This substitution of matter for spirit accounts for the death of Western civilization as known about a century ago. Why has the new generation turned from the theologian to the scientist for the answer to his nagging question about the origin of the universe? In a provocative work D. F. Payne addressed himself to this question.<sup>1</sup> He concluded that the switch came about because of a threefold attack on the first chapter of Genesis during the latter half of the last century.

#### CHALLENGES TO BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

First, there came the challenge of the scientific community. In the wake of Charles Darwin's revolutionary hypothesis of

1 D. F. Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale Press, 1962).

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).

evolution to explain the origin of species, the majority of the scientific community fell in with Darwin's hypothesis against the Bible. They believed they could validate Darwin's theory by empirical data, but they thought that they could not do the same for the Bible.

The second challenge came from the comparative religionists who sought to discredit the biblical story by noting the numerous points of similarity between it and ancient mythological creation accounts from various parts of the Near East being studied at that time. If Darwin's work, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*, was the bellwether for the scientific challenge, Hermann Gunkel's work, *Schopfung und Chaos*,<sup>2</sup> persuaded many that the Hebrews from their entrance into Canaan had a fairly complete creation myth like all the other ancient cosmogonic myths. But in Israel's story, according to Gunkel, Yahweh took the place of the pagan hero gods. According to his view, the Hebrew version of creation was just another Near Eastern folktale, which was improved in the process of time by the story transmitters' creative and superior philosophical and theological insights.

The third challenge came from literary criticism. The case was stated most persuasively by Julius Wellhausen in his most influential classic, first published in 1878 and still in print under the title, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel*.<sup>3</sup> Here he argued that there were at least two distinct accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2 and that these two accounts contradicted each other at various points.

This threefold challenge radically altered the shape of theological education throughout Europe and America. The position of most of the educators at the turn of the century is tersely caught in this pronouncement by Zimmern and Cheyne in the *Encyclopaedia Biblica*:

It may be regarded as an axiom of modern study that the descriptions [note the plural] of creation contained in the biblical records, and especially in Gen. 1:1-2:4a, are permanently valuable only in so far as they express certain religious truths which are still recognized as such. To seek for even a kernel of historical fact in such cosmogonies is inconsistent with a scientific point of view.<sup>4</sup>

2 Hermann Gunkel. *Schopfung und Chaos* (Gottingen: Vanenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1921).

3 Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Meridian Books, 1957).

4 *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. s. v. "Creation."

Payne observed, "By the year 1900, therefore, many people had been educated to believe that the Bible's statements about creation were neither accurate, inspired, nor consistent."<sup>5</sup> No wonder the sons of the fathers turned their backs on their heritage as they sought to answer the question, "How did the world originate?"

The purpose of this series of articles is not to reappraise the apology for the biblical account of creation. But it seems imprudent to address oneself to this subject without taking note of the debate between reaction and evolution.

Perhaps the author can best state his position by a personal anecdote. Last spring, through the mediation of one of his students, who was both a premedical and a theological student, the author was requested by his student's professor in a course on genetics at Southern Methodist University to give a lecture defending the creationist viewpoint. The thesis the author presented was that evolution is a faith position that cannot be supported by empirical data. In the field of genetics, for example, it can be demonstrated that microevolution takes place but it cannot be demonstrated that macroevolution has occurred. To illustrate, it is well known that the varieties of gulls inhabiting the northern hemisphere between North America and Western Siberia interbreed with one another in the middle of the ring, but those at the end of the ring do not interbreed. Therefore, by a strict definition of species, it appears almost certain that by natural selection distinct species arose on this planet. But what cannot be proved -- and this is essential if the theory of general evolution is to stand -- is that one of these species of gulls is superior to another, that is, that it has a new functioning organ with a genetic capacity to carry it on. To this writer's knowledge there is no observed instance of the development of a cell to greater specificity. G. A. Kerkut, professor of physiology and biochemistry at the University of Southampton, concluded:

. . . there is the theory that all the living forms in the world have arisen from a single source which itself came from an inorganic form. This theory can be called the General Theory of Evolution, and the evidence that supports it is not sufficiently strong to allow us to consider it as anything more than a working hypothesis.<sup>6</sup>

During the questioning session that followed the lecture, the basic thesis was accepted by both professor and students, but their next question was, "Why should we accept your faith position instead of ours?"

5 Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered*, p. 5.

6 G. A. Kerkut. *Implications of Evolution* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1960), p. 157.

Now the author is not suggesting that by this one experience he has refuted the hypothesis of evolution, but he is maintaining that all answers which attempt to explain the origin of the universe are essentially faith positions. The question that the LORD asked of Job is asked of every man: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4) Since science is the systematic analysis of *presently*, observed processes and their phenomena, science cannot and ought not attempt to answer the question of the origin of the universe. The answer is beyond the range of empirical proof.

#### IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

But it may be asked, "What difference does all this make?" It is important because the question of cosmogony is closely related to one's entire world view. Someone has said that our world view is like the umpire at a ball game. He seems unimportant and the players are hardly aware of him, but in reality he decides the ball game. So likewise one's world view lies behind every decision a person makes. It makes a difference whether we come from a mass of matter or from the hand of God. How we think the world started will greatly influence our understanding of our identity, our relationship to others, our values, and our behavior. Because the question of cosmogony is important for understanding some of the basic issues of life, intelligent men throughout recorded history have sought the answer to this question. Just as the knowledge of the future is crucial for making basic choices in life, so also the knowledge of beginnings is decisive in establishing a man's or a culture's *Weltanschauung* ("world view"). No wonder the Bible reveals both.

Because of man's limitation as a creature, he must receive this knowledge by revelation from the Creator. Moreover, because of the noetic effects of sin, he needs to be reborn before he can comprehend that revelation.

The Christian faith rests on God as the first Cause of all things. God has created man a rational creature, and while the Christian's faith does not rest on rationalism, he should be able to validate and defend his position. Therefore, we applaud and encourage those engaged in apologetics.

Ancient myths died at just this point; they could not be believed because there came into man's experience too much contradictory evidence. As long as the world view assumed by the myth satisfactorily accommodated the apparent realities of the

objective world, it served as a plausible explanation of things and gave a cohesive force to the community. But when that world view slipped radically out of line with the general experience of "the way things are," it ceased to be effective, Mary Douglas, in her work *Purity and Danger*,<sup>7</sup> made the helpful analogy that myth and ritual are like money in providing a medium of exchange. As the test of money is whether it is acceptable or not, so primitive ritual is like good money so long as it commands assent.

It is precisely because of this incongruity between myth and reality that the old liberal myth of man's self-progress died. Anderson rightly observed:

It is worthy of note that contemporary poets give expression to a sense of catastrophe. . . . As Amos Wilder points out, poets like John Masefield and Alfred Noyes, Vachel Lindsay and Edwin Markham, even Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson, and many others who reflected the buoyant optimism of the nineteenth century doctrine of progress, no longer speak to our situation. Where are the Browning clubs or the Tennyson circle?<sup>8</sup>

They are gone because man can no longer believe in his own self-made Utopia.

Orlinsky made this point well when addressing the symposium of the annual meeting of the American Learned Society in 1960:

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the earlier part of our own twentieth, are not unfairly labeled by historians as the age of reason, enlightenment, ideology, and analysis -- in short, the age of science. In this extremely exciting epoch, man began increasingly to reject, and then to ignore the Bible, the revealed Word of God, for more than two thousand years preceding, as the ultimate source of knowledge by which the problems of society could be resolved. Man began to depend upon his own powers of observation and analysis to probe into the secrets of the universe and its inhabitants.

Rationalists, political scientists, economists, historians, philosophers, psychologists -- the two centuries preceding our own times are full of great minds who grappled with societal problem, and proposed for them solutions of various kinds. . . . If only reason prevailed in man's relations to his fellowman -- the kind of universal peace and personal contentment that religion had been promising humanity for over two thousand years would finally come to pass.

7 Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 128.

8 Bernhard Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos* (New York: Association Press, 1967), p. 13.

Alas, this has not come to pass. If anything the opposite seems to prevail. Ever since World War I in the teens, the world depression of the early thirties, the rise of fascism in Europe, the horrors of World War II, the cold and hot and lukewarm wars of the past decade and a half, increasing unemployment and automation, and the rather frequent recessions, it has become ever more clear that reason alone was unable to bring our problems closer to solution. And so, people have begun to come back to Holy Scripture, to the Bible.<sup>9</sup>

In a word, the challenge has failed, and its alternative hypothesis has left the world spiritually bankrupt. We are reminded of Simon's answer when the Lord asked the Twelve if they too would leave Him: "To whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

But unfortunately, when we turn to the theologians we discover that those who study the Scriptures have not as yet established a consensus of opinion regarding the meaning of the first two verses of the Bible. In this series of articles the author hopes to familiarize his readers with the positions advocated and to defend his own conclusion.

#### ASSUMPTION UNDERLYING BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

Four assumptions underlie the method used in this series.

1. The validity of the philological approach used by the rabbis of Spain during the ninth century A.D. is assumed, in contrast to the mystical approach employed by their French peers.

2. The historical method of interpretation will be employed as faithfully as possible. Through the tools at our disposal, we must work our way back into the world of the biblical authors if we hope to understand their message.

The biblical authors themselves make it abundantly plain that they were a part of their world, and that they originated out of the nations of their time and place. For example, concerning the list of nations in Genesis 10, Eichrodt observed:

The list of nations in Gen. 10, which is unique in ancient Eastern languages, includes Israel, proudly conscious though it is of its preferential historical position, in the general context of humanity. No claim is made for Israel of any fundamentally different natural capacity or "inherited nobility" which set it apart from the rest of the nations.<sup>10</sup>

9 Harry M. Orlinsky, "The New Jewish Version of the Torah," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 249.

10 Walther Eichrodt. *Man in the Old Testament*. trans. K. and R. Gregor Smith (Chicago: H. Regnery. 1951), p. 36.

One of Israel's earliest creeds begins with this humble confession: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there" (Deut. 26:5).<sup>11</sup> Ezekiel deflates the pretentious pride of his fellow countrymen by reminding them, "Your origin and your birth are from the land of the Canaanite, your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite" (Ezek. 16:3).

These notices of their common origins with the other peoples of the ancient Near East went by largely unnoticed until one day in 1872. At that time George Smith, a young Assyriologist employed as an assistant in the British Museum, was sorting and classifying tablets excavated from Nineveh about twenty years earlier. In the course of his work he was struck by a line on one of the tablets. He later wrote of this epoch-making moment:

Commencing a steady search among these fragments, I soon found half of a curious tablet which had evidently contained originally six columns. . . . On looking down the third column, my eye caught the statement that the ship rested on the mountains of Nizir, followed by the account of the sending forth of the dove, and its finding no resting place and returning. I saw at once that I had here discovered a portion at least of the Chaldean account of the Deluge.<sup>12</sup>

But that was not all. Included among the religious texts from Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh was the Babylonian creation myth known as *Enuma Elish* (after its opening words "When on high") -- a relatively late version of an ancient myth which dates back to at least the First Babylonian Dynasty (ca. 1830-1530 B.C.), whose greatest king was Hammurabi (ca. 1728-1686 B.C.). This myth was first published by George Smith in 1876 under the title *The Babylonian Account of Genesis*.

It was on the basis of Smith's work that Gunkel wrote his most influential work on creation and chaos in the Old Testament. Though few will be enamored with Gunkel's clever analysis, no serious student of Scripture today should give less attention to this material than that given by Gunkel.

3. Having analyzed our material by the philologico-grammatical approach, we must attempt to classify and systematize it. The texts of the Old Testament bearing on cosmogony may be grouped into four divisions: (a) texts describing the creation under the figure of

<sup>11</sup>Gerhard von Rad considered this the first of all biblical creeds. See *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), 1: 127-28.

<sup>12</sup>George Smith, cited in Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 217.

Yahweh's combat with the sea monster; (b) Genesis 1; (c) texts from the wisdom school bearing on creation, namely Psalm 104, Job 38, and Proverbs 8; and (d) the use of creation by Isaiah as he addressed the exiles in Babylon.

4. Any given text must be interpreted within the realm of Old Testament thought. Eichrodt's words are pointed but well taken:

In deciding, therefore, on our procedure for the treatment of the realm of OT thought, we must avoid all schemes which derive from Christian dogmatics -- such, for example, as "Theology-Anthropology-Soteriology," "*ordo salutis*," and so on. Instead we must plot our course as best we can along the lines of the OT's own dialect.<sup>13</sup>

In a word, we must try to extrapolate from the Old Testament itself its unifying concepts and interpret the texts bearing on cosmogony within those categories.

#### CREATION AND THE RAHAB-LEVIATHAN THEME

In several passages of the Old Testament, reference is made to God's conflict with a dragon or sea monster named as Rahab, "The Proud One," or Leviathan, "The Twisting One."<sup>14</sup> At least five of these texts are in a context pertaining to the creation of the world, and it is for this reason that these are considered in this series on creation. An understanding of these passages will aid in understanding the Genesis creation account. For example, in Job 26:12-13 we read: "He quieted the sea with His power, and by His understanding He shattered Rahab. By His breath the heavens are cleared; His hand has pierced the fleeing serpent." In Psalm 74:13-17 it is recorded: "Thou didst break the heads of the sea-monsters in the waters, Thou didst crush the heads of Leviathan; Thou didst give him as food for the creatures of the wilderness. Thou didst break open springs and torrents; Thou didst dry up ever-flowing streams, Thine is the day, Thine is the night; Thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast established all the boundaries of the earth; Thou hast made summer and winter,"

Three questions may be asked about these passages: Who are the monsters? How are we to interpret references to them in the Old Testament? What is the significance of these references? These questions pertain to identification, interpretation, and significance.

13 Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*. trans, J. A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961). p. 33.

14 Rahab is referred to in Job 9:13; 26:12; Pss. 87:4; 89:10; Isa. 30:7; and 51:9. Leviathan is mentioned in Job 3:8; 41:1; Pss. 74:14; 104:26; and Isa. 27:1.

## IDENTIFICATION

To identify Rahab and Leviathan. Wakeman turned to the mythological lore of the ancient Near East.<sup>15</sup> After analyzing twelve myths from Sumer, India, Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Greece, and Canaan, she concluded that in spite of their great variety, all the battle myths are, as she put it, "about the same thing." Her analysis showed that at the core of the myths three features were always present: (1) a repressive monster restraining creation, (2) the defeat of the monster by the heroic god who thereby releases the forces essential for life, and (3) the hero's final control over these forces.<sup>16</sup>

These myths of the ancient Near East identify Rahab or Leviathan as an anticreation dragon monster.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the biblical texts that refer to Rahab or Leviathan imply these same three features found in these other mythical cosmogonies.

Job 3: 8 makes it clear that Leviathan is a repressive, anti-creation monster who swallows up life. Job said: "Let those curse it who curse the day, who are prepared to rouse Leviathan." Summarizing the context of this verse, Fishbane concluded:

The whole thrust of the text in Job iii 1-13 is to provide a systematic *bouleversement*, or reversal, of the cosmicizing acts of creation described in Gen. i-ii 4a. Job, in the process of cursing the day of his birth (v. 1), binds, spell to spell in his articulation of an absolute and unrestrained death wish for himself and the entire creation.<sup>18</sup>

In several passages this repressive anticreation monster is associated with the sea. For example, Psalm 89:9-10 reads: "Thou dost rule the swelling of the sea; when its waves rise, Thou dost still them. Thou thyself didst crush Rahab like one who is slain; Thou didst scatter Thine enemies with Thy right arm." Isaiah 27:1b reads, "He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea." Job 26:12-13 and Psalm 74:13-17, cited earlier, also associate this monster with the sea, as do Psalms 89:10; 104:26; and Isaiah 27: 1.

The other two features, viz., the destruction of the monster and the controlling of life forces by the destroyer, are also seen in several of the biblical Rahab-Leviathan passages. For example,

15 Mary K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973).

16 Ibid., pp. 4-6.

17 Cf. the conflict between Apsu and Tiamat and between Ea and Marduk in the Chaldean myth "Enuma Elish." See E. A. Speiser, "The Creation Epic," in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, ed. James P. Pritchard (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 60.

18 Michael Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23-26 and Job III 3-13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (1971): 153.

Isaiah 51:9 states that Yahweh cut Rahab in pieces and pierced the dragon, and Psalm 89:10 mentions that Yahweh crushed Rahab and quelled the turbulent sea associated with the dragon.

Gordon's study of leviathan in both the Bible and the Ugaritic texts puts the case beyond doubt.<sup>19</sup> He convincingly demonstrated that the myth about Rahab-Leviathan belongs to the mythology of ancient Canaan.

#### INTERPRETATION

Having established that Leviathan in the Canaanite mythology is a dragon resisting creation, we must raise the hermeneutical question whether the inspired poets of Israel meant that Yahweh actually had a combat with this hideous creature or whether this Canaanite story served as a helpful metaphor to describe Yahweh's creative activity. If we assume that the biblical authors were logical -- and they were that and far more -- then we must opt for the second interpretation of these references. The poets who mention this combat also abhor the pagan idolatry and insist on a strict monotheism.

Job, for example, protested his innocence by claiming: "If I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon going in splendor; and my heart became secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth, that too would have been an iniquity calling for judgment, for I would have denied God above" (Job 31:26-28). Isaiah, who stated that Yahweh hewed Rahab and pierced the dragon (Isa. 51:9), also wrote, "Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel. . . : 'I am the first, and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me'" (Isa. 44:6). Similar words are stated later by Isaiah: "That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun that there is no one besides Me; I am the LORD, and there is no other, the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity; I am the LORD, who does all these" (Isa. 45 :6-7).

Allen stated the issue well when he concluded, "The problem. . . is not one of borrowed theology but one of borrowed imagery."<sup>20</sup> The biblical prophets and poets, who were accustomed to clothing their ideas in poetic garb, elucidating them with the help of simile, and employing the familiar devices of poetry, were

19 Cyrus H. Gordon. "Leviathan: Symbol of Evil," in *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations*. ed. Alexander Altmann (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 1-9.

20 Ronald Barclay Allen. "The Leviathan-Rahab-Dragon Motif in the Old Testament" (Th. M. thesis. Dallas Theological Seminar, 1968). p. 63.

not, to be sure, deterred from using what they found at hand in Israel's epic poetry, McKenzie observed:

It does not seem possible any longer to deny the presence of mythological allusions in the Old Testament. They appear almost entirely, as far as present research has shown, in poetic passages, where they add vividness and color to the imagery and language. They do not, on the other hand, permit one to affirm the existence of creation myths among the Hebrews, corresponding to those of Mesopotamia and Canaan. Gunkel's brilliant attempt to do this was a conspicuous failure. The creation accounts of the Bible were studiously composed to exclude mythological elements. The fact that such allusions were freely admitted in poetry indicates no more than this, that the Hebrews were acquainted with Semitic myths. Where these are cosmogonic myths, the work of the creative deity, or his victory over chaos, is simply transferred to Yahweh; other deities involved in the myths are ignored. In no sense can it be said that the Hebrews incorporated "mythopoeic thought" (to borrow a word from Frankfort) into their own religious conceptions; they did, however, assimilate mythopoeic imagery and language.<sup>21</sup>

It is inconceivable that these strict monotheists intended to support their view from pagan mythology, which they undoubtedly detested and abominated, unless they were sure that their hearers would understand that their allusions were used in a purely figurative sense.

A study of the texts in which the Rahab-Leviathan emblem is found shows that the biblical authors used it in one of three ways. First, as seen in the texts considered thus far, they employed the figure to describe God's creative activity in the prehistoric past.

Second, the symbol of Yahweh's victory over the dragon is used as symbolic of Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh and Israel's enemies in the historic present. They were particularly fond of using Rahab as a nickname for Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. Rahab evoked appropriate feelings of Yahweh's victory in creating Israel by destroying the oppressive tyrant and drying up his restraining sea. In Isaiah 30: 7 the prophet, referring to Egypt, wrote, "Therefore I have called her Rahab who has been exterminated." Later when Isaiah calls for the second exodus, this time from the oppressive Babylonian, he commands: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not Thou who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not Thou who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a

21 John L. McKenzie. S. J., "A Note on Psalm 73 (74); 13-15," *Theological Studies* 2 (1950): 281-82.

pathway for the redeemed to cross over?" (Isa. 51:9-10) As Anderson observed: "It was then that Yahweh slew the monster Rahab, separated the Great Deep (*tehom rabbah*) so that the people could pass through (44:27), [and] rebuked the rebellious Sea (Yam; 51:10)."<sup>22</sup>

Third, whereas Yahweh's poets used the symbol of Rahab to depict His triumph at creation in the prehistoric past, and the prophets employed the story for His victories over Israel's political enemies in the historic present, the apocalyptic seers used it to portray Yahweh's final triumph over the ultimate enemy behind all history, even Satan, in the posthistoric future. Thus in Isaiah we read: "In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea" (Isa, 27: 1). More clearly John says in his apocalypse: "And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Rev. 12:7-9).

#### SIGNIFICANCE

In all these passages, the literary allusions to Yahweh's defeat of Rahab serve to underscore the basic thought of the Old Testament: Yahweh will triumph over all His enemies in the establishment of His rule of righteousness. Negatively, the allusion serves as a polemic against the gods of the foreign kingdoms. Not Baal of the Canaanites, not Marduk of the Babylonians, not Pharaoh of Egypt, but Yahweh, God of Israel, author of Torah, triumphs. As the Creator of the cosmos, He triumphed at the time of creation; as Creator of history, He triumphs in the historic present; and as Creator of the new heavens and the new earth, He will triumph in the future.

22 Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos*, p. 128. Incidentally, it may be noted that in contrast to Moses' rod which turned into a serpent (Exod, 4:3). Aaron's rod turned into a dragon (Exod. 7:12). It was Aaron's draconic rod that swallowed the draconic rods of the Egyptians. The point of the incident is now clear: The rod is a symbol of rulership, and God thus demonstrated that His kingdom would swallow up Pharaoh's kingdom. Moreover, God indicated that He would subsume its powers within His own dominion. The psalmist accordingly looked forward to the day when Egypt will be incorporated into Yahweh's rule: "shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me" (Ps. 87:4).

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary  
3909 Swiss Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75204  
[www.dts.edu](http://www.dts.edu)

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)

---

# The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3: Part II: The Restitution Theory

**Bruce K. Waltke**

[Bruce K. Waltke, Professor of Semitic Languages and Old Testament Exegesis, Director of Doctoral Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary.]

[EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1–4, 1974, and adapted from *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).]

## Introduction

Three views on the cosmogony of Genesis 1:1–3 have found broad acceptance in the literature on this subject: (1) the restitution theory of cosmogony, which contends that the chaos of Genesis 1:2 occurred after God had created an originally perfect universe; (2) the initially chaotic theory of cosmogony, which insists that the chaos of 1:2 occurred in connection with the original creation; and (3) the precreation chaos theory of cosmogony, which holds that the chaos of verse 2 existed *before* the creation mentioned in the Bible.

According to the first mode of thought, chaos occurred after the original creation; according to the second mode of thought, chaos occurred in connection with the original creation; and in the third mode of thought, chaos existed before the original creation.

## Need for This Study

This issue is important for both apologetic and theological reasons. In order to meet the challenge of science against the first chapter of Genesis, the apologist must have a clear understanding of the biblical cosmogony. D. F. Payne said, “Biblical exegesis is paramount...when the scientific challenge is under

---

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 137

consideration.” Moreover, how we understand the syntax of Genesis 1:1–3 has a significant effect on our theology. Von Rad noted, “The sequence of particular declarations in vv. 1–3 comprises a wealth of reference whose fullness is scarcely to be comprehended.”

## Method

To construct a proper model of cosmogony special attention must be given to Genesis 1. The reason is that this text is written in precise prose, whereas other biblical passages bearing on cosmogony are poetic, imaginative, evocative, and not didactic. Concerning the style of Genesis, von Rad observed:

Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely.... Nowhere at all is the text only allusive, symbolic, or figuratively poetic. Actually, the exposition must painstakingly free this bundled and rather esoteric doctrine sentence by sentence, indeed, word by word.

Here, then, is a challenge to the exegete to prove himself an accurate workman in handling God's Word.

The procedure in exegeting this crucial passage will be to present each of the three views mentioned, evaluate them, and conclude by validating one of them.

### **The Restitution Theory**

By two contrasting grammatical analyses of Genesis 1:1–2, this model is constructed. The majority of expositors advocating this mode of thought regard verse 2 as a sequential clause after verse 1, but Merrill F. Unger, while holding this model, thinks that verse 2 is a circumstantial clause with verse 1.

#### **The View That Verse 2 Is a Sequential Clause after Verse 1**

According to the majority contending for this understanding of biblical cosmogony, Genesis 1:1 presents an account of an originally perfect creation. Satan was ruler of this world, but because of his rebellion described in Isaiah 14:12–17, sin entered the universe. As a consequence, God judged the world and reduced it to the chaotic

---

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 138

state described in Genesis 1:2. Later God recreated it according to the description given in Genesis 1:3–31. Thus there is a time gap of unknown length between verses 1 and 2. This theory is traditionally referred to as the “gap theory.” The view gained wide acceptance through *The Scofield Reference Bible* notes. Regarding the word *create* in Genesis 1, Scofield wrote, “It refers to the dateless past, and gives scope to all the geological ages”; and concerning the words *without form* he continued:

Jeremiah 4:23–26; Isaiah 24:1 and 45:18, clearly indicate that the earth had undergone a cataclysmic change as the result of the divine judgment. The earth bears everywhere the marks of such a catastrophe. There are not wanting intimations which connect it with a previous testing and fall of angels. See Ezekiel 28:12–15 and Isaiah 14:9–14, which certainly go beyond the kings of Tyre and Babylon.

The proponents of this view translate the opening words of Genesis 1 in this way: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, and then the earth became....”

*Support.* It should be noted that this view was not dreamed up merely to meet the scientific challenge. D. F. Payne stated: “The ‘gap’ theory itself, as a matter of exegesis, antedated the scientific challenge, but the latter gave it a new impetus.” Arthur Custance, in his book *Without Form and Void*, attempts to show that this interpretation has its roots in early Jewish tradition and throughout the history of the church. Unfortunately, this book, which is filled with much helpful information, is marred by egregious errors.

---

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 139

Defenders of this view also appeal to logic, philology, and theology. Since “the heavens and the earth” in verse 1 means “the organized universe,” and verse 2 speaks of the earth in chaos,

and verses 3–31 speak of the organization of the universe again, it is plausible to suppose that verses 1–3 describe three successive stages in the history of the earth.

Furthermore, it can be demonstrated that simple **היה** can mean “to become” as in Genesis 3:20 which reads: “For she *became* [**היה** without **ל**] the mother of all the living.”

Moreover, in Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 34:11, the only other two passages beside Genesis 1:2 where “waste and void” (**תהו ובהו**) occur together, the rhyming compound describes a state effected by God’s judgment. It is argued, therefore, that since in these passages the expression is used in connection with God’s judgment, the same inference must be drawn in the case of Genesis 1:2.

Finally, this interpretation enables us to make sense of the career of Satan which is otherwise fraught with mystery. Commenting on Isaiah’s vision, “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground” (Isa 14:12, AV), Scofield said, “This tremendous passage marks the beginning of sin in the universe.” In the record of the “fall of man” in Genesis 3, Satan appears without introduction; the chapter assumes that he is already here on earth. Where did he come from? Is it not probable, these expositors suggest, that his fall mentioned by Isaiah should be connected with the judgment of the earth implied in Genesis 1:2? By systematic thought and with the help of Genesis 1:2, the career of Satan is thus filled in.

*Objections.* But this understanding has not been accepted by the overwhelming majority of exegetes because it cannot stand the

---

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 140

test of close grammatical analysis. For example, the theory assumes that the “and” which introduces verses 2 and 3 are identical in meaning and that both have the idea of sequence, “and then.” However, the conjunctions introducing verses 2 and 3 are different in the original text. The *waw* introducing verse 3 does in fact denote sequence and is called by grammarians the “*waw* consecutive.” But the *waw* introducing verse 2 is different in both form and function; grammarians refer to this *waw* as the “*waw* conjunctive.” The *waw* conjunctive may introduce various types of clauses (to be discussed below) but it does not introduce an independent sequential clause. It is inconceivable that Moses would have used a construction which does not indicate sequence in contrast to other constructions open to him, if this had been his intent.

Now let us critically reappraise the argument that **תהו ובהו** in verse 2 came about through God’s judgment because elsewhere God’s wrath effected it.

These Hebrew words also appear in Jeremiah 4:23. Anderson says of Jeremiah 4:23–26: “This moving portrayal of threatening chaos is undoubtedly one of the finest pieces in the literature of ancient Israelite prophecy and, for that matter, in world literature as a whole.”

Jeremiah’s dire vision is as follows:

I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void [**תהו ובהו**] and to the heavens, and they had no light.

I looked on the mountains, and behold, they were quaking, and all the hills moved to and fro.

I looked, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled.

I looked, and behold, the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were pulled down before the LORD before His fierce anger.

Scholars have not failed to notice that these verses serve as a counterpart to the first chapter of Genesis. Fishbane noted the following parallels between the two texts:

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 141

	<i>Gen 1:1–2:4a</i>	<i>Jer 4:23–26</i>
Pre-creation	תהו ובהו	תהו ובהו
First day	Light	Light
Second day	Heavens	Heavens
Third day	Dry land	Mountains and hills
Fourth day	Luminaries	Light
Fifth day	Birds	Birds
Sixth day	Man	Man
Seventh day	Sabbath	Fierce wrath

But in almost unbearable words, Jeremiah sees the Creator undoing His work. Note the *bouleversement*, the reversal, of the cosmos back to chaos.

Earth	תהו ובהו
Heavens	No light
Mountains	Shaking (a technical term for final shaking of the world at the return of chaos)
Man	No man
Birds	Fled
Fruitful land	A wilderness

Whether the vision is intended as a metaphor of Judah's return to her precreative state, or an apocalyptic portrayal of cosmic destruction at the end time,<sup>13</sup> need not be decided for our purposes. The point is that the judgment to come on the land takes the form of dismantling or undoing the creation. But it obviously does not follow that the precreative state itself is the result of God's fury.

The fallaciousness of the reasoning used by the proponents of the "gap theory" may be illustrated as follows. Let us suppose that a child is given a new tinker-toy set. After taking the pieces out of the manufacturer's box, he constructs a derrick. But after

---

*BSac* 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 142

a while he becomes frustrated with the derrick and so, in anger, he dismantles his production and replaces the sticks and spools into their container. Now, would anyone wish to conclude that because the child dismantled the set in fury and replaced it into its original container, that therefore the manufacturer had also originally dismantled the set in fury and put the pieces into the box? Of course, we would have to admit that this is a possibility, but it certainly could not be proved by the action of the child.

We must draw the conclusion, therefore, that the use of the Jeremiah 4:23–26 passage to prove that Genesis 1:2 is the result of God's fury and judgment is logically fallacious. The conclusion is a non sequitur.

The same argument applies to the passage in Isaiah in which **תהו** and **בהו** are used. In the immediate context of 34:11, Isaiah sees the destruction of Edom. As part of his evocative imagery, he implicitly likens Edom's destruction to the dismantling of a house to its precreated state. He predicts God's destruction on Edom: "And He shall stretch over it the line of desolation (**תהו**, formlessness)" and the stones of emptiness (**בהו**)." The line and stones (plummets) of the builder are employed here not for erecting a building but for dismantling it. Once again God's judgment results in the return of the object of His wrath to its original state prior to its creation, namely, nothing or an unformed state. And again, it does not follow that the precreative, unformed state is itself the result of judgment.

Here, however, we should pause and note the meaning of **תהו ובהו** as clarified by these two passages. We may deduce that the compound rhyming expression indicates a state of material prior to its creation. The Septuagint renders the compound in Jeremiah 4:23 appropriately by οὐθέν, "nothing." Indeed this appears to be essentially its meaning; not in the sense that material does not exist, but rather in the sense that an orderly arrangement, a creating, a cosmos, has not as yet taken place. The meaning "formlessness" for **תהו** finds support when used apart from **בהו** (which, by contrast, never occurs without **תהו**). Kidner summarized the meaning and use of **תהו** thus:

*Tohu* (without form) is used elsewhere to mean, in physical terms, a trackless waste (e.g., Dt. 32:10; Jb. 6:18), emptiness (Jb. 26:7), chaos (Is. 24:10; 34:11; 45:18); and metaphorically, what is baseless or futile (e.g., 1 Sa. 12:21; Is. 29:21).

---

BSac 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 143

Jacob concluded, “Where it [תהו ובהו] is met (Is. 34:11; Jer. 4:23), [it] denotes the contrary of creation and not merely an inferior stage of creation.”

We conclude, therefore, that תהו ובהו denotes a state of material devoid of order, or without being shaped or formed into something.

Finally, we turn to reappraise critically the theological argument, namely, that Isaiah and Ezekiel instruct us that God destroyed the earth as part of His judgment on Satan when he rebelled against God. In the author’s opinion, it is unlikely that Lucifer, the king of Babylon, in Isaiah 14 has reference to Satan. Since space does not permit exploring this question here, it is necessary to settle for stating this view without supporting it. Seth Erlandsson and Robert Alden<sup>17</sup> also believe that Lucifer is not Satan. However, in the case of the king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28, it is likely that Satan is in view. But whether Satan is or is not in view in these highly poetic and imaginative passages is beside the point of this article.

The point is that neither passage contains any explicit statement that God judged the universe when these kings rose up in hubris against His reign. In fact, nowhere in Scripture do we find an explicit statement to such an incident. In 2 Peter 3:5–7, we might expect to find a statement that God had destroyed a once perfect creation prior to Genesis 1 because in this passage Peter is speaking about God’s destruction of the heavens and the earth. But he mentions only two judgments of the universe: (1) when God destroyed it by a flood in the past, and (2) when God will destroy it by fire in the future. Now should someone wish to argue that the destruction by a flood refers to the waters of Genesis 1:2, the reply may be given that it seems far more probable that he refers to Noah’s flood. Noah’s flood is explicitly referred to elsewhere in Scripture while Lucifer’s flood is not explicitly mentioned.

We conclude, then, that this popular interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2 is impossible on both philological and theological grounds.

---

BSac 132:526 (Apr 75) p. 144

## **The View That Verse 2 Is a Circumstantial Clause with Verse 1**

Let us look briefly now at Unger’s view. According to his interpretation, the restitution theory cannot be supported grammatically from Genesis 1:1–2. He wrote:

[This] interpretation...runs into grammatical and etymological problems. In the original language, Genesis 1:2 consists of three circumstantial clauses, all describing conditions or circumstances existing *at the time of* the principal action indicated in verse 1, or giving a reason for that action.

He finds support for his view in Isaiah 45:18 and Job 38:4–7. He wrote:

Why should a perfect Creator create an original imperfect and chaotic earth? the fact of which is expressly denied by revealed truth recorded in Isaiah 45:18 and completely at variance with the ecstatically joyous dedication of the primeval earth when it came perfect from the Creator’s hand, as described by Job (Job 38:4–7).

This thesis cannot stand for at least these three reasons: (1) Verse 2 cannot be construed as a circumstantial clause with verse 1, a point to be proved in the next article. (2) Isaiah 45:18 has reference to the completed creation at the end of six days, a point also to be considered in connection with the “initial chaos theory.” (3) The creation of the “earth” described in Job 38:4–7 can be harmonized best with the creation of the dry land called “Earth” on the third day as described in Genesis 1:9–10, rather than with the statement about the earth’s condition given in Genesis 1:2.<sup>1</sup>

---

## **The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3**

### **Part III:**

### **The Initial Chaos Theory**

### **and the Precreation Chaos Theory**

**Bruce K. Waltke**

[Bruce K. Waltke, Professor of Semitic Languages and Old Testament Exegesis, Director of Doctoral Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary.]

[EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the third in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1–4, 1974, and adapted from *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).]

In the preceding article in this series, the first of three views of biblical cosmogony was discussed. That view was the restitution theory, popularly known as the “gap theory.” The present article discusses the other two theories, which may be called the initial chaos view and the precreation chaos theory.

### **The Initial Chaos Theory**

The initial chaos view of cosmogony interprets Genesis 1:1 as a declaration that God created the original mass called heaven and earth out of nothing, and verse 2 as a clarification that when it came from the Creator’s hand, the mass was unformed and unfilled.

Looked at grammatically, verse 1 is construed as an independent clause and verse 2 as three circumstantial clauses describing the condition of the earth when it first came into existence. Calvin wrote, “For Moses simply intends to assert that the world was not perfected at its commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, than that it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth.” Some who hold this view regard verses 1 and 2 as a chronological

---

*BSac* 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 217

---

<sup>1</sup> (1975). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 132(526), 135–144.

unity separated by a gap in time from the first day of creation described in verse 3, whereas most think of verses 1–5 as a chronological unity.

## Support

This is the traditional view, and according to Gerhard Hasel it has the support of the majority of Jewish and Christian interpreters. Although this view is still supported in modern times, its number of adherents is diminishing. Moreover, the classic grammar by Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley construed verse 2 as a circumstantial clause with verse 1. Also, this conception of the cosmogony is satisfying to the strictly monotheistic view of the universe.

The view affirms that God existed before all and then He created matter with its potential for life. Luther wrote the following on this view:

The plain and simple meaning of what Moses (here) says is that all things that exist were created by God and that at the beginning of the first day, God put into it the light so that the light of day was shining and the shapeless heaven and earth could be seen. This was not unlike a shapeless crude seed from which things can be generated and produced.

## Objections

A critical reappraisal of the theory does not show this to be the plain and simple meaning. In fact, the theory faces such serious objections as to render it untenable.

This interpretation demands that we place a different value on the words “the heavens and the earth” than are given to them

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 218*

anywhere else in Scripture. Like **תהו ובהו** in verse 2, “the heavens and the earth” is a compound phrase that must be studied as a unity. In connection with this phrase in verse 2 Cassuto made this comment:

In language, as in chemistry, a compound may be found to possess qualities absent from its constituent elements. For example, anyone who does not know what “broadcast” denotes, will not be able to guess the connotation of the word from its separate elements “broad” and “cast.”

Likewise, it will prove erroneous to study the words “heavens” and “earth” in isolation from one another.

Furthermore, in trying to decide the meaning of the compound **השמים והארה** Cyrus Gordon noted that pairs of antonyms often mean “everything” or “everyone.” For example, in English, the expression “they came, great and small” means that “everybody came.” The Hebrew language is filled with such antonymic pairs called merisms. For example, the psalmist says that the blessed man meditates in God’s law “day and night,” i.e., “all the time.” So here, “the heavens and the earth” are antonyms to designate “everything,” and more specifically “the organized universe, the cosmos.” In fact, Wisdom of Solomon uses the Greek words *ὁ κόσμος* to refer to Genesis 1:1.

This is undoubtedly the sense of the compound in the summary statement concluding the creation account: “Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts” (Gen 2:1). The compound occurs again in this sense in the summary statement introducing the stories about

man at the time of the creation of the universe: “This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (Gen 2:4). In both of these summaries a world is in view. Childs concluded that this compound never has the meaning of disorderly chaos but always of an orderly world. Likewise, Skinner said, “For though that phrase...is a Hebrew designation of the universe as a whole, it is only the organized universe, not the chaotic material out of which it was formed, that can

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 219*

actually be so designated.” If this understanding, based on its extensive and unambiguous usage in the creation account itself and elsewhere is allowed, then Genesis 1:2 cannot be construed as a circumstantial clause. Logic will not allow us to entertain the contradictory notions: God created the organized heavens and earth; the earth was unorganized. Plessis rightly asked, “If the heavens and earth signified the organized universe how, then, can it denote heaven and earth in a formless state?”

Many commentators in the past have gone wrong here for they insist that the phrase refers to the primeval material from which the universe was developed. Calvin, for example, said: “There is no doubt that Moses gives the name of heaven and earth to the confused mass which he shortly after (verse 2) denominates water.” But this is nothing more than a pontifical pronouncement without lexical support. In answer to Calvin and Aalders who share the same opinion, Young simply noted: “Elsewhere the phrase...does designate the well-ordered universe, ὁ κόσμος”

Gruenthaner proposed getting around the problem by suggesting that “the heavens and the earth” may have received this appellation proleptically, because of its destination. He called attention to the proleptic use of man in Genesis 2:7 where the clay statue is called Adam, although it is devoid of life.

But this is a farfetched and desperate attempt. Perhaps one can see how bold the attempt is by substituting “house” for “the heavens and the earth.” The text would then read, “God created the house.” Would any normal reader think this meant that the word “house” was used proleptically, and in reality it meant that God created the unorganized materials from which He made the house? The expression in Genesis 2:7, moreover, is not an apt analogy, for here the man is in his completed form lacking only the breath of life.

Boyer and König proposed that the heavens designated the completed upper heavens, including the angelic realm, in contrast

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 220*

to the heavens visible to the human eye, and that the earth refers to the chaotic earth described in verse 2. König tried to support his thesis by noting that whereas in verse 1 the article is present in “the heavens,” in verse 8 the article is missing in “heaven.” Hence, he concluded they must be distinct. He found further confirmation in verse 14 where the text speaks of the “firmament of the heavens.” Here he said that the genitive is partitive and therefore the firmament, or lower heaven, is part of the upper heaven. He argued further that “the heavens” are not mentioned again in the chapter whereas the equipment of the firmament, the visible heaven, is described at length.

But this argumentation is also unconvincing. In verse 10 the dry land is named simply “earth,” without the article, because it is a proper name. Consequently, in the parallel passage, verse 8, the firmament is called “heaven” because it too is a proper name. Moreover, the genitive

in verse 14 is normally construed as an attributive genitive. Thus the alleged distinction between **השמים** and **שמים** becomes more than questionable.

Not only does the compound **השמים והארץ** militate against taking verse 2 as a circumstantial clause with verse 1, but also the statement by Isaiah that God did not create the earth **תהו** argues against this interpretation. Those holding to an imperfect first stage of creation understand Isaiah to mean that the Lord did not form the earth for the purpose of being a waste. Allis concluded from the parallelism, “Isaiah xlv.18 should be rendered, ‘He did not create it to be a waste, for inhabiting it He formed it.’” But the double accusative after verbs of making does not normally have this sense. The normal sense would be what is found in almost all translations: “The LORD did not create it a formless mass.”

Then too it has been demonstrated from Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 34:11 that **תהו ובהו** denotes the antithesis of creation. To take Genesis 1:2, therefore, as a circumstantial clause presents the contradiction: He created...and the earth was uncreated.

In addition, we note that elsewhere in Scripture it is said that God created everything by His Word. In a psalm of praise, for example, we read these words: “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host.... For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast”

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 221*

(Ps 33:6, 9). The writer of Hebrews said: “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). But no mention is made anywhere in Scripture that God called the unformed, dark, and watery state of verse 3 into existence.

Finally, it is significant that in the new and perfect cosmos to come there will be no sea (Rev 21:1), and in the new Jerusalem associated with it there will be no darkness (Rev 21:25). This revelation about the new cosmos suggests that the deep and darkness in verse 2 are less than desirable and were not called into existence by the God of order and goodness.

It is concluded, therefore, that though it is possible to take verse 2 as a circumstantial clause on syntactical grounds, it is impossible to do so on philological grounds, and that it seems unlikely it should be so construed on theological grounds, for it makes God the Creator of disorder, darkness, and deep, a situation not tolerated in the perfect cosmos and never said to have been called into existence by the Word of God.

### **The Precreation Chaos Theory**

The precreation chaos theory of Genesis 1:1–3 has two variations, based on different grammatical analyses of the text. Some regard Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause while others regard that verse as a summary statement explicated in the remainder of the chapter .

#### **The View That Verse 1 Is A Dependent Clause**

The view that verse 1 is a dependent clause is widely held in scholarly circles today, and has been accepted into the last three versions of the Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant communities. Thus the New Jewish version (1962) reads:

When God began to create the heaven and the 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....

The New American Bible (1970) reads:

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters, then God said....

The New English Bible (1972) reads:

In the beginning of creation, when God made heaven and earth, the earth was without form and void, with darkness over the face of the abyss, and a mighty wind that swept over the surface of the waters. God said....

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 222*

But while many scholars accept verse 1 as the dependent clause, there is not full agreement about the protasis, or independent clause. The Jewish scholar, Ibn Ezra (d. 1167) considered verse 2 as the independent clause. Thus he read Genesis 1:1 as the protasis (“When God began to create...”) and 1:2 as the apodosis (“the earth was...”). But this position is not widely accepted because the wording in verse 2 militates against it. If this were the case, then verse 2 should begin with **הִיתָ הָאָרֶץ** as in Jeremiah 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; and Hosea 1:2.

The other position, first proposed by Rasbi (d. 1105), construes verse 3 as the apodosis and verse 2 as a parenthesis. The text is analyzed as follows:

1:1 Protasis: “When God began to create...”

1:2 Parenthesis: “the earth being/was...”

1:3 Apodosis: “God said...”

Because this position is by far the one most widely accepted, the following discussion is limited to an analysis of that protasis-parenthesis-apodosis view.

According to Orlinsky, the cumulative lexical, syntactical, contextual, and comparative evidence favors this interpretation of the passage.

*Lexical and grammatical arguments.* An initial question to consider is whether **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is in the construct or absolute state. If the form is construct, then verse 1 must be understood as a dependent clause. If it is in the absolute state, the traditional rendering will stand.

Two arguments have been advanced to show that the first word of the Bible is in the construct state: (a) a lexical statistical analysis of its usage; and (b) the absence of the article.

Humbert argued that of the 50 or 51 times **בְּרֵאשִׁית** is used, in all but one instance it is in the construct state. The one exception is found in Isaiah 46:10 where Isaiah says of God that He declares the end from the beginning, **מֵרֵאשִׁית**. But the exception is instructive for, as Ridderbos points out, it shows that the word can be used in

---

*BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 223*

the absolute state with a temporal meaning. Although it is true that the construct can occur with a verb<sup>23</sup> **מראשית** never occurs elsewhere in biblical Hebrew in the construct with a verb. No other use of **מראשית** is quite like this one in Genesis 1:1. It should be noted here that in the parallel construction, Genesis 2:4, Moses used the unambiguous infinite construct rather than a finite tense form. If he really intended his reader to take **מראשית** as a construct, why did he not use this less ambiguous construction? Because of the parallel in 2:4, many scholars reposit the text to fit the theory, but in effect the need to emend the text points to the weakness of the interpretation. However, allowing the text to stand without emendation, it is the conclusion of this author that such ambiguity would be exceptional.<sup>25</sup>

But what about the absence of the article? Hasel's argument has no force because both König and Heidel have shown that time designations in adverbial expressions do not need the article, Heidel stated:

Terms like *reshith*, "beginning," *rosh*, "beginning," *qedem*, "olden times," and *'olam*, "eternity," when used in adverbial expressions, occur almost invariably *without* the article, and that in the absolute state.

More convincing that the word should be understood as an absolute is the fact that all ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, Aquila, Theodotion, Symmachus, Targum Onkelos) construed the form as absolute and verse 1 as an independent clause. Hasel noted that in the Greek transliterations of the Hebrew text which have come down to us, and in the Samaritan transliteration, the first word in Genesis appears to have been pronounced with the article: **בראשית**. He concluded, therefore, that **בראשית** could be used without or with the article without any difference of meaning. It is more likely, however, that the change shows that those responsible for this reading were under the impression that the absolute sense demands the use of the article and accordingly altered the oral tradition. It does supply us with additional evidence, however, that traditionally the word was understood as an absolute.

Edward J. Young, Gerhard Hasel, and others insist that the

---

*BSac* 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 224

presence of the disjunctive accent *tipha* proves that in the oral tradition handed down by the Masoretes, the word was understood as an absolute. Although it is generally true that words in the construct take a conjunctive accent, **ראשית** appears to be in the construct state with a disjunctive accent in Jeremiah 26:1; 27:1; 28:1 and therefore the *tipha* does not prove that verse 1 must be construed as an independent clause.

In sifting all the data, two facts emerge: (1) In both the Jewish and Christian tradition, the first word in the Bible was unanimously understood as being in the absolute state and the first verse was considered an independent clause. (2) Moses could not have used any other construction to denote the first word as in the absolute state, but he could have opted for a different construction to indicate clearly the construct state. It is therefore concluded that the text which has come down to us should be understood as an independent and not a dependent clause.

*Syntactical arguments.* Wellhausen rejected taking verse 1 as a dependent clause because, in his words, “this complicated syntactical construction is desperate.” Cassuto also rejected it because, as he said,<sup>29</sup> the הִיָּה would have been omitted in verse 2 (cf. 1 Sam 3:2–4). But even though these two scholars objected to the construction on syntactical grounds, their arguments are baseless. Wellhausen is clearly mistaken because close parallels can be found to this analysis of Genesis 1:1–3 in 2:4b–7 and in the ancient accounts of creation. The structure of 2:4b–7 appears almost identical to the one proposed for 1:1–3 :

2:4b Protasis: “When Yahweh God made earth and heaven...

2:5–6 Parenthesis: “now no herb of the field...”

2:7 Apodosis: “...then Yahweh God formed man.”

Speiser points out the similar parallel structure in *Enuma elish*:

Dependent temporal clause:

“When on high the heaven had not been named  
Firm ground below had not been called by name”  
(lines 1–2)

Parenthetical clauses:

“...and Mummu-Tiamat, she  
bore them all.  
(lines 3–8)

Main clause:

“Then it was the gods were formed within them.”  
(line 9)

---

BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 225

Moreover, against Cassuto’s arguments it should be noted that the copula is often present in disjunctive clauses of the pattern *waw* + noun + verb. To cite but two illustrations of many:

“And Jonah went to Nineveh...(Now Nineveh was a great city, וְנִינְוָה הִיָּתָה עִיר־גְּדוּלָּה)...” (Jonah 3:3).

“And Yahweh said unto Satan...(Now Joshua was clothed, וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ הָיָה לְבוּשׁ)...” (Zech 3:2–3).

It is concluded, therefore, that no objection can be raised against this interpretation on syntactical grounds.

It should be noted, however, that Speiser and Orlinsky<sup>31</sup> overstate their case when they say that Genesis 2:4b and *Enuma elish* exhibit exactly the same kind of structure. It is not exact because, for one thing, the parallelism with 2:4 is artificially achieved by dividing 2:4a from 2:4b according to the dictates of literary criticism. As will be seen, however, the parallel between 1:1–3 and 2:4–7 is exactly the same if we construe 1:1 as an independent clause and 2:4 as a literary unity.

Moreover, in 2:4b the dependent clause is clearly expressed by the infinitive construct, whereas 1:1 is probably an independent clause. Then, too, the construction of 1:1–3 is not exactly the same as in *Enuma elish*. Whereas the Babylonian myths use *enuma* (or *inuma*) and

the Sumerian myths at times start with *udda* to introduce the dependent clause, they correspond only to 2:4b but not to 1:1. None of them begins with the equivalent of the **בראשית** (“in the beginning”) of Genesis 1:1. In fact, Genesis 1:1 has no parallel in the ancient Near Eastern mythologies. Gunkel recognized long ago that “the cosmogonies of other people contain no word which would come close to the first word of the Bible.” Heidel concluded, therefore, that the comparative argument in favor of considering verse 1 of the Bible as a dependent clause is dubious.

### **The View That Verse 1 Is A Summary Statement**

The other view that also sees the chaotic state described in verse 2 as existing before the creation spoken of in the Bible, understands verse 1 as an independent clause and verse 2 as a

---

*BSac* 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 226

circumstantial clause connected with verse 3. According to this view, verse 1 is a summary statement, or formal introduction, which is epexegeted in the rest of the narrative. It appears to this author that this is the only viewpoint that completely satisfies the demands of Hebrew grammar.

It has already been shown from the study of **בראשית** that verse 1 is best construed as an independent clause. But it is yet to be demonstrated that verse 2 should be construed as a circumstantial clause to the main clause of verse 3.

As discussed earlier, on lexical and logical grounds verse 2 cannot be construed as a circumstantial clause with verse 1. But is there any positive evidence that verse 2 should be subordinated to verse 3? An answer to this question may be seen by first examining the introduction to the second account of creation which serves to connect the narrative about man’s creation with the narrative about the cosmos’ creation. An analysis of the clause structures exhibits the following pattern:

1. *Introductory summary statement:*

“This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created...” (Gen 2:4).

2. *Circumstantial clause* of the pattern *waw* + noun + verb (**היה**) describing a negative state before creation:

“Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth...” (2:5–6).

3. *Main clause* of the pattern *waw* consecutive + prefixed conjugation form describing the creation:

“Then the LORD God formed man...” (2:7).

It can readily be seen that this is the same pattern exhibited in 1:1–3, as follows.

1. *Introductory summary statement:*

“In the beginning God created the cosmos” (1:1).

2. *Circumstantial clause* of the pattern *waw* + noun + verb (**היה**) describing the negative state before creation:

“Now the earth was devoid of form...” (1:2).

3. *Main clause* of the pattern *waw* consecutive + prefixed conjugation form describing the creation:

“And God said...” (1:3).

---

BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 227

A similar construction is also found in the introduction to Genesis 3. That story, however, lacks a separate introductory statement because it is a substory of the creation record about man introduced by 2:4. Here, too, is the same pattern:

[1. *Introductory summary statement*: (2:4)]

2. *Circumstantial clause* of the form *waw* + noun + verb (היה):

“Now the serpent was more crafty...” (3:1a).

3. *Main clause* of the form *waw* consecutive + prefixed conjugation form describing the creation of sin:

“And he said...” (3:1b).

In addition, Young is able to cite many examples where the circumstantial clause precedes the main verb. Moreover, this analysis comports perfectly with the structure of the ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies which, however, do not have an introductory summary statement as in Genesis 1:1. Note, for example, the structure of the Enuma elish:

1. *Circumstantial clause* describing the negative state before creation:

“When on high the heaven had not been named...” (Enuma elish 1:1–8).

2. *Main clause*:

“Then it was that the gods were formed...” (Enuma elish 1:9).

The evidence, therefore, seems convincing that verse 1 should be construed as a broad, general declaration of the fact that God created the cosmos, and that the rest of the chapter explicates this statement. Such a situation reflects normal Semitic thought which first states the general proposition and then specifies the particulars. This structure of thought is consistent with Hebrew grammar and with Semitic literature in which specification follows the broad general statement.

Having demonstrated the syntax of Genesis 1:1, the force of היה should now be considered.

Custance argues that היה must have its active sense “to become” and have the force of the pluperfect tense. Thus he would translate verse 2, “But the earth had

---

BSac 132:527 (Jul 75) p. 228

become.” Although it is not possible to disprove this interpretation conclusively, it must be clear that the suggestion is highly unlikely.

It should be noted that in the parallel circumstantial clauses in 2:5 and 3:1, the verb היה almost certainly has its stative rather than its active sense. Jonah 3:3; Zechariah 3:2–3; and Judges 8:11 have similar structures and the verb היה is normally rendered by “was” rather than “became.”

Indeed, no ancient or modern versions understand the verb in the sense of “had become.” It would be most unusual for an author to introduce his story with a pluperfect.

It is concluded, therefore, that the structure of the account of the creation of the cosmos is as follows:

- I. Introductory summary statement, 1:1 .
- II. Situation prior to the creation, 1:2 .
- III. Narrative of creation, 1:3–31 .
- IV. Concluding summary statement, 2:1 .
- V. Epilogue: the Sabbath rest, 2:2–3 .<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> (1975). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 132(527), 215–228.

## **The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3**

### Part IV: The Theology of Genesis 1

Bruce K. Waltke

Moses' revelation of God, given through the Holy Spirit's inspiration, conflicted diametrically with the concepts of the gods and goddesses found in the nations all around him. Moses differed with the pagan religions precisely in the conceptualization of the relationship of God to the creation. To all other peoples of the ancient Near East, creation was the work of gods and goddesses. The forces of nature, personalized as gods and goddesses, were mutually inter-related and often locked in conflict. Moreover, their myths about the role of these gods and goddesses in creation were at the very heart of their religious celebrations. These stories about Ninurta and Asag, Marduk and Tiamat, Baal and Yamm, did not serve to entertain the people, nor did they serve merely to explain how the creation originated. The adherents of these myths believed that by myth (word) and by ritual (act) they could reenact these myths in order to sustain the creation. Life, order, and society, depended on the faithful celebration of the ritual connected with the myth. For example, concerning the *Enuma elish*, Sarna wrote:

Recorded in seven tablets, it was solemnly recited and dramatically presented in the course of the festivities marking the Spring New Year, the focal point of the Babylonian religious calendar. It was,

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the fourth in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).

in effect, the myth that sustained Babylonian civilization, that buttressed its societal norms and its organizational structure.<sup>1</sup>

But the revelation of God in Scripture is diametrically opposed to these degraded notions about God. If, then, the essential difference between the Mosaic faith and the pagan faith differed precisely in their conceptualization of the relationship of God to the creation, is it conceivable that Moses should have left the new nation under God without an accurate account of the origin of the creation? To this writer such a notion is incredible. Anderson touched on the source critic's problem when he noted: "Considering the impressive evidences of the importance of the creation-faith in pagan religion during the second millennium B.C., it is curious that in Israel's faith during its formative and creative period (1300-1000 B.C.), the belief in Yahweh as Creator apparently had a second place."<sup>2</sup> His choice of the word curious for this tension is curious. The dilemma for the critic is intolerable. The only satisfying solution is to grant Mosaic authorship to the narrative of Genesis 1. Once that is clear, the theological function of the chapter is also clear.

Moses, the founder of the new nation, intended this introductory chapter to have both a negative and a positive function. Negatively, it serves as a polemic against the myths of Israel's environment; positively, it teaches man about the nature of God.

#### THE POLEMICAL FUNCTION OF GENESIS I

Before considering the discontinuity between the pagan cosmogonies and Genesis 1, however, it is only fair to consider first the points of continuity between these myths and Scripture.

#### THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS 1

*The evidence of the continuity.* First, there is a literary continuity. It has been noted, for example, that both the *Enuma elish*<sup>3</sup> and Genesis 1:2-3 begin with circumstantial clauses followed by the main account of the creation.<sup>4</sup> Also in both accounts the circumstantial

1 Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 7.

2 Bernhard W. Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos* (New York: Association Press, 1967), p. 49.

3 Many other versions of Babylonian creation myths are listed by Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 61-81, but the *Enunia elish* may be taken as representative of them.

4 Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis I:1-3: Part 1: Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (January-March 1975): 25-36.

clauses serve a negative function. Westermann referred to these as the "when-not-yet sentence materials from the ancient Near East and Egypt."<sup>5</sup> This same pattern prevails in Genesis 1:2-3; 2:4b-7; Proverbs 8:24-26; and Ezekiel 16:4-5. As Hasel commented: "In these passages as in the ancient Near Eastern materials, long series of descriptions negate later conditions of the world through formula-like 'when not yet' sentences."<sup>6</sup> Of course, this continuity of literary structure comes as no surprise, for Israel belonged physically to the peoples of the ancient Near East. Her language was Canaanite and her literary compositions, in their physical outward form, conformed to the literary conventions of her age.

Second, there are points of similarity in their content. Both accounts present a primeval, dark,<sup>7</sup> watery, and formless<sup>8</sup> state prior to creation, and neither account attributes this state to the Creator/creator. Also the two accounts agree about the order of the creation. Heidel has charted these basic similarities in detail between the chronological sequence of the creation of the cosmos in the two accounts.<sup>9</sup>

*Enuma elish*

*Genesis*

Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal

Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it

Primeval chaos; Tiamat enveloped in darkness

The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep

Light emanating from the gods

Light created

The creation of the firmament

The creation of the firmament

The creation of dry land

The creation of dry land

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of man

The creation of man

The gods rest and celebrate

God rests and sanctifies the seventh day

5 C. Westermann, *Genesis*, in *Biblische Konrmetar zunt Alten Testamentuni* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967), pp. 60 ff., 87 ff., 131.

6 Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look," *The Bible Translator* 22 (October 1971) : 164-65.

7 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 101.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

*The explanation of the continuity.* How can these correspondences be explained? One answer is that Israel's neighbors borrowed from her. But this is improbable for it is almost certain that many of these ancient Near Eastern myths antedate Moses.<sup>10</sup>

Another explanation is that the similarities are purely coincidental. D. F. Payne noted that Ryle, Gerhard von Rad, and Kinnier Wilson hold this view, and then concluded, "It must probably remain an open question whether . . . the correspondence [is] coincidental."<sup>11</sup>

The most common explanation of those scholars who regard the world as a closed system without divine intervention is that Israel borrowed these mythologies, demythologized them, purged them of their gross and base polytheism, and gradually adopted them to their own developing and higher theology. Zimmern went so far as to state that the early appearance of the watery chaos in Genesis 1 "is unintelligible in the mouth of an early Israelite," for he supposed that the concept of a watery chaos was derived from the annual flooding of the Mesopotamian river.<sup>12</sup> Of course, his argument is no longer tenable because, as Wakeman has demonstrated,<sup>13</sup> the concept of primeval water is found across a broad spectrum of ancient myths and not confined to any one geographical area.

It is certain that Israel knew these myths and it is also possible that having borrowed them they demythologized them.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the biblical writers elsewhere tell us that they did use sources.<sup>15</sup> In spite of these facts, this explanation does not satisfy because it offers no explanation for Israel's higher theology. Where did Israel get this higher theology? Why did it not appear among any other people? Neither the brilliant Greek philosophers of later ages, nor Israel's Babylonian and Egyptian contemporaries, so far ahead of them in the arts and science, attained to it. All the world was steeped in mythical thought except Israel. Her religion was like the sun compared to the night. No umbilical cord attached the faith of Moses and his successors with the other religions of the ancient Near East.

10 Ibid., pp. 130-32.

11 D. F. Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale Press, 1964), p. 11.

12 Encyclopedia Biblica, s.v. "Creation," by Heinrich Zimmern, col. 940.

13 Mary Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), pp. 86-105.

14 In this connection also see R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13-14* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), pp. 62-77.

15 Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, p. 135.

Furthermore, any religion that even approaches the Mosaic faith, such as Mohammedanism, borrowed it from Israel.

Moreover, this religion did not arise from Israel itself. Over and over again they confess that they are stiffnecked and prone to conform to the religions around them. No, Israel's religion did not originate in the darkened mind and heart of man. Instead, as the prophets consistently affirm, it is a revelation from God. This is the only answer that satisfies both the mind and spirit of man. If, then, the theological content is by divine revelation, does it not follow that the historical details may also have come by divine revelation?

Genesis 1 is unlike the sources, of pagan religions in that it contains information unknowable to any man. Certainly ancient chroniclers could record events of their days and the inspired prophet-historians could use them for theological reasons. But what human author could know the historical details of the creation? It is concluded, therefore, that the explanation that Israel borrowed the material is wrong.

The only satisfying answer is that proposed by Ira M. Price of the University of Chicago. He suggested that these versions sprang from a common source of some kind. He attributed the common elements to a common inheritance of man going back to "a time when the human race occupied a common home and held a common faith."<sup>16</sup> Although not citing Price, Unger holds the same view:

Early races of men wherever they wandered took with them these earliest traditions of mankind, and in varying latitudes and climes have modified them according to their religions and mode of thought. Modifications as time proceeded resulted in the corruption of the original pure tradition. The Genesis account is not only the purist, but everywhere bears the unmistakable impress of divine inspiration when compared with the extravagances and corruptions of other accounts. The Biblical narrative, we may conclude, represents the original form these traditions must have assumed.<sup>17</sup>

Isaiah confirms this explanation for he implies that God's people know of the creation from the beginning itself. He asked: "Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?" (Isa. 40:24).

16 Ira M. Price, *The Monuments and the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1925), pp. 129-30.

17 Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1954), p. 37.

## THE DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS 1

While there is a similarity in literary form and in rudimentary content, the biblical account radically differs from the creation myths of the ancient Near East in its theological stance.

For one thing, the creation myths are stories about numerous gods and goddesses personifying cosmic spaces or forces in nature. They are nature deities. The pagan mind did not distinguish spirit from matter. For them all of nature consisted of personalities combining divine spirit and cosmic matter in an eternal coexistence. Thus the sun was a god and the moon was a god. Even Akhenaten, the so-called first monotheist, never conceived of Aten, the sun god, any differently. He distinguished himself by selecting only one force of nature and, of course, never could find a following. Did not the other forces of nature also need to be worshiped?

In Canaan at the time of the Conquest, each city had its own temple dedicated to some force of nature. The name Jericho derives from the Hebrew word,  $\text{יְרִיכֹ}$ , which means "moon"; Jericho's inhabitants worshiped the moon, the god "Yerach." Likewise, on the other side of the central ridge of Palestine is the city of Beth-shemesh, which means "Temple of the Sun"; Shamash, the sun god, was worshiped there. It is against this environment that one can appreciate the significance of the stories about the Conquest. Yahweh, the God of Israel, did not consist of the forces of nature but stood majestically transcendent above them. He fought for Israel. He compelled these high gods of Canaan to hide their faces at noonday. Concerning the account in Joshua 9, Wilson wrote:

At the prayer of Israel's leader, both of their chief deities, the sun and the moon, were darkened, or eclipsed. So, as we can well imagine would be the case, they were terrified beyond measure, thinking that the end of all things had come; and they were discomfited and smitten and turned and fled.<sup>18</sup>

The second element of the darkened pagan view of the universe is summarized in the catchwords "myth" and "ritual." The "creation myth," so widespread in the ancient Near East, did not serve primarily to satisfy man's intellectual curiosity about the origin of the world. Man was not concerned about history as such. He was rather concerned about continuing the stability of the natural world and the society to which he belonged. How could he guarantee that the orderly life achieved in the beginning by the triumph of the creative

<sup>18</sup> Robert Dick Wilson, "What Does 'The Sun Stood Still' Mean?" *Princeton Theological Review* 16 (1918): 46-54.

forces over the inert forces would continue? Chaos was ever threatening to break down the structures of his life. His solution to the dilemma was by means of myth and ritual. By the use of magical words (myth) accompanying the performance of certain all-important religious festivals (ritual) he thought he could guarantee the stability of life. The myth, spoken magically at the high religious festivals, served as the libretto of the community liturgy. It declared in word what the ritual was designed to ensure through action. Sarna summarized the role of myth and ritual thus:

Myth, therefore, in the ancient world was mimetically re-enacted in public festivals to the accompaniment of ritual. The whole complex constituted imitative magic, the effect of which was believed to be beneficial to the entire community. Through ritual drama, the primordial events recorded in the myth were reactivated. The enactment at the appropriate season of the creative deeds of the gods, and the recitation of the proper verbal formulae, it was believed, would effect the periodic renewal and revitalization of nature and so assure the prosperity of the community.<sup>19</sup>

Against this background, the polemical function of the first chapter of Genesis is evident. Not that the tone is polemical; precisely the opposite. As Cassuto noted, "The language is tranquil, undisturbed by polemic or dispute; the controversial note is heard indirectly, as it were, through the deliberate, quiet utterances of Scripture."<sup>20</sup> By a simple straightforward account of the way it happened, the biblical account corrects the disturbed pagan notions.

Here there is no theogony. No one begot God; God created all. Stuhmueller commented: "Alone among all Semitic creative gods, Yahweh underwent no birth, no metamorphosis."<sup>21</sup> Moreover, here there is no theomachy. The Spirit of God does not contend with a living hostile chaotic force, but hovers over the primordial mass awaiting the appropriate time for history to begin. How can the chaos be hostile when it is not living but inanimate? It can only be shaped according to the will of the Creator. The sun, moon, and stars, worshiped by the pagans, are reduced to the status of "lamps" (Gen. 1:16). The dreaded תַּנִּינִים ("dragons") are created (בָּרָא) by God, who calls them good (v. 21). McKenzie put it this way:

<sup>19</sup> Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 7.

<sup>20</sup> Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 1:7.

<sup>21</sup> Carroll Stuhmueller, "The Theology of Creation in Second Isaias," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959): 429-67.

Against this background, the Hebrew account of origins can scarcely be anything else but a counterstatement to the myth of creation .... The Hebrew author enumerates all the natural forces in which deity was thought to reside, and of all of them he says simply that God made them. Consequently, he eliminates all elements of struggle on the cosmic level; the visible universe is not an uneasy balance of forces, but it is moderated by one supreme will, which imposes itself with effortless supremacy upon all that it has made. By preference the author speaks of the created work rather than of the creative act, because he wishes to emphasize the fact that the creative Deity, unlike Marduk, has not had to win his supremacy by combat with an equal.<sup>22</sup>

Instead of cosmic deities locked in mortal combat, God the Creator works calmly as a craftsman in his shop. There is no more danger that He will fall before the monster of chaos than there is that the chair will devour the carpenter.<sup>23</sup>

As von Rad said, Genesis 1 is not a demythologized narrative but a distinctly antimythical narrative.<sup>24</sup> Thus the creation was "disenchanted," to use the language of the sociologist of religion, Max Weber. By speaking the truth in a world of lies, God emancipated man from the fear of creation to the freedom to research it and bring it under his dominion. Here, then, was the sound philosophical foundation on which true science could progress. Man could now stand at a distance from matter as an observer, calm and unafraid.

#### THE THEOLOGY OF GOD ACCORDING TO GENESIS 1

Genesis 1 points to several activities of God and also reveals several attributes of God. His activities as the Creator, Savior, and Ruler are discussed in the following paragraphs and His attributes will be discussed in the next article in this series.

#### GOD AS THE CREATOR

Foundational to an understanding of God is the truth that He is the Creator above and apart from His creation. The faith that God was the Creator of heaven and earth and not coexistent and coeternal with the creation distinguished Israel's faith from all other religions.

Here was the basis for fellowship between Abraham and Melchizedek. Although much about Melchizedek is not explained, one thing is certain: he worshiped the Creator of heaven and earth. When Melchizedek, king of Salem, met Abraham after his return

22 John L. McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword* (New York: Image Books, 1966), p. 101.

23 Ibid., p. 102.

24 Gerhard von Rad, cited by Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered*, p. 22.

from defeating the kings of the East, he blessed him and said: "Blessed be Abram of El Elyon (the Most High God), Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:15). Abraham immediately recognized this king-priest who worshiped the Creator rather than the creation as *his* king-priest, and Abraham gave him a tenth of all. Indeed they worshiped the same God, but instead of calling God merely by the epithet El Elyon, Abraham added God's personal name and replied, "I have sworn to Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:22). By adding the personal name Yahweh, he revealed that the Most High Creator was also the God of history, law, and ethics, the God who would establish His kingdom on earth through Abraham's seed.

The word for "create" used by Melchizedek in Genesis 14:19, 22 is different from the word used in Genesis 1:1. The verb translated "create" in Genesis 14 is used only four other times in the Old Testament in the sense "to create," but it seems to have been more frequent in the Canaanite world. It was used at Ugarit and was found in the Phoenician inscription of Karatepe. Possibly because of his Canaanite background Melchizedek used this more unusual word.<sup>25</sup>

At this point it may be well to digress and discuss the words for "create" in the Old Testament. Many words, in fact, are used to designate the creative activity of God. In addition to **בָּרָא** found in Genesis 1:1, there are **יָצַר**, "to form"; **עָשָׂה**, "to make"; **יָסַד**, "to found"; **יָלַד**, "to beget"; and others. All these, with the exception of **בָּרָא**, are metaphorical for they are also used of man's creative activity. **בָּרָא**, however, distinguishes itself from these other words by being used exclusively with God as the subject. Moreover, as Julian Morgenstern pointed out, it "never takes the accusative of the material from which a thing is made, as do other verbs of making, but uses the accusative to designate only the thing made."<sup>26</sup> Since it is used exclusively of God and never takes the accusative of the material, some have suggested that the word must mean "to create out of nothing." Evidently assuming that the word meant "to create out of nothing," in contrast to the other words for making, Scofield popularized the view that there were only three creative acts of God:

25 P. Hanhert, "Qavah in Hebrew Bible," in *Festschrift Alfred Bertholet*, eds. Walter Baumgartner et al (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), pp. 258 ff.

26 Julian Morgenstern, "The Sources of the Creation Story - Genesis 1 : 1-2:4," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 36 (1920) 201.

"(1) the heavens and earth, v. 1; (2) animal life, v. 21; and (3) human life, vss. 26-27."<sup>27</sup>

But this distinction cannot be maintained for at least four reasons: (1) usage shows that **ברא** does not necessarily mean "to create out of nothing"; (2) it is used synonymously with other words for "making"; (3) other words for "making" may imply that the thing made did not originate out of preexisting material; and (4) the ancient versions did not see this meaning in the word.

Two passages illustrate that **ברא** was used to mean something other than *creatio ex nihilo*. In Genesis 1:27, God "created" (**ברא**) the man, but in Genesis 2:7 God "formed" (**יצר**) the man from the earth. Moreover, **ברא** is used with a double accusative to define the production of a new mental state; for example, in Isaiah 65:18, the Lord declares, "for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness." Gruenthaner observed: "Evidently, Jerusalem and the people are represented as being prior to the state into which they are converted."<sup>28</sup> **ברא** in Genesis 1:1 does not include the bringing into existence of the negative state described in verse 2. Rather, it means that God utilized it as a part of His creation. In this sense He created it.

That **ברא** is used synonymously with the more colorless word **עשה** seems evident from the following comparisons.

Comparison of **ברא** and **עשה**

Gen. 1:21	God created the sea monsters -- <b>ברא</b>
1:25	God made the beasts -- <b>עשה</b>
1:26	God said, "Let us make man" -- <b>עשה</b>
1:27	And God created man -- <b>ברא</b>
2:4a	When the heavens and the earth were created -- <b>ברא</b> When the Lord God made earth and heaven -- <b>עשה</b>
1:1	God created the heavens and the earth -- <b>ברא</b>
Exod. 19:11	God made the heavens and the earth -- <b>עשה</b>
Gen. 1:16	God made the two great lights . . . and stars -- <b>עשה</b>
Ps. 148:3, 5	Praise Him, sun, moon, . . . stars He commanded and they were created -- <b>ברא</b>
Isa. 40:26	Who created these [sun, moon, stars] -- <b>ברא</b>

<sup>27</sup> *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Michael J. Gruenthaner, "The Scriptural Doctrine in First Creation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 9 (1947) : 50.

Anderson set forth similar comparisons in the use of these words in Isaiah 40-66 and found that **בָּרָא**, **עָשָׂה**, and **יָצַר** are all used synonymously.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, it is clear that **עָשָׂה** and the other verbs may designate creation by fiat *ex nihilo*. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* does not depend on the verb **בָּרָא**. Light was created when God spoke the words, "Let there be light" (v. 3) ; there is not the slightest hint that it sprang from chaos. Similarly, the firmament, which is called "heaven" and which is conceived as a vault separating the lower from the upper water, owes its existence exclusively to a divine command. The sun, moon, and stars came into existence at the sole bidding of their Creator. Several different words are used for God's creative acts:

- God *made* (**עָשָׂה**) the firmament, heavenly bodies, sea animals and birds, land animals and man.
- God *separated* (**בָּדַל**) light and darkness, the waters above and firmament below, the water and dry land.
- God *placed* (**נָתַן**) the heavenly bodies above the uninhabited world, and man to rule over the inhabited world.
- God *created* (**בָּרָא**) sea creatures, birds, man.

The way the verb **בָּרָא** is variously rendered in the Septuagint shows that the translators did not know the popularly alleged distinction.

God is not the Creator of just three aspects of the universe. He is the Creator of the entire universe. The verb **בָּרָא** serves to call attention to His marvelous acts. Here is something that no man or other god could accomplish.

This belief in God as Creator was the essential feature of the Mosaic faith. God considered this aspect of Israel's faith so fundamental and important that when He chose a badge, a sign, a symbol for His theocratic nation to wear, He chose one that displayed Him as the Creator of the heaven and earth. In the fourth of the Ten Commandments God mandated that the people work six days and rest the seventh. He added that they were to do this because He had worked six days and rested on the seventh day.

This was the outward mark, the sign, symbolizing visibly that Israel was in covenant, in league, with God. According to Exodus 31:13, 17 the observance of the Sabbath was a sign between Israel and God. Just as the rainbow symbolized the Noachic Covenant, and circumcision symbolized the Abrahamic Covenant, and the cup

<sup>29</sup> Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos*, pp. 124-26.

of wine symbolized the New Covenant, the observance of the Sabbath symbolized the Old Covenant.

By this ritual, Israel mirrored the Creator on earth and bore witness among the pagan nations that they were in covenant with the transcendent Creator. Here, indeed, was the essential difference in the two faiths. The pagans manipulated their nature deities by their magical words and mimetic ritual of the creation myth. But Israel showed by the mimetic ritual of working six days and resting the seventh day that they were under the Word, the Law, of the Creator, the One who brought the universe into existence by His command. This was the Creator's pattern in the beginning. Genesis 1, then, served as the libretto for Israel's life.

But what about the uncreated or unformed state, the darkness and the deep of Genesis 1:2? Here a great mystery is encountered, for the Bible never says that God brought these into existence by His word. What, then, can be said about them?

First, it can be said that the Book of Genesis does not inform us concerning the origin of that which is contrary to the nature of God, neither in the cosmos nor in the world of the spirit. Where did the opposite of Him that is good, and bright originate? Suddenly, without explanation, in Genesis 3 an utterly evil, brilliant, intelligent personality appears in the Garden of Eden masquerading as a serpent. The principle of origins, so strong in our minds, demands an explanation. But the truth is that the Book mocks us. The Bible provides no information regarding that which is dark and devoid of form. Here are some of the secret things that belong to God.

Second, the situation described in verse 2 was not outside the control of God, for the circumstantial clause adds, "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The verb **רחף** translated "moved upon" occurs elsewhere only in Deuteronomy 32:11 of a **נשר**, either an eagle or a vulture, fluttering over her young in her nest as she cares for them. Although some would translate **רוח אלהים** here by the words "mighty wind,"<sup>30</sup> this is unlikely because everywhere else in this text **אלהים** designates God, and the verb **רחף** implies intelligent concern. Here is no restrainer as in the ancient Near Eastern myth, hindering the Creator, but here is the creative, life-giving Spirit of God waiting the proper moment to begin history by the creation of heaven and earth through the Word. Though not called "good" at first, the darkness and deep were called

30 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 5.

"good" later when they became part of the cosmos. It is all part of God's plan. According to His own sovereign purposes, however, in due time He has said that He will eliminate the darkness and deep from His organized universe altogether.

The biblicist faces a dilemma when considering the origin of those things which are contrary to God. A good God characterized by light could not, in consistency with His nature, create evil, disorder, and darkness. On the other hand, it cannot be eternally outside of Him for that would limit His sovereignty.<sup>31</sup> The Bible resolves the problem not by explaining its origin but by assuring man that it was under the dominion of the Spirit of God.

### GOD AS THE SAVIOR

The narrative of Genesis one served as the libretto for all of Israel's life. Reflection on this libretto for life not only reminded Israel that her God who called her to be His instrument for the salvation of the world was the Creator transcendent above and not immanent in the creation, but also that this same God was Himself a triumphant Savior.

In this series it has been pointed out that the chaos spoken of in Genesis 1:2 was not some living force or principle that could oppose God. But it has also been stated that a hostile dragon symbolized that state of darkness and sea at the time of creation. How can these two viewpoints be reconciled, or are they contradictory, as McKenzie maintained?<sup>32</sup> It seems that both viewpoints are true: on the one hand, the deep and darkness had no life, but on the other hand, they represented a state of existence contrary to the character of God. According to Ramm, verse 2 represents the creation as a block of marble waiting the sculptor's creative touch,<sup>33</sup> and according to Cassuto, it is like the raw clay on a potter's wheel waiting to be fashioned.<sup>34</sup> To many theologians the state of verse 2 should be evaluated as "good." But this evaluation is inconsistent with the biblical viewpoint. The poets of Israel likened it to a monster. The remains of that state are still seen in the surging seas threatening life. The situation of verse 2 is not called good. Moreover, that state of darkness, confusion, and lifelessness is contrary to the nature of God

31 See Karl Barth, *Die Kirckliche Dogmatik* (Zurich, 1945), 3:111-21.

32 McKenzie, *The Two-Edged Sword*, pp. 102-3.

33 Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Gland Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), p. 203.

34 Cassuto, *The Book of Genesis*, 1:23.

in whom there is no darkness. He is called the God of light and life, the God of order.

As Israel reflected on this account of creation, then, it may be concluded that she was reminded that her God was a triumphant Savior, who overcame all that was contrary to His character. To Moses and his followers this fact brought assurance that the victory belonged to God.

But how different was Israel's battle to that of her pagan neighbors. Whereas her neighbors were involved in the battle of overcoming the hostile forces of nature, the gods of inertia, Israel was involved in the political-spiritual battle of overcoming a world hostile and in rebellion to the righteous character of God. The restrainer for Israel was not some cosmic dragon, but the Pharaoh, and the kings of the earth, who agitated like a surging sea against the rule of God. As Marduk overcame Tiamat, so Yahweh overcame Rahab, the Pharaoh, and so Yahweh would overcome His enemies including even Satan himself.

In fact, in contrast to the pagan celebrations reenacting an annual victory over the hostile forces of nature, all of Israel's celebrations commemorated God's victories in history in His ongoing program of establishing His righteous rule on earth. At the Passover ritual Israel celebrated the deliverance from the oppressive Pharaoh; at the Feast of Firstfruits she celebrated the victory of taking the land from the resisting Canaanites; and at the Feast of Tabernacles Israel anticipated the ultimate establishment of God's universal rule over the world which He had created in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

#### GOD AS THE RULER

In the "creation myths" of the pagans, the god responsible for the creation emerged as the ruler after his victory. So also God's story about creation revealed that He is the supreme ruler, sovereignly exercising His lordship in and over all the creation.

The narrative of Genesis 1 includes several indications of God's absolute lordship. The essence of the creative process is the will of God expressed through His word. A basic pattern runs through each creative act. Westermann analyzed that common pattern as follows:<sup>36</sup>

35 Terry Hulbert, "Eschatological Significance of Israel's Annual Feasts" (Th.D. disc., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965), p. 95.

36 Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 7.

Announcement: And God said . . .

Command: "let there be .. let it be gathered .  
let it bring forth ..."

Report: And it was so

Evaluation: And God saw that it was good.

Temporal framework: And there was evening, and there  
was morning, the ... day.

This analysis readily exposes the fact that the essential feature of the creative process was the command of God. Westermann observed: "These five elements are but parts of one coherent whole: a command. The whole creation came into existence because God willed it, God commanded it."<sup>37</sup> Von Rad observed: "The world and its fulness do not find their unity and inner coherence in a cosmological first principle, such as the Ionian natural philosophers tried to discover but in the completely personal will of Yahweh their creator."<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, to show His sovereign dominion over His creation, God gave names to the light, to the darkness, to the firmament, to the dry land, and to the gathered waters. He called them Day, Night, Heavens, Earth, and Sea, respectively. To understand the significance of this act of naming the parts of the creation it must be realized that in the Semitic world the naming of something or someone was the token of lordship. Reuben, for example, changed the names of the cities of the Amorites after he had conquered them (Num. 32:38). Likewise, Pharaoh Necho changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim after he had defeated the Judean king (2 Kings 23:34). Is it not significant that God gave names precisely to those features that belonged to the precreated situation? In so doing He showed that He was Lord of all.

He left it to man to decide the names of the birds and of the domesticated and wild animals. He did not name these because He had delegated His authority to man to have dominion over the earth. Thus by naming the creatures of the earth man brought them under his dominion. Significantly, before God gave Adam His most precious gift, the woman, God had man first show his ability to rule by naming the other creatures. But, then, in one of the most instructive insights into the mind of man before the fall, Adam named her after himself (Gen. 2:23). He was אִישׁ; she would be אִשָּׁה, the feminine form of אִישׁ. In this way Adam was saying, "She is my equal." He was

37 Ibid.

38 Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 1:141.

her lord, but he recognized her as his equal. What a perfect blending of leadership and love in the first husband.

God, who is Ruler of all, then delegated His authority to others. To the sun and the moon He gave the rule over the day and the night (Gen. 1:16), but to man He gave the rule over the earth (1:26). Does man want to know what it means to rule the earth? Then let him look to the sun and the moon as his example in the heavens. There he can see excellence, beauty, faithfulness and dependability, as these creatures fulfill and actualize their Creator's intent.

What an example and what an encouragement this creation narrative must have been to Israel, called on to bring the earth under His righteous rule. As they reflected on God's creative acts, they were reminded that they were called on to rule under and with the Ruler par excellence (Deut. 20:10-18). If they would be obedient to His word, they too would create a society in which righteousness and peace would kiss each other.

And what an encouragement that they would ultimately succeed! The Creator did not leave His job half finished. He perfected the creation, and then He established it. He did not end up with chaos, as Isaiah noted (Isa. 45:18). Neither would He forget His people. The program He began with He would consummate in triumphant rest.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary

3909 Swiss Ave.

Dallas, TX 75204

[www.dts.edu](http://www.dts.edu)

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)

## **The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 Part V: The Theology of Genesis 1--Continued**

Bruce K. Waltke

The preceding article in this series discussed some of the activities of God revealed in the creation account in Genesis 1.<sup>1</sup> This present article continues the discussion of the theology of Genesis 1 and then considers the relationship of other Old Testament creation passages to the interpretation of Genesis 1 suggested in this series.

### **GOD'S DIVINE ATTRIBUTES SEEN IN GENESIS 1**

Genesis 1 revealed to Israel the activities of God as Creator, Savior, and Ruler. But it also revealed something of His attributes, including His greatness, wisdom, and goodness.

#### **HIS GREATNESS**

What splendid power and greatness God displayed by His creation. The Creator is a fortiori greater than His creation. Isaiah declared that Israel's God holds in the hollow of one hand all the water of the sea, and with the outstretched fingers of His other hand measures the expanse of the sky. Isaiah then added that God could take all the dust of the earth and pour it into His little basket and weigh all the mountains of the earth on His scales (Isa. 40:12).

<sup>1</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1: 1-3; Part IV: The Theology of Genesis 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (October-December 1975): 327-42.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final installment in a series of five articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from I (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).

If God was great to Israel which had a limited view of the universe, how much greater He ought to be to modern man. Today we know that our galaxy is spinning like a gigantic pinwheel extending for 104,000 light-years from one end to the other. Our sun is 25,000 light-years from the center of this gigantic spiral and rotates around its center once every one million years. Above and below the spiral of our galaxy are about one hundred clusters of stars with one million stars in each cluster, and some of them have a diameter of 16 million miles. And to think we are but part of one of thousands of galaxies! Certainly God's vast creation reveals something of His own greatness.

### HIS WISDOM

In the creation God's wisdom is displayed. He achieved the cosmos by first establishing the separation of the supportive systems necessary for life and man's existence, and by then filling these with moving and living creatures. On the first three days He overcame the lack of form, the **אֵת**, and on the next three days, and parallel to them, He overcame the emptiness of space, perhaps the **בְּהוּ**. The following well-known model of creation illustrates this creative work.<sup>2</sup>

<b>אֵת</b> - Unformed		<b>בְּהוּ</b> - Unfilled	
	Day	Day	
1	Light	4	Luminaries
2	Water	5	Fish
	Sky		Birds
3	Land	6	Beasts
	Vegetation		Man

Instead of having been produced by gods locked in deadly conflict, the universe is the beautiful and orderly product of the one wise, creative Mind. On the first day temporal separation was achieved by the separation of light from darkness. On the second and third days spatial separation was achieved. The sky was separated from the water on the second day, but no pronouncement of good was given because spatial separation was not yet complete. Only with the separation of land, the third life supportive system, did God pronounce the spatial separation as good or complete. The parallelism of the last three days with the first three is

<sup>2</sup> Ronald Youngblood, "Moses and the King of Siam," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 16 (Fall 1973): 219.

apparent. Whereas on the first day there was light, on the fourth day the light was localized into luminaries; whereas on the second day the water and sky were separated, on the fifth day the fish were created to fill the seas and the birds to fill the skies; whereas land and vegetation were created on the third day, on the sixth day the land animals and man were formed to live on the land and to be sustained by its vegetation.

Unlike Marduk who needed the wisdom of his father Ea in order to effect the creation, Yahweh acted alone in His sublime intelligence. Isaiah inferred this contrast when he asked:

Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD,  
Or as His counselor has informed Him?  
With whom did He consult and who gave  
Him understanding?  
And who taught Him in the path of justice  
and taught Him knowledge,  
And informed Him of the way of understanding?  
(Isa. 40:13-14).

Isaiah's point, however, is not clear in this translation found in the New American Standard Version. The following translation by R. N. Whybray more accurately captures Isaiah's thought:

Who has understood the mind of Yahweh,  
or who was his counselor, who instructed him?  
Whom did he consult for his guidance,  
and who taught him the way to achieve order,  
And showed him how to exercise creative skill?<sup>3</sup>

Four crucial differences separate the two translations:

Comparison of Whybray and NASB

Hebrew	NASB	Why bray
תָּכַן	directed	understood
רוּחַ	Spirit	mind
מִשְׁפָּט	justice	to achieve order
תְּבוּנָה	understanding	creative skill

The verb תָּכַן can be translated "directed" or "understood" (Ezek. 19:25, 29; 33:17-20; Prov. 16:2; 21:2; 24:12; 1 Sam. 2:3). The translation "understood" is preferred here to "directed" because

<sup>3</sup> R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13-14* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), p. 18.

in verse 12 the same verb undoubtedly means "to measure." In fact, in verse 12 the NASB translated **הִכִּן** "to measure." One would normally assume that the word would have the same meaning in the next verse. Moreover, the notion of "measure" fits this passage better. Isaiah is asking, "Who has measured the mind of Yahweh?" i.e., "Who has comprehended it?" or as the Septuagint correctly interpreted it, **τίς ἔγνω νοῦν κυρίου**: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" In another connection Paul asked that same question: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (1 Cor. 2:16).

As to the second difference, Whybray follows the Septuagint translation of "mind" rather than the more normal rendering "spirit" for the word **רוּחַ**. In deciding this issue it should be noted first that **רוּחַ** can mean "mind." In Ezekiel 20:32 it is in the **רוּחַ** that a thought or plan is formed. Similarly 1 Chronicles 28:12 refers to the plan which David "had in mind" to build the temple of Yahweh. Second, it should be noted that the principal verbs in these verses are **יָדַע** ("to know") (40:13, 14b), **בִּין** ("to understand") (40:14a), **לָמַד** ("to train"). The emphasis in these verbs is on "knowing," "understanding," "thinking." Therefore, the Septuagint once again, followed by Paul, has probably given us the true sense by opting for "mind" rather than "spirit."

A third difference between Whybray and the NASB is in the rendering of **מִשְׁפָּט**. The basic meaning of this word is "to establish the heavenly norm or pattern on earth." Normally this concept is applied to society, i.e., the bringing of society into the right order or arrangement. In this sense it is translated "justice." But in three passages its meaning is applied to a building. In Exodus 26:30; 1 Kings 6:38; and Ezekiel 42:11 this word is used in reference to the design of the tabernacle, the temple of Solomon, and the future temple prophesied by Ezekiel, respectively. Significantly, in all these passages it refers to the design or arrangement of God's dwelling place. Once again, Whybray has opted for the better sense, though unquestionably it is the more unusual one, for in this passage Isaiah is speaking of God as the Creator, the Designer of the world. For example, in verse 12 he speaks of God holding the whole creation in His hands; in verse 22 he says that God has stretched out the heavens like a curtain; and in verse 26 he says that Yahweh created the stars. The notion of social justice does not fit the context, but the unusual notion of constructing a building according to a design fits easily. Isaiah is asking in effect, "under whom did God serve as an apprentice to learn how to fashion this building, this temple, if you please,

namely the cosmos?" In effect, the earth is God's temple where He can fellowship with man.

Regarding the fourth difference, **תְּבַנְנֹתָ** can be used of those who have technical skill in constructing God's buildings. It is used of Bezaleel who had responsibility for the artistic designs of the implements of the tabernacle (Exod. 31:3; 35:1); it is used of Oholiab and every skillful person engaged in the tabernacle (Exod. 36:1); and it is used of Hiram who built Solomon's temple. This sense parallels precisely the suggested sense for **מִשְׁפֵּט**. Isaiah spoke of God's skill in building His temple, the cosmos.

It is concluded, therefore, that the intent of Isaiah's questions is to show that God acted alone in the designing and fashioning of this cosmos, His temple.

Whybray has pointed out that in this passage we have another polemic against the Babylonian creation myth. According to the *Enuma elish*, Marduk, the storm god who was credited with the creation, was counseled by his father Ea, the god of wisdom.

Whybray noted:

One of the most striking features of this poem is the role of Ea, the father of Marduk. In several respects his influence outweighs that of Marduk, in spite of the latter's frequently proclaimed kingship. It is Ea "the all wise" (1:60) who devises and executes the scheme for slaying Apsu, "the begetter of the gods," and who renders powerless his adviser and vizier, Mummu; and it is he who begets Marduk. When Anshar, the president of the assembly, proposes that Marduk, as a young and vigorous god, should be chosen to avenge the gods against Tiamat, it is again Ea who gives advice to Marduk before the interview (II: 96ff.).<sup>4</sup>

But in Yahweh's court there is none who can measure the extent of His mind and serve as His counselor. By Himself and in His supreme intelligence God fashioned the harmonious symbiotic cosmos. In the light of this expression we can better understand what we are in Christ: "We have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16).

## HIS GOODNESS

The narrative recorded in Genesis 1 also taught God's people the Creator's goodness. All that He made He called good; but more than that, He gave it all to man as a gift. All was under the dominion of Yahweh and He in turn had committed the dominion of the earth to man. Here indeed was a benevolent Despot.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

The separation of the elements into their life supportive systems enabled man to live. The heavenly bodies not only served as an example of rulership but also served to enable man to observe the seasons and times as he took part in the historical process, in which sphere the Creator was pleased to display His other sublime moral attributes of justice, righteousness, grace, and truth. The animals were under man's sway, and the herbs, vegetation, and fruit provided for his physical needs. It was not good that man should be alone, and so God made him a counterpart equal with himself.

Moreover, whereas everything else was created remotely from God, man came directly from the heart, hand, and nostrils of God. The vegetation sprang from the earth, the sea creatures originated out of the sea, and the beasts likewise trace their origin back to the earth. All these were created through the mediacy of other agents. But not man. At the chronological pyramid of creation stands man, and nothing stands between him and God. He originated from the hand and breath of God. The Creator resolved in His heart to make him: "Let us make man in our own image and our likeness" (Gen. 1:26). Here then is God's counterpart; not His equal, but one sharing His nature and dominion. Man too is crowned with glory and honor, as the psalmist stated (Ps. 8). As God is a plurality so also is man a plurality. "Let us," said the Creator and He made "them." Both are a plural unity. On him the Creator pronounced His effective word of blessing. The same word that brought the heavens and the earth into existence placed His word of blessing on the head of man: "Be fruitful and multiply." Surely Israel must have had a good self-image that psychological necessity for mental health. Then the Creator gave man, His image, the Sabbath rest.

How different all this was from the Israelites' pagan neighbors. The scriptural story is a breath of fresh air in a stagnant room; it is light in the midst of darkness. According to Tablet VI of *Enuma elish*, man was created from the blood of Kingu, a rebel deity, and for the purpose of doing the work of the gods. The text reads:

They bound him Kingu] holding him before Ea,  
They imposed on him guilt and severed his blood (vessels).  
Out of his blood they fashioned mankind:  
He [Ea] imposed the service and let free the gods.  
After Ea, the wise, had created mankind,  
Had imposed upon it the service of the gods  
That work was beyond comprehension ....<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 68.

The creation myth, then, underscored in the minds of its celebrants that they were slaves. Sarna observed, "The position and function of man in the scheme of creation paralleled precisely the status of the slaves in Mesopotamia."<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, one should note the contrast in viewpoints toward the seventh day. In contrast to the blessed nature and refreshment of Israel's Sabbath, the seventh day in Mesopotamia was a day of bad luck. Those pagans feared that their work would not prosper on the seventh, fourteenth, twenty-first, and twenty-eighth days of the month, days which were connected with the four phases of the moon. Concerning these days Cassuto wrote: "These days, to which must be added the nineteenth of the month, which occurs seven weeks after the beginning of the preceding month, were regarded as unlucky days on which a man should afflict himself, eschew pleasures, and refrain from performing important work, for they would not prosper."<sup>7</sup>

It is against this environment and background that one can appreciate the Bible and the God of grace who revealed His benevolent virtues to man.

#### OTHER CREATION PASSAGES

Having considered the basic text bearing on creation and chaos and its theological implications, the writer now turns to other texts of the Old Testament to test and to clarify his conclusions about creation and chaos. Most writers regard the divergent texts about creation as contradictory and make no attempt to harmonize them. But this skepticism is unworthy of a book that bears the earmarks of an Author in whom there is no confusion.

#### PSALM 104

An analysis of Psalm 104 reveals that the author celebrates the works of God essentially according to the six creative days of Genesis.

Psalm 104 and Genesis 1			
Day	Text	Ps. 104	Gen. 1
1	"covering yourself with light"	2a	3-5
2	"stretching out the heaven"	2b-4	6-8

<sup>6</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken Books, 1972), p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961 and 1964), 1:66.

3	He established the earth/set a boundary for [the deep] (Description of rain and springs)	5-9 10-11	9-10
	He causes the grass to grow	14-18	11-13
4	He made the moon . . . sun	19-20	14-19
6	the young lions roar/man goes forth to his work	21-23	24-31
5	"There is the sea/and leviathan, which you formed to sport in it."	24-26	20-23

It is apparent that the poet-psalmist has signaled out the sea and its creature, leviathan, for special emphasis by placing the creation of the fifth day after the sixth. In the light of the pagan myths it is quite clear that his intentions are polemical. Whereas in the pagan creation myths the sea and its monster were dreaded manifestations of the hostile cosmic forces, the inspired poet climactically declared that these, too, are the work of God.

But the crucial verse in this discussion is verse 6. Here it is stated that in the creation God covered the earth with the **תְּהוֹם** ("the deep") as with a garment. At first glance this seems to contradict this writer's analysis of Genesis 1:2, for it seems to say that God created the deep referred to there. Psalm 104:6 reads: "Thou didst cover it with the deep as with a garment; the waters were standing above the mountains." The waters referred to here, however, are not the flood mentioned in Genesis 1:2, but the flood mentioned in connection with Noah, recorded in Genesis 6:9. Several reasons are suggested in support of this view:<sup>8</sup>

First, though the psalm is structured after Genesis 1, it is not a cosmogony. It is a description of the earth as it is now. The perspective is not that of the origin of creation, but of a man living after the events of the early chapters of Genesis. For example, the psalmist speaks of the cultivated grains: "He causes the grass to grow for the (domesticated cattle, and vegetation for the labor of man, so that he might bring forth bread from the earth" (v. 14). According to Genesis 2:6 and 3:17-18, however, cultivated grains and the bread from them did not originate until after the Fall of man. Moreover, the psalmist speaks in verse 13 of God watering

<sup>8</sup> For a contrary analysis see Arch Rutherford, "The Relationship of Psalm 104 to the Doctrine of Creation" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971), pp. 27/ff.

the mountains from His upper chambers--again a situation that did not prevail until after the Fall of man, according to Genesis 2:5-6. Then, too, he speaks of God's creatures dying and returning to the dust: "You hide your face and they are dismayed; You take away your spirit and they expire and return to the dust" (v. 29). On the other hand, he insists that creation continues now. Verse 30 reads: "You send forth Your spirit and they are created; and You renew the face of the ground." The psalmist, then, is not giving a cosmogony, but a description of creation as it is now.

Second, the psalmist states that this flood will never again cover the earth. "You set a boundary that they [the flood waters of v. 6] may not pass over; that they may never again cover the earth" (v. 9). How could he have the flood of Genesis 1:2 in mind when later in the time of Noah, God once again unleashed the destructive sea and once again covered the earth? Surely, the psalmist must have had in mind the deluge at the time of Noah, for it was only after this flood that God promised never again to destroy the earth with a flood (Gen. 9:11).

Third, the terminology of Psalm 104:6 is precisely the same as that used in connection with the flood in Genesis 7:19: "And the water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered." This view agrees with Morris and Whitcomb, who interpret verse 6 in connection with the Noahic flood.<sup>9</sup>

Fourth, it is significant to note that the psalmist begins creation with light, not with an earth devoid of form and covered with darkness. This psalm, then, does not differ from the proposed exegesis of Genesis 1.

But the point of the psalm should not be missed. The purpose of creation is doxological: "Bless the LORD, oh my soul! Oh LORD my God, Thou art very great" (v. 1).

#### JOB 38:4-11

This passage may be divided into two equal parts, with four lines in each stanza: the creation of the earth (vv. 4-7), and the creation of the sea (vv. 8-11).

The issue here is whether this poem can be harmonized better with the state described in Genesis 1:2 or with the creation of the dry land and sea on the third day as described in Genesis 1:9-10.

<sup>9</sup> John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 77.

To put it another way, is the earth referred to in Job 38:4 the unformed earth or the dry land separated from the sea?

The key to the correct harmonization of Job 38:4-7 with Genesis I is found in the metaphorical word **יָסַד** "to found," "to establish" (v. 4). In this highly evocative poem God is likened to a builder, an architect, constructing His magnum opus. He begins by preparing its footings and finally finishes the foundation by laying the chief cornerstone. It seems impossible to harmonize this imagery with the **יָבֵשׁ וְיָבֵשׁ** of Genesis 1:2, which means precisely the opposite. In Isaiah 34:11 the metaphor of building was used but with the opposite intent. Instead of using the line and plummet for erecting the house, God was there using them to dismantle the house. After He had dismantled it He ended with **יָבֵשׁ וְיָבֵשׁ**, which means "not built." How, then, could Job's imagery of building refer to the unformed state of Genesis 1:2? The notions are contradictory. On the other hand, there is nothing inconsistent here with applying the metaphor to the triumphant command, "Then God said, Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place, and let the dry land appear" (Gen. 1 :9).

This harmonization is further confirmed by the description of the seas. The poet does not have in mind the formation of a deep which covered the unformed earth as depicted in Genesis 1:2. He means precisely the opposite. He has in view a sea under very restricted limits. Using the figure known as hypocaustasis, God asks, "Who enclosed the sea with doors?" (v. 8), and then He continued, "I placed boundaries on it, and I set a bolt and doors, and I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther; and here shall your proud ways stop' " (vv. 10-11 ). This imagery can only be harmonized with the command in Genesis 1:9, "Let the waters below the heavens be gathered into one place." The mention of darkness with the sea (which might cause one at first to think of the unformed state in Genesis 1:2) must be associated from the context with the darkness under God's creative design after the first day.

As the Creator calmed the turbulent sea, so this revelation from God quieted the temptuous spirit of Job.

#### PROVERBS 8:22-31

By means of soliloquy the wisdom poet seeks to show the primacy of wisdom. In the poem, wisdom claims to have existed prior to and at the time of God's first created acts. The issue is, What does wisdom include among God's creative acts? By implication the

"depths and springs" mentioned in verse 24 are included among God's creative acts.

Many commentators assume that the "depths" spoken of in verse 24 refer to the **אֵי** mentioned in Genesis 1:2. If this is so, then wisdom is including the state mentioned in Genesis 1:2 as among God's creative acts, and the present writer's analysis of Genesis 1:1-3 must be wrong. On the other hand, it should be noted that **אֵי** is used over thirty times in the Old Testament to designate the oceans which came into existence on the second and third days as part of God's creative process in separating out the spatial elements of the cosmos. Indeed, the mention of "depths" as plural in the passages favors this latter interpretation, for the "oceans" formed on these days are mentioned frequently in the plural.

An analysis of the structure of the Proverbs passage will confirm the thesis that the "depths" should be understood as those formed on the second and third days, and not the depths covering the unformed earth mentioned in Genesis 1:2.

Gemser noted the formal resemblance of verses 22 to 31 with the Egyptian and Babylonian hymns of creation.<sup>10</sup> That is helpful, but even more helpful is the realization that the structure is precisely like that of Genesis 1:1-3,<sup>11</sup> as seen in the following analysis:

- I. Summary statement 8:22-23 (2 vv.)  
 The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way,  
 before His works of old.  
 From everlasting I was established  
 from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.
- II. Circumstantial clauses 8:24-29 (6 vv.)
  - A. Negative situation: "when-not-yet" sea or land. 8:24-26 (3 vv.)
    1. When there were no depths I was brought forth,  
 when there were no springs abounding with water.
    2. Before the mountains were settled,  
 before the hills I was brought forth;
    3. While He had not yet made the earth and the fields,  
 for the first dust of the world.

<sup>10</sup> Cited by William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), p. 352.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3; Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (July-September 1975): 226-28.

B. Positive situation: "When He made" heaven, sea, land.

8:27-29 (3 vv.)

1. When He established the heavens, I was there,  
when He inscribed a circle on the face of the deep,
2. When He made firm the skies above,  
when the springs of the deep became fixed,
3. When He set for the sea its boundary,  
so that the water should not transgress His command,  
when he marked out the foundations of the earth.

III. Main clause: waw consecutive with prefixed conjugation form.

8:30-31 (2 vv.)

Then I was beside Him, as a master workman;  
and I was daily His delight,  
rejoicing always before Him,  
Rejoicing in the world, His earth,  
and having my delight in the sons of men.

It is clear that in five of the six lines of the circumstantial clauses, wisdom has in mind the creative acts of the second and third days when God achieved the spatial separation of the universe. The positive circumstantial clauses (vv. 27-29) speak of the separation of the heavens from the springs of the deep and of the separation of the earth from the sea. Here too is further confirmation that the analysis of Job 38:4 is correct because the same imagery of a builder laying a foundation is used, and here it is clearly in connection with the separation of the waters from the dry land.

Moreover, it is also certain that in the negative circumstantial clauses of verses 25 and 26 the poet, characterizing the earth by mountains and hills, fields and dust, obviously does not have in mind an earth unformed and unfilled. So then the earth in view is the earth that appeared on the third day of creation. If five of the six lines clearly speak of the creation that occurred on the second and third days, and the one remaining line (v. 24) can refer to that time, is it not probable that this is actually the case? Should not an ambiguous line be interpreted by the unambiguous ones? In a word, nothing in the context suggests that the poet has in mind the state described in Genesis 1:2. It is therefore concluded that Proverbs 8:24 is best harmonized with the creation of the sea on the second and third days.

Once again the text can be harmonized, and it need not be concluded that the scriptural accounts of creation are incompatible with one another.

#### ISAIAH 45:7

This is the only verse in Scripture which states that God created darkness. He is said to be "the One forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity." How can this statement be harmonized with the view that in Genesis 1 God did not create the darkness? Two answers may be given in response to this question. Since God incorporated the darkness as part of His creation (in order to provide temporary separation), He may well have had in view this act of the first day. In this sense one can say that God formed the light and even created the darkness. This writer, however, prefers a different solution--an answer that views this verse in its larger context as part of the conclusion to the Cyrus oracle in Isaiah 44:24-45:4. In 44:24-28 God calls Cyrus His shepherd who would release His people from the restraint of the Babylonian captivity and in 45:1-4, He calls Cyrus His Messiah ("anointed") who would smash Israel's oppressors. On the one hand, then, Yahweh's servant brings peace for God's people; and on the other hand, Cyrus brings destruction on Israel's enemies. Cyrus is the author of both peace and calamity; or to use metaphorical terms, he is the author of both light and darkness. But the one who called Cyrus to his twofold task is none other than Yahweh, the Author of both.

#### CONCLUSION

The creation account of the Old Testament finds its full explanation in Jesus of Nazareth, the God-man. As God, He is the Creator, the One full of light, life, wisdom, and goodness. As man, He is the One who is bringing the earth under His dominion. The earth that the first Adam lost to Satan through his disobedience to the command of God is being reclaimed by the Second Adam through His obedience to the Cross. He is presently winning it back by His spiritual victories in the lives of men and He will finally put all things under His feet at the Second Advent.

John wrote about Him as the Creator: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that

has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:1-5).

Paul also wrote about Christ as the Creator: "For Him all things were created, both in the heavens, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities- all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17) . And the writer of the Book of Hebrews spoke of Him as the man who will bring all things under His dominion: "He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, 'What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him? Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.' For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:5-8).

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary  
3909 Swiss Ave.  
Dallas, TX 75204  
[www.dts.edu](http://www.dts.edu)

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: [thildebrandt@gordon.edu](mailto:thildebrandt@gordon.edu)