

PRIMEVAL PROLOGUE: GENESIS 1:1—11:32

COMMENTARY

I. CREATION AND ALIENATION (GENESIS 1—3)

Overview

None of us ever will read three chapters together—not in the Bible, and certainly not in any other literary work—more important than Gen 1—3. No other three-chapter section of the Bible (and certainly not of any other literary work) evokes the interest, nor elicits the blizzard of written response, that Gen 1—3 evokes and elicits. Yet no other three-chapter section of the Bible has been subjected to as much under-informed, misinformed, ill-informed—and at the extreme end of the spectrum, hostile—commentary as has Gen 1—3. Genesis 1—3 is intensely interesting, and its proper understanding is foundational to Christian faith and life. Yet, its proper understanding is beset with difficulties as small as the meaning of a single noun and as large as the imposition upon it of comprehensive paradigms completely alien to it.

A proper understanding of Gen 1—3 is critical, if for no other reason than its primacy in the canon of Christian Scripture. An accurate understanding of Gen 1—3 should shape our understanding of all else that follows in the biblical and postbiblical records of God's people. Together, Gen 1 and 2 comprise the only extended biblical narrative of God's creation of this earth and of its living entities, culminating in the humans created in the image of God. Genesis 3 narrates the human choice of estrangement from God, from each other, and from the rest of the created order. These chapters separately or together provide the foundation for the biblical theology of creation, estrangement, redemption, and restoration—separately or together. Thus, what these chapters teach us of God's creation intentions, and of the consequences of our turning from God, is of the *utmost* importance. *All* Christian teaching about God, humanity, and God's relationship to the world should conform to the *intended* teachings of these chapters. *None* of our thinking about God, about the earth and the universe we live in, about our human relationships at every level—in short, about anything—should contradict the *intended* teachings of these chapters.

Genesis 1:1—2:3 is the opening literary unit of both the Jewish and the Christian Scriptures. Unlike creation stories from other parts of the world, including those of ancient Israel's pagan neighbors, the opening sentence of this literary unit goes back to the very beginning of all that is, except for God: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (1:1). Thus, the preceding context, both literarily within the book of Genesis, and theologically in the creation of the cosmos, is nothing—nothing, that is, except God.

Ancient Israel, however, did not exist in a vacuum. For much of their existence as a nation in their own land, Israel had more powerful neighbors, Egypt to their southwest and the empires of Mesopotamia—first Assyria, then Babylonia, then Persia—to their north and east. Moreover, Israel counted the beginnings of their cultural heritage from Mesopotamia, and significant influence came from Egypt early on, as well. Israel's immediate neighbors, also, largely Canaanite/Phoenician in their culture, exercised considerable influence on Israel over the centuries of their existence as a people in their own land. All these neighbors of Israel possessed creation stories, some of them quite elaborate and extended. It is reasonable to assume that educated Israelites would have known the creation stories of their neighbors. It is also possible that Israelites who wavered in their devotion to Yahweh would have been attracted to their neighbors' creation theologies.

Yet, at least a minority in Israel and in Judah always remained faithful to Yahweh and faithfully preserved the historical and theological traditions of the nation. The placement of Israel's creation stories at the beginning of Israel's sacred writings indicates its primary place in Israel's theology. The creation stories in Genesis give Yahweh Elohim his proper place as the transcendent Creator and Maker of all that is in heaven and on earth. The creation

stories in Genesis also critique and challenge the religious ideas and claims of the creation stories of their neighbors. Genesis 1:1—2:3 is the great summary of creation, and it takes special care to establish that the natural phenomena worshipped by Israel's neighbors as the pantheon of the great gods are, in fact, not gods themselves, but God's creations.

Genesis 2:4-25 relates God's intimate care in the making of the first humans. Much of modern scholarship views 1:1—2:3 (or, 2:4a) and 2:4b-25 as two separate accounts, the first from a priestly writer and the second from a Yahwist writer. (The issues of 2:4 are particularly knotty, as discussed in the commentary below.) Moreover, many scholars understand the second account as the earliest version of Israel's creation faith (perhaps from around the eighth century B.C.), and the first account as a later theological reflection of God's creation of the world, from the period of the Babylonian exile or later (sixth or fifth century B.C.). Others, including the writer of this commentary, are less confident in our ability to reconstruct the prehistory of the present text. Whichever perspective one maintains regarding the nature of the relationship between these two accounts, one thing remains clear. In their present canonical form, these two narratives belong together, and together they convey the initial biblical understandings of God as Creator, of creation, of humanity, and of God's creation intentions for the relationships among them.

Genesis 3 paints the vivid picture of the origin of human beings' estrangement from God and others. The narrative depicts the first humans, created in God's own image, listening to a creature (and a stranger, to boot), rather than to their Creator. The consequence was the tragic fracturing of the wholesome relationships that had existed between and among God, humans, and the rest of God's earthly creation.

The various narrative segments in Gen 1—3 reveal a beautiful example of the simultaneous patterning, or the presence of more than one literary patterning or sequencing, often found in great literary works. In Gen 1—3 as a whole, we note the following repeated pattern of bringing a discussion of one subject to a climax, then focusing on the subject of that unit's climax in greater detail in the following discussion, or unit.

First Unit: *Subject*—creation of the heavens and the earth (1:1); *Climax*—the earth (1:1)

Second Unit: *Subject*—creation upon the earth (1:2—2:3); *Climax*—creation of the first humans (1:26-31)

Third Unit: *Subject*—making of the first human pair (2:4-25); *Climax*—both naked and not ashamed (2:25)

Fourth Unit: *Subject*—how humans learned shame (3:1-24); *Climax*—expulsion from the garden (3:23-24)

A. Creation upon the Earth (1:1—2:3)

BEHIND THE TEXT

The seven paragraphs of the creation week

The artistry of literary sequencing found in chs 1—3, as a whole, also is evident in the first longer unit, 1:1—2:3. Following the short introductory paragraph (1:1-2), the narrative of creation is organized into seven successive paragraphs, the seven successive days of the creation week. The seven paragraphs exhibit a number of features in common. Each of the first six paragraphs, narrating the six days of God’s actual creative work, begins, “And God [*Elohim*] said, ‘Let there be . . .’ [or the logical and necessary variant, ‘Let X bring forth . . .’].” Other recurring features include the report “it was so,” and God’s assessment or evaluation, “it was good.” Each of these paragraphs also ends, “And there was evening, and there was morning—the X day.” This feature, of course, is the source of the common titles, “day one” (or “first day”), “second day” (or “day two”), etc., for the successive days of the creation week.

Within these seven paragraphs, however, other common features vary in their presence within or absence from any given paragraph, another sign of the author’s literary skill. Moreover, and partly as a sign of its unique subject—the account of the seventh/Sabbath day—the seventh paragraph does not follow the pattern of the first six either at its beginning or at its end, though it does show other commonalities with some of the preceding six paragraphs.

The pairing of the six creation days

Another sign of the skilled literary crafting of this account is the symmetrical pairing of the six days of God’s creation work, as follows:

Day 1—Light	Day 4—Light-bearers
Day 2—Skies and seas	Day 5—Sky creatures and sea creatures
Day 3—Dry land	Day 6—Land creatures, including the <i>’ādām</i>

The importance of these pairings will become evident as we discuss them in the commentary, below.

The number seven

Another literary feature of Gen 1:1—2:3 is its use of the number seven—a number of perfection in many cultures—and its multiples. Besides the obvious seven paragraphs of the seven days of the creation week, we may observe immediately that v 1 comprises seven words (Hebrew), and v 2 comprises fourteen. Cassuto notes these, among others (1961, 13-15): “God” [*Elohim*] occurs thirty-five times; “earth,” twenty-one times; “heavens” (together with “expanse/firmament”), twenty-one times; “light” and “day” occur seven times in the first paragraph (day one); “water(s)” occurs seven times in paragraphs two and three; “light” occurs seven times in paragraph four; references to “living creatures” oc-

cur seven times in paragraphs six and seven; God's evaluation that "it was good" occurs seven times; the middle three sentences of the seventh paragraph dealing with the seventh day comprise seven words each; in the middle of these three sentences occurs the phrase "the seventh day"; the seventh paragraph contains thirty-five words altogether. As Cassuto comments, "To suppose that all this is a mere coincidence is not possible" (1961, 15).

The lengthening of successive paragraphs

Another literary feature that has to do with word count is the lengthening of the paragraphs as the narrative of the creation days progresses. Paragraph/day one is thirty-one words (Hebrew text); paragraph/day two is thirty-eight words. Paragraphs three, four, and five are approximately double the first two. Paragraph/day three and paragraph/day four are sixty-nine words each; paragraph/day five is fifty-seven words. Paragraph/day six is one hundred forty-nine words, a little more than double the paragraph lengths for each of the previous three days. Dorsey is correct in observing, "This structuring technique conveys the impression of ever-increasing variety and profusion" (1999, 49).

A phenomenological telling

Finally, we never shall understand Gen 1:1—2:3, especially, unless we understand its phenomenological approach. That is, this text is written from the point of view of the earth's surface, and presents its subjects as they present themselves to humans here (cf. LaSor 1987, 7-8). It does not contradict science in any particular, and could not, since it is a very general and generalized, short account. But neither is it intended as a scientific treatise—again, because it is a short and very generalized account, and its interests lie elsewhere than in modern astronomy, geology, biological taxonomy, and cellular biology, including the recent more sensational findings of DNA research.

Thus, Gen 1:6-8 pictures the "expanse," "firmament," or "sky" (*rāqīa'*) as a giant bowl resting upside-down upon the surface of the earth. Indeed, when one sees the daytime sky unobstructed through the complete circle of the horizon, it does appear as a bowl resting on the earth at the horizon, all around the circle. On an unclouded night, with views to the horizon all around, it is easy to experience the sky as a giant inverted colander!

Similarly, the account of day four says nothing about the nature, or the celestial positioning and movement, of the light-bearers. For theological reasons it does not even name them, but simply states that God placed them where they are, *with respect to how we see and experience them*, to perform the tasks God appointed them, *with respect to this earth*. Nothing else is said about them, by way of affirmation or of denial, because nothing else is of concern in this account.

The author presents the text in such a way that all humans of all ages could understand the narrative and its purposes and intentions. Science has

been important in a number of ages and cultures, but this text deals in what humans can observe with the naked eye, meaning that its observation of the world is quite limited by our standards, and thus difficult for us to recognize as science. (To call this limitation prescientific, though, seems to this writer unnecessarily elitist and prejudicial.) Thus, as noted above, the text references a bowl-like sky. As another example, this text is easy to read as presenting a three-storied view of the universe, with a watery heaven above, subterranean waters beneath, and dry-land-with-water in the middle. (This reading, while common, is not necessarily convincing, as it ignores one of the two meanings of *šamayim* within the text.) Moreover, this text deals only summarily with seed-producing plants, with different kinds of fruit-producing trees, with different kinds of animals and birds, etc. The presence of such (to us) rudimentary observations of the world in this text and the integration of that data with the author's theology of creation means this account of creation is not *antiscientific*. However, its focus on God as Creator indicates that its primary purposes are theological, not scientific. Advances in the physical sciences in recent centuries reveal a universe far more complex than this text could have portrayed, even had that been its purpose. Therefore, to read this text as a treatise on science is to misread it almost totally. (For an important nuancing here, see Fretheim 2005, 27-28 and, esp., note 116, 303-4.) This is not so much a tragedy of reading modern science into the text. The real tragedy is that, in focusing on the kind of science that is *not* intended in this text, one inevitably misses the foundational truths about God and God's creation, including especially God's human creation, that *are* intended. It is not too much to say that in missing these truths, God's people also have missed our way at many crucial points along our historical/theological journey, causing much unnecessary skepticism, hostility, and suffering both within and outside our ranks.

The functional ontology of Gen 1

In *The Lost World of Genesis One*, John Walton (2009) sets out the case for viewing Gen 1 as presenting not a *material* but a *functional* ontology of the origins of the earth and the cosmos. These are not literary categories; rather, they are philosophical and theological. The central feature of Walton's thesis is that Gen 1 is not intended to present a summary of the *material* origins of the earth, or of any of the rest of the cosmos: *What* all did God make? *How* did God make it? *When* did God make it? Rather, the purpose of Gen 1 is to report the *functional* beginnings of the earth, its systems, and its creatures, as God's cosmic temple. That is, Gen 1 reports the inauguration of the earth as God's dwelling place, from which God directs and superintends the *functions* of the various entities and systems God has created and set in motion. Walton does not deny a material ontology; God is Creator of the universe in its material as well as its functional origins. He simply says Gen 1 is not the place to find a discussion of *material* origins. Walton argues that to read Gen

1 as though it presents a *material* ontology, when it is intended to present a *functional* ontology, is to read Gen 1 *nonliterally*, rather than literally.

I. The Heavens and the Earth (1:1-2)

BEHIND THE TEXT

The Genesis creation account is set against the backdrop of and is intended (among other purposes) to correct Egyptian, Canaanite, and Mesopotamian notions of multiple gods and goddesses, each possessing his or her own sphere of power and responsibility. The proclamation of *this* account could not be more vivid in its contrast: Israel's creator God is before all else, and is the Creator of all else. In the stories with the greatest influence on Israel, even the mightiest creator gods could not begin with nothing. In these stories, matter existed even before the gods themselves. As Oswalt has noted, knowledge of the transcendent God, shown first here in Gen 1:1, cannot be deduced; rather, God revealed it to Israel (1988, 16-17).

We have chosen to discuss vv 1 and 2 together, because together they set the scene for the sequence of the six creation days as the narrative presents them: **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now as for the earth . . .**; then the days are narrated in order, with the creative activities specific to each one. Verse 2 sets up the sequence with its brief description of the earth's state at the *beginning* of the creative process upon it.

IN THE TEXT

■ If one begins reading the Bible at the first line, as we do with most books, one reads, **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**—the simple, yet sublime, beginning of the greatest story ever told. **In the beginning** (*bēre'sit*) is not the beginning of God, but of **the heavens and the earth**. Also, this verse does not state anything about the time of this beginning, whether it was billions of years ago, or only thousands. It only says God began it all.

With respect to God, v 1 affirms one God, and one God only. The divine title *'ēlōhîm* (plural noun form, **God**) denotes divine majesty and power. The author uses the plural form *'ēlōhîm* here in a singular sense, which is the case in most instances of its occurrence in the Hebrew Scripture. The plural form conveys the plural of majesty, the idea that Israel's God is the God of all gods, the only true God, the God of majesty and power, and the Lord of the universe, history, and nature. The text thus begins with an emphatic claim of God's rightful title (God's personal name *Yahweh* is introduced in Gen 2) and the acknowledgment of Israel's God as the Creator of all else that is.

God (*'ēlōhîm*)

In the ancient Semitic world, El (*'el*, noun, masc. sg.) was the basic word for "God"; this title most likely denotes power and strength. In the Canaanite

religion depicted in the Ugaritic epics, El is the name of the supreme deity, father of all the gods and goddesses, and lord of heaven. In the Hebrew Bible, the noun *ʾēl* can be linked with other nouns (e.g., “The God of Israel,” Ps 68:35), and with adjectives (e.g., “the faithful God,” Deut 7:9). Though in some instances the plural form (*ʾēlōhîm*) is applied to gods of other nations (e.g., Judg 11:24; 1 Kgs 11:5; 2 Kgs 1:2), in most cases the plural form refers to Israel’s God.

Another important implication of v 1 is that only God is eternal. This verse, rightly read, does not leave room for the coexistence with God of the energy/matter, or of the space/time, continuums. Rather, it affirms God’s creation of all else: of energy and matter, of space and time. Nothing is coeternal with God. This first sentence in the Bible, this first logical and theological assertion with all its implications, precludes any and all forms of Gnosticism and dualism and their claims.

The Hebrew Verb *bārāʾ*

The Hebrew verb *bārāʾ*, “he created,” occurs about fifty times in the Hebrew Bible; seven of those occurrences are in this chapter. When *bārāʾ* occurs in the Qal (basic) stem, as it does here in its first six occurrences, God always is its subject, i.e., God is the Creator.

The verb *bārāʾ* does not, in and of itself, mean *creatio ex nihilo*, creation from nothing. It does, however, signify an extraordinary creative work, something greater and/or more special than even God usually does—if that is possible! In this account, it is used once to introduce God’s extraordinary creative activity, altogether (1:1). Once it introduces the beginning of sentient life on this earth (1:21). It is used twice in the summary of God’s creative action (2:3, 4). In the middle three occurrences of *bārāʾ*, all in 1:27, the object is humans (*ʾādām*). This is the clearest and most emphatic statement possible of the unique and extraordinary value God placed, and places, upon humans (*ʾādām*).

Furthermore, God (*Elohim*) created **the heavens and the earth**. This phrase is not the ancient Hebrew equivalent of “the universe”; ancient Israel conceived of the heavens as one entity, and the earth as another. The universe, of which the earth is a small part, is a later (Greek, astronomical) understanding. Though we comprehend the universe conceptually as the Greeks discovered it to be, we still *experience* it in two parts as this verse names it—the heavens we see “above” us, and the earth (including the seas) “beneath,” upon which we dwell.

The Hebrew noun *šamayim* is rightly translated here **heavens**, the place of the heavenly bodies beyond the firmament/expanse. A few verses later, in the account of the second day (v 8), God named the firmament (*rāqîaʿ*) itself *šamayim*; there the context requires the translation “firmament,” “expanse,” or, more commonly today, “sky,” or even “atmosphere.”

Similarly, the noun ^ʾeres is translated correctly here **earth**, meaning the planet we inhabit. Depending on the context, ^ʾeres may be translated “land” in the sense of a district, a region, or a nation or even “earth” in the sense of the ground or the soil. The immediate context of v 1 is v 2; as we shall see, v 2 confirms the translation here, **the heavens and the earth**.

Genesis 1:1

The traditional translation of v 1 as an independent clause (sentence) is correct, though some modern scholars (preeminently Speiser 1964, 11-13), and some English versions, translate it as a subordinate clause, “When God began to create . . .,” or the like. Cassuto has demonstrated that the syntax of v 2 requires v 1 to be an independent sentence (1961, 19-20). Hamilton, using different theological and syntactical arguments, reaches the same conclusion that v 1 is an introductory sentence to the entire seven-day creation account (1990, 105-8). As an independent sentence, v 1 stands both as an introduction to and a summary statement of this creation narrative.

■2 Verse 2 confirms the reading of v 1 as an independent clause. The subject of discussion in the first short unit (v 1) is God’s creation of the heavens and the earth. Immediately in v 2, **the earth**, the climactic entity of the first unit (v 1), becomes the main subject of the next unit; we translate *vēhā’āres*, **Now as for the earth**. That this was the author’s literary intent is clear from two facts: (1) the earth and its inhabitants are the predominant interest of 1:2—2:3, the second literary unit by this analysis; (2) the heavens are discussed from here on only from the perspective of the earth. As Westermann has noted, “Any attempt . . . which leaves the first two or three verses in isolation and does not enquire into the function of these verses as part of a whole neglects a very important methodological approach” (1984, 93).

We believe the following is an accurate (though a bit stilted) translation of the whole of v 2: ***Now as for the earth, it was a desert and a vacancy, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God [Elohim] was hovering/brooding over the face of the waters.***

In this verse we find the writer describing the condition of the earth when God brought it into existence. Though often translated as two adjectives, the Hebrew phrase *tōhû vāvōhû* actually comprises two nouns, joined by the Hebrew conjunction *vav/waw*, usually translated “and.” David Tsumura has shown conclusively that no idea of a hostile or violent chaos inheres in either of these nouns separately, nor in both when used together (1994, 310-28). The basic meaning of *tōhû* is “desert, a desert place.” Here, it refers to the earth that is present, but covered by the primeval waters. It depicts the earth as yet unproductive, as desert wastelands are unproductive (from the ancient point of view). The second noun *bōhû*, Tsumura explains (albeit tentatively) as “a Semitic term based on the root **bhw* and possibly a cognate of Arabic *bahiya*

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1:1-2

‘to be empty,’” as a tent or a house bare of furnishings and other contents is empty (1994, 315-16).

This makes a vivid picture and excellent sense, as well. This phrase (*tōhû vāvōhû*) pictures the earth, when God had brought it into existence but had not yet begun to act creatively in and upon it, as an unproductive *desert* and, moreover, as *a vacancy*, or *empty*. (Fretheim translates *tōhû vāvōhû* “desolate and unproductive”; 1994, 342.) Jeremiah’s use of *tōhû vāvōhû* (4:23-26; see esp. v 26) also conveys the image of the nonproductive desert. Here in Gen 1:2, the earth was *not yet* the earth as it would be when God had finished the work of the initial creation week, nor even as we experience it now, after its extensive ruination because of human unfaithfulness. Walton takes a slightly different perspective, proposing that *tōhû* and *bōhû* together conveys the idea of nonexistence (in their functional ontology); i.e., the earth was not yet functioning in an ordered system. (Functional) creation had not yet taken place; therefore, there was only (functional) nonexistence (2009, 49).

The next part of v 2 indicates that *darkness was upon the face of the deep*. *Darkness* here is only the absence of light (see more discussion on darkness below). Verse 2 implies the presence of the raw materials for the creative processes that would bring the earth to its fullness. The text does *not* imply the raw materials always existed; on the basis of v 1, we may conclude that God the Creator brought even these into existence. The accounts of the successive creation days in the rest of this chapter describe God’s activity in bringing content and productivity—the fertility both of the earth and of the multiplicity of created entities upon it. This would begin with God’s creation of the light, which set the limits to the darkness on day one.

The *deep* (*tēhôm*) in v 2 refers to the primeval waters covering the earth. Heidel has shown that Hebrew *tēhôm* derives from the same Semitic root as does the divine name Tiamat, the goddess of the saltwater oceans in the Mesopotamian creation accounts (1951, 98-101). (This is not to say Hebrew *tēhôm* is derived from Babylonian Tiamat.) However, these waters of Gen 1:2 were *not* the raging monster goddess whom the creator god Marduk had to defeat and slay before he could set to work creating the earth from her dead body. If anything, the author’s choice of the noun *tēhôm* here seems to be deliberate; the author could have described this primeval condition using different vocabulary. This was an opportunity to deny the deity of the goddess without naming her directly, as well as to deny either the power or the desire (could they have experienced desire) of the primeval waters to resist the will of their creator.

Verse 2 ends with a final description of the primeval condition, *and the Spirit of God [Elohim] was hovering/brooding over the face of the waters*. Hebrew *rûaḥ* may mean “Spirit,” “spirit,” “wind,” or “breath.” We may rule out “wind” as a translation here; “the wind of God” would imply a great wind-storm, gale force or beyond. This is not the picture provided by the rest of the clause, of a peaceful *hovering* or *brooding* (*mēraḥpet*), like a bird watching

over and protecting its young. It is difficult, too, to imagine “breath” *brooding over the waters* (*māyim* here, not *tēhôm*). The phrase **the Spirit of God** (*rūah ʿēlōhîm*) is the appropriate translation here; in this first context, **the Spirit of God** is the pensive, creative, nurturing, soon-to-be-acting presence of God.

Partly because chaotic waters feature in some other biblical texts, many have argued that the waters of this verse, also, identified by the use of two different nouns (*tēhôm*, *māyim*), were chaotic and rebellious, needing God’s strong hand to bring them into submission before beginning God’s creative work. Tsumura’s work on the phrase *tōhū vāvōhū* (see above) proves this was not the case with the primeval waters. Rather, this earth, as God was about to begin God’s creative action upon it, wheeled in space—dark, unproductive, and vacant, as a stripped and deserted tent or house is vacant. Far from being an unruly or a hostile primeval nature in rebellion, the earth and its mantle of covering waters were still, motionless, receptive, waiting quietly in the darkness for the Creator’s next step.

Ephrem the Syrian on Gen 1:2

It was appropriate to reveal here that the Spirit hovered in order for us to learn that the work of creation was held in common by the Spirit with the Father and the Son. The Father spoke. The Son created. And so it was also right that the Spirit offer its work, clearly shown through its hovering, in order to demonstrate its unity with the other persons. Thus we learn that all was brought to perfection and accomplished by the Trinity. (Louth 2001, 6)

FROM THE TEXT

The first line of the traditional version of the Apostles’ Creed is, “I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” The Hebrew/Israelite/Jewish faith, and the Christian faith that descended from it, always have affirmed God as Creator. Today, some Jews and many Christians believe God created by a process they have recently labeled creation science or, sometimes, intelligent design. However, most Jews and many Christians, still affirming God as Creator, believe God created by means of one of the several evolutionary models advanced in the century-and-a-half since Darwin published *On the Origin of Species*. Some of these folks refer to themselves as theistic evolutionists. As we have noted already, and hope to show in more detail below, Gen 1—2 addresses the *what* of God’s creation only in the most general of terms, not in any way resembling a modern scientifically descriptive manner. Similarly, it does not address the timeline of creation, the *when*, in a manner that would allow us to draw modern scientific conclusions from the text. Finally, it does not address the multiple *hows* of creation in a way that answers the modern concerns of, e.g., geomorphology or biological taxonomy.

Occupied with greater concerns, the text does not (partly because it could not adequately, for our day) address any of these.

This is not to say that believers in God (Jewish or Christian) are forbidden to pursue scientific answers to the *what*, *when*, and *how* questions of creation—far from it. It is to say, however, that those who find one set of answers currently more persuasive—and acting by love’s constraints—ought not to denigrate or condemn others who find another set of answers more persuasive, since all are agreed in affirming their belief in “God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.” (Atheistic evolutionary hypotheses are another issue, of course.) Science has its multiple, valuable places, but Gen 1—2 is a theological, not a scientific, narrative. “I believe in God . . .” is the tenet binding us together as brothers and sisters in *God’s* creation. Disagreeing, with love, on the science of origins, is both the privilege and the responsibility of Christian brothers and sisters who find themselves on opposite sides in these matters, while affirming together, “I believe in God . . . , maker of heaven and earth.”

One can find various attempts to reconcile geological and other data that seem to indicate the age of the earth as in the billions of years with a common young earth understanding of Gen 1—2. One such attempt is the so-called gap theory, which begins by positing a perfect creation in v 1. Something happened to make the earth ***a desert and a vacancy***, as we have translated the description of its state at the beginning of v 2. In the gap theory, that *something* is said to have been the casting of Lucifer to the earth following his unsuccessful rebellion against God in heaven. Proponents of this theory interpret Isaiah’s oracle against the king of Babylon to have a broader secondary application to Satan’s fall (Isa 14:12-15). To be fair, these gap theory proponents base this interpretation of Isaiah on Jesus’ words in Luke 10:18, ***I watched Satan falling from heaven like lightning***. However, this line of interpretation produces far too small a gap into which to stuff the entire geological column, the astrophysical evidences, and the other assorted data that must be disposed of between Gen 1:1 and 1:2 to make the gap theory tenable.

More importantly, Gen 1:2 cannot be made to support such an understanding. The gap theory requires translating the beginning of v 2, “Now as for the earth, it *had become* a desert and a waste” (as a result of some here-unspecified catastrophe). The grammatical structure and the positioning of the verb and the noun in this verse do not support this translation. The verb would have to be imperfect (with *vav* consecutive) and come first in the clause to translate, “the earth had become.” However, the *vav* conjunction is attached to the noun, the noun precedes the verb, and the aspect of the verb is perfect (*hāyētā*). The only translation that makes grammatical and syntactical sense is, ***Now as for the earth, it was a desert and a vacancy*** (in keeping with our discussion above). The gap theory is a fanciful, too-clever-by-half attempt to reconcile competing *scientific* hypotheses, but ultimately is capable only of inflicting damage upon a *theological* text, if taken seriously.

On another matter, no reader before the first century (and possibly not even then) would have placed a Trinitarian interpretation upon Gen 1:2. However, reminding ourselves that the earliest readers would not have seen the Trinity in v 2 is not the same as denying the cooperative presence and work of all three persons of the Trinity in creation. John asserted, “Through [the Word, i.e., Jesus Christ] all things were made” (John 1:3). Paul agreed, “For by [the Son] all things were created” (Col. 1:16). If God the Father and God the Son partnered in creation, Christians are justified in believing that God the Holy Spirit was also an equal partner. We may think of Gen 1:2, then, as referencing the Holy Spirit in a foreshadowing kind of way, though it does not prove the Trinity. That would be too great a burden for this verse to bear by itself.

Though the verb *bārā'* is not used extensively through the rest of the Hebrew Scripture, its later uses link creation with God's redemption first, of Israel, then of all God's earthly creation. We see this in Isa 40—45, both in Isaiah's multiple uses of *bārā'* (nearly one-third of its total occurrences are in these six chapters), and in the internal reciprocity of Isaiah's comprehensive argument through this section: God will rescue/redeem Israel because God as Creator is wise enough and powerful enough to do it; God will demonstrate to unfaithful Israel that God is the only God and Creator by rescuing/redeeming Israel from its foreign exile.

In Rom 4:16-17, Paul commended the faith of Abraham in *God, the one giving life to the dead, and calling [into existence] the things which do not exist, as existing*. Abraham, Paul declared, believed God's promise that God was not finished creating; as a result, Abraham became “the father of us all” in faith.

If we had the space, we could discuss many other ramifications of God's ongoing creative/redemptive work in the world. The creative power of God reversed the hold of death and raised Jesus from the dead on the third day. That same creative power God continues to exercise against the day when the eschaton shall be fully realized and, as John the Revelator heard from the mouth of the One sitting on the throne, “Behold, I make [am making] all things new” (Rev 21:5 *KJV*). The first verses of Genesis open the Bible as the end of Revelation closes it, with the great hope anchored in the Alpha and Omega, the One who creates and re-creates—from the individual believer to all creation.

2. Days of Preparation (1:3-13)

a. Let There Be Light (1:3-5)

BEHIND THE TEXT

On the narrative structure of the creation week, see “The pairing of the six creation days” in the first Behind the Text section, above.

Genesis 1 has been called poetic prose, exalted prose, and other, similar admiring descriptors. Its literary artistry is evident even in the verbs of this short section. Its three verses contain nine verb forms. Four of these are forms of the verb *hāyâ* (“to be”), with one pair of occurrences near the beginning in v 3, another pair as the last two verbs of the section (v 5). The first of these “to be” verbs is God’s fiat command (**let there be**); the other three, statements of existence resulting from God’s fiat (**and there was**). The other five verb forms all have God as their subject: **and God said** [*’āmar*]; **and God saw/evaluated** [*rā’â*]; **and God separated** [*bādāl*]; **and God called/named** (*qārā’*). The last of these occurs twice, but with a fine sense of artistic variation (*yiqrā’* and *qārā’*). The divine title itself is not actually repeated in the second occurrence of *qārā’*; it occurs four times altogether in the section. The last four verb forms are two pairs of two different verbs, **he called/named** (*qārā’*) twice, then **and it was** (*vayyēhî*) twice.

IN THE TEXT

■ **3** God’s first act in shaping and filling the earth was a spoken command: **Let there be light** (v 3). Its breathtaking brevity and simplicity serve to accent God’s sovereignty. The Hebrew text is even shorter, more spare: *yēhî ’ôr*; two words; three syllables; six letters. As often, in the accounts of royal commands in ancient Near Eastern narratives, the fulfillment of this command is recorded immediately, in identical language (**and there was light**, *vayyēhî ’ôr*). Even more to the point for Israel’s faith (and ours), this immediacy of fulfillment was/is striking evidence of God’s sovereignty—that even that ubiquitous and mysterious entity, light, should have made its first appearance merely at this briefest of directives.

The ancients did not conceive of light as an entity and, with all our vaunted advances in the disciplines of physics, we, too, still cannot fully grasp the dual nature of light as both matter and energy. Despite (or perhaps because of) the continuing gaps in our knowledge, this report that the primordial light simply appeared at God’s bidding is entirely in character for light as we experience it, even as it was for the ancients.

Having initiated creation upon the earth in this way, however, God did not act exactly the same way twice. Each creative act God fitted to the nature of its object. The text reports, **And God said**, eight more times (vv 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 29). However, only here is that report *not* followed up by action of some kind, such as “God made” (see v 7), or the action of some previously created entity.

■ **4** Verse 4 begins with God’s evaluation of the light that came into existence at his command. **And God saw the light, that it was good** is the first of seven such positive assessments in this creation narrative (vv 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). **Good** (*tôb*) in this context is not in the middle of a scale from totally bad to most excellent; it is itself a superlative assessment, completely positive in

the highest degree, as far from bad or evil as it is possible to get. When God pronounces something (or someone) **good**, God is judging it as being, and functioning, as God intended—by creation or, as often is necessary now, by redemption and restoration.

Verse 4 concludes with the report of another divine activity. *And God caused a separation between the light and the darkness.* We see the significance of this in v 5; this is not an everywhere-and-for-all-time separation of light and darkness, but the separation we experience upon the earth as the alternating of day and night. If light were not assigned its own times and timing, we would not experience darkness at all.

The question well may occur to the reader, “If ‘the light’ was ‘good,’ what was ‘the darkness’?” The answer is, “Nothing.” First, we must stipulate that this is not a text on the physics of light. Nevertheless, we are allowed to recognize that what we experience and name as “light” is the same substance/energy studied and explained by the physicist whose specialty is light. Thus, in the physics of light, the Hebrew word *’ôr* and the English word “light” denote the existence/presence of the almost infinitesimal mass/energy particles to which we give those names in our respective languages. The Hebrew word *hōšek* and the English word “darkness” signify the nonexistence/nonpresence of such particles in the place being described as “dark.” The words *’ôr* and “light” are real words, apart from what they symbolize and, physically, “light” is “something.” The words *hōšek* and “darkness” are real words, apart from what they symbolize, but what they symbolize does not, in fact, exist, except as an abstract concept. “Darkness,” the absence of light, is “nothing.” The statement, for example, “The darkness was so deep I could feel it,” is merely a literary device called hyperbole (exaggeration for effect); it cannot *give* substantive existence to that which has no substantive existence apart from the literary figure.

Later, in Hebrew as in other languages, “darkness” acquired metaphorical significance as designating and describing “evil.” Since this text deals with our world before the “presence” of evil within it, it is best not to import that metaphorical use of “darkness” into it.

■5 God’s separation of light and darkness was followed by God’s naming of light and darkness. *And God called the light, day; and the darkness he called, night.* The common noun *shēm* (name), which would be necessary to make this a formal naming, is not present in either clause here (Bush 1996, 7-8). This may be because **light** is an inanimate entity, and **darkness** is not an entity at all, but only the *absence* of light. Rather than giving them proper names, then, God designated the common nouns by which these two states (as we experience them on the earth’s surface) would be called henceforth: **the light** [*’ôr*] **day** (*yôm*); its absence, **the darkness** (*hōšek*), **night** (*lāyālā*).

Augustine on Gen 1:5a

“And God divided the light and the darkness, and God called the light day and [God] called the darkness night.” It did not say here “God made the darkness,” because darkness is merely the absence of light. Yet God made a division between light and darkness. . . . “He called the light day, and he called the darkness night” was said in the sense that he made them to be called, because he separated and ordered all things so that they could be distinguished and receive names. (Louth 2001, 8)

Verse 5 concludes with the placement of God’s creative work in a temporal framework, a recurring feature of this creation narrative. *And it was evening, and it was morning.* It is common for people to quote this phrase as the reason the Jewish faith reckons the day from sunset to sunset. That may be so, at least in part, but such a reckoning of the day’s beginning and ending is a misunderstanding of these statements. Their natural import is, “So the day went along until it was evening, then the night went along until it was morning, and then one full day had elapsed.” Thus, when on day four the sun and the moon began their appointed tasks of regulating for the earth its hours of day and night, respectively, the day began and ended with sunrise.

In biblical narrative the day after a specified night is called “tomorrow,” i.e., the day begins at sunrise (e.g., Gen 19:33-34; 1 Sam 28:19). Even the laws that prescribe the beginning of the *observance* of a holy day at sundown reckon the holy day itself as beginning with the following sunrise (e.g., Exod 12:18; Lev 23:32). Cassuto summarizes, “It will thus be seen that throughout the Bible there obtains only one system of *computing time*: the day is considered to begin in the morning; but in regard to the festivals and appointed times, the Torah ordains that they shall be observed also on the night of the *preceding day*” (1961, 29, emphasizes original; see his entire discussion, 28-30). Our Western custom of reckoning the day as beginning at midnight is a part of our heritage from Rome.

The last two Hebrew words we should render, *one day*; “day one” is grammatically acceptable but could be conceptually misleading. We definitely should *not* translate, *the first day*, even though this was the first day of the creation week. Logically, there was no first day yet, because a second day had not yet come into existence for a first day to be prior to. So far, there had been only *one day*. This day, at this point in the creation narrative, stands alone. The reader soon will know this day is only a beginning. *Within the narrative*, however, we do not yet know that, and that fact invites us to evaluate it without comparisons. God pronounced this day *good*; in and of itself, and on its own merits, it was good because God had made it good.

GENESIS
1:5

Westermann on the Creation of Light

The first thing that God created was light. . . . It is only possible to describe the work of creation as a whole because of the creation of light at the beginning. And so those exegetes are correct who understand vv. 3-5 as a process which makes creation possible rather than as a single work of creation. But the point should not be pressed. . . . The separation of light from darkness is temporal, not spatial. (1984, 112)

FROM THE TEXT

Beginnings are necessary to all that follows; it does not follow that beginnings are only means to subsequent ends. If any given beginning is to be worthy of evaluation as “good,” it probably will be because its initiator regarded it as a worthy end, *before* considering its value as a means to further ends. Even here, already in the *one day*, we may learn about creating from the Creator in whose image we are created. We, too, may evaluate our work as good, and take joy for its own sake in work only begun, if only it is well begun.

A sevenfold repetition of God’s appraisal of all God’s creative work as *good*, in the very first, and only sustained, biblical narrative account of creation stands as a powerful theological statement. The physical, material universe is *not* intrinsically evil. Matter and energy, space and time, the universe and this earth—all are *essentially* good, because God created them so. *All* forms of gnostic thought, ancient and modern, are ruled out of consideration from the beginning, in the judgment and the positive word of the God who made all that is, both the physical/material and the spiritual. The equations, “physical is evil” and “spiritual is holy,” are shown already to be false—in effect, blasphemy against the good and holy God who delights in *all* God’s creation, material *and* spiritual. Human faithlessness, though making necessary Christ’s redemptive, restorative work, could not and cannot negate the initial and essential goodness of all God’s creation, material or otherwise.

b. Let There Be an Expanse (1:6-8)

BEHIND THE TEXT

We noted briefly above (v 2) that many of Israel’s neighbors regarded the seas as gods, or as goddesses. Actually, almost any source, movement, or body of water was deified in antiquity, from oceans and seas to lakes and rivers, from clouds and mists to springs and wells.

Here we see another learning unit of this text’s teaching that the waters are not gods in any shape, form, or fashion. Like all else in creation, they are God’s servants, doing God’s bidding. If they could experience and express thought and feeling, they would exude joy that God created them and found

them worthy of God's calling to the being and the tasks God appointed them. This paragraph records the next step in God's working upon all the waters, assigning them their respective places and functions. This was a two-stage process, the first stage accomplished on the second creative day, the second stage on the third day.

IN THE TEXT

■ **6** The account of the second creative day begins with another command of God, **Let there be**. The fulfillment of this command, however, was a creative *act* of God, as we see in v 7, "So God made." We often visualize God as speaking everything into existence during the creative process. The narrative of Gen 1, however, records only the light of day one as coming into existence solely at God's spoken word. Everything else, though always mandated at the beginning of its narrative by God's spoken word, is a product of God's making or arranging, or of the ground or seas producing. This is not to deny the power of God's spoken word, only to say that God apparently delights in *making*, perhaps more than in *merely* speaking entities into existence. As we are made in God's creative image, we may see here the ultimate source of human delight in the myriad things we make in imitation of our Creator's good work, and of our joy in that making, following upon God's own joy in God's making.

God commanded that there should be **an expanse in the midst of the waters to separate water from water** (v 6). To this point, the narrative has pictured the waters as covering the whole surface of the earth. Now something would change, but it would have to do entirely with the primeval waters. Since the *expanse* would be **in the midst of the waters**, we must look for the change as having to do with the form, the characteristics, and/or the functions of the waters.

■ **7** Verse 7 reports that God fulfilled his command by his own creative act. **So God made the expanse**. Hebrew *rāqīa'* (**expanse**) refers to something shaped by beating out its malleable substance, as the smith formed a gold, silver, or bronze bowl by beating it into the desired shape with a hammer. Indeed, when one has an unobstructed view of the entire three-hundred-sixty-degree circle of the horizon, the sky looks like a bowl set upside-down upon the edge of the earth. We even have a saying, "The heavens are brass," reflecting this sometime appearance and feel of the atmosphere.

It is the atmosphere that **expanse/rāqīa'** names, as we discover now, for God caused the *rāqīa'* to divide (separate) **between the waters which were under the expanse and the waters which were above the expanse**. This was not a new entity, but a second division, this one within a single entity already in existence, namely, the primeval waters. (The first division was the separation between light, a created entity, and darkness, merely the absence of light, v 4.)

This is not to say the atmosphere consists entirely of water, nor that ancient Israel thought it does. It reflects the fact that rain, snow, and other forms

of precipitation—all of which are water—come from the atmosphere, the sky. Job 38:22-41 largely reflects, in exquisite poetic language, this imagery of the sky as the immediate source of snow, water, ice, frost, hailstorm, etc. *The waters . . . above the expanse*, both in their suspension within the atmosphere and in their falling upon the earth in myriad forms, sustain the life upon the earth's surface.

This is the beginning of the hydrological cycle (briefly outlined also in Eccl 1:6-7), upon which all life upon the land, at least, depends. The ability of the sun to evaporate moisture from the waters on the earth's surface, and of the atmosphere to absorb it, then to relinquish it again in the form of precipitation is a critical function of the *expanse*.

A Phenomenological Telling

It is important not to slight the *phenomenological* approach of this broad, sweeping, very limited description of God's initial creative activity. Genesis 1 is not intended as a detailed scientific description. If it had been, all humans except the educated minority of the last two or three hundred years would have been excluded from understanding and learning from it.

Rather, Gen 1 describes the sky above us *phenomenologically*. That is, it describes it only as we see it and as we experience it—most vividly, as a bowl (*rāqia'*) inverted above us. On a clear, moonless night, with an unobstructed view to the horizon in all directions, and the several thousand stars visible to the naked eye shining down upon us, we experience the night sky as a colander, a bowl pierced through with many holes, and a light source beyond it. We know this is not a scientific description of the daytime sky or of the nighttime sky; moreover, this description has nothing to do with the science of the sky, but only with how we see and experience it. Because it *does* record that God called the expanse “sky” (v 8), we can identify it as the earth's atmosphere, comprising air, water vapor, etc. More than that we ought not ask of this text, for on other issues it simply is silent.

Similarly, this narrative presents “the greater light” and “the lesser light” (v 16) of day four only from the perspective of their appearance from this earth's surface, and only mentions their functions related to the earth and its inhabitants. It says nothing else, nothing about the solar system, or of our place in our galaxy, or of our galaxy's place among the galaxies. How could it, and mean anything, since none of this was known to ancient Israel? Again, this is not a negation of science. Science as we practice it today, the detailed investigation and description of entities and their processes and interactions over time, simply is not a part of this discussion.

■ **8** God called the expanse “sky.” The Hebrew word for sky is *šāmāyim*, the same word translated “heavens” in v 1. Here, it means the atmosphere above us. In v 1, it means “everything above” the earth and our atmosphere, i.e., what

English, also, means by “the heavens” (what C. S. Lewis in his space trilogy called “deep heaven”).

The final phrase of v 8, **the second day**, leads the readers of this text to anticipate the ongoing creative activity of God. Now that two days had come and gone, not just a single day, it was appropriate for the author to speak of “second,” using the ordinal, an adjectival form, rather than the cardinal, as at the end of day one (v 5).

FROM THE TEXT

Perhaps the average ancient Israelite did not, could not, make the distinction between “the heavens” and the “sky.” As we see and experience them—i.e., as we know them phenomenologically—the two are not easily distinguishable. Unaided observation and experience from the earth’s surface will not give most of us an idea of “the heavens” *beyond* “the sky.” We cannot know whether the narrator had a hint of “the heavens” as far more complex and far-reaching, or whether he even acknowledged a distinction between “the heavens” and “the sky.” Perhaps he did. However, it is easy to read this text as intending to depict the ancient model of a three-storied universe, with heaven above, the earth’s flat surface in the middle, and the place of the dead (*sheol*) below, the common cosmology of the ordinary ancient observer of the heavens and the earth. Whatever this narrator’s understanding, he spoke phenomenologically, to be understood by the readers of his day, whose knowledge could not have been based on anything other than what they experienced and observed in their own everyday lives. Of course, today’s reader can understand “the heavens” with the tools of modern astronomy, which continue to reveal the mysteries of “the heavens” in all their depth, variety, and marvelous complexity, unknown and unknowable to human beings of any past age. What we may not do is patronize our bygone elders, merely because we have been privileged to live in a different era.

c. Let the Dry Land Appear (1:9-13)

BEHIND THE TEXT

We see in this section another corrective to ancient pagan ideas of the creation of the earth. The Mesopotamian creation theologies, specifically the *Enuma Elish*, spoke of the creator god Marduk as killing the hostile ocean goddess Tiamat in hand-to-hand combat. Here in the biblical text there is not even a hint of force. On the contrary, God invited the waters and the dry land to participate in this stage of God’s creative action, calling the waters to **gather themselves to one place**, and the dry land to **show itself**.

In an even more radical correction of ancient pagan theologies, God commanded/invited the earth to **vegetate vegetation**. All Israel’s neighbors (and, too often, many Israelites themselves) believed the earth itself was a

goddess whose active, willing (and sexual) participation they needed to secure if their fields, vineyards, orchards, and gardens were to be fruitful. This magisterial, and totally irenic, correction proclaims the earth, too, as God's good creation, willing servant, and glad partner in God's design for abundant and joyful life upon its surface.

The phrase *according to its kind* occurs ten times altogether (another number of completion in the decimal system, which ancient Israel also used) in the accounts of days three (vv 11-12), five (vv 20-23), and six (vv 24-31). It occurs once in v 11, twice in v 12 (thus a total of three for day three), twice in v 21 (two for day five), twice in v 24, and three times in v 25 (five for day six). This can be read as $3 + 2 = 5$, followed by $2 + 3 = 5$, two pairs of fives achieved by simple addition. The significance is that the first cluster of three occurrences pertains to plant life upon the land, the second cluster of two occurrences pertains to animal life in the seas and the skies, while an equal total of five in two successive verses (vv 24-25) pertains to the making of animal life upon the land. This concentrated and equal repetition signals movement toward the climax of the creative process.

IN THE TEXT

■9 The third creative day featured another mode of creation; the Creator is not limited in means or methods of creation, except as one choice may preclude other choices, at that or other points in the entire creative enterprise. Here, the method is rearrangement, rather than introduction of new entities. Both verbs are Hebrew *Niph'al*, the passive/reflexive stem. We may translate either *Let the waters under the heavens be gathered to one place, and let the dry ground appear/be seen* or *Let the waters under the heavens gather themselves to one place, and let the dry ground show itself*. Given both the explicit and the implicit notices of God's invitation to the creation to partner with God in the creative/procreative process at other points in the text of Gen 1, one may take the latter understanding to be the intent of the writer. Even at this early stage, though God retained sovereignty, God invited responsive participation. The command and its fulfillment in v 9 reflect what humans observe and experience. The earth's ocean waters cover the earth's great surface depressions, and all are connected—albeit sometimes by narrow straits—and the dry land rises above the oceans' various depressions.

John of Damascus on Gen 1:9

Now, the fact that Scripture speaks of one gathering does not mean that they were gathered together into one place, for notice that after this it says: "And the gathering together of the waters he called seas." Actually, the account meant that the waters were segregated by themselves apart from the earth. And so the waters were brought together into their gathering places and the dry land appeared. (Louth 2001, 12)

The phrase **to one place**, as the words of John of Damascus show, illustrates the dangers of reading the *details* of any current science (observation and/or experimentation, with explanatory analysis) back into any Scripture as its original and intended meaning. John of Damascus apparently followed the LXX reading of v 9, “And the waters under the heavens [*ouranou*] were gathered together into their gathering places, and the dry land appeared.” Knowing various large and small bodies of water, John apparently assumed that the earth’s surface always had been marked by these features in this kind of arrangement, and visualized many original large and small gatherings of waters as God’s direction reported in v 9.

All modern geologists—whether theists and others espousing old earth uniformitarian geology or young earth creationists espousing a major geological upheaval as part of the processes of Noah’s flood—agree that today’s continents originally were a single land mass, usually called Pangaea/Pangea. The Hebrew reading of v 9 can be marshaled as “evidence” on either side. Both sides may agree that the original gathering of the waters into **one place** covering a greater part of the earth’s surface resulted in the “dry land,” i.e., a supercontinent. For old earth proponents, continental drift explains its breakup. For young earth proponents, the geological cataclysm of the deluge explains it. Thus, the existence of a primeval Pangaea really is evidence for neither side in the debate, nor is the minimal statement of v 9 (from the perspective of any modern science).

■ **10** As recorded in v 10, God named **the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters . . . “seas.”** Hebrew *’eres* is the same word translated “earth” in vv 1 and 2. There, *’eres* refers to the planet as a whole; here it refers to the dry land of the earth as a whole, in its original appearance as the supercontinent Pangaea. Later, *’eres* designates regions, such as Canaan and Mesopotamia; the lands populated by ethnic groups; the territories of nation-states; the smaller territories of city-states; and even the ground or soil of the earth’s dry land surfaces. This semantic range of *’eres* is important; later, it bears on the variety of interpretations of the narrative of Noah’s flood.

The Hebrew word for **seas** (*yammîm*) is the plural of *yām*. In Canaanite mythology, Yam was god of the sea, a dangerous enemy of Baal; Baal was the most prominent, popular, and seductive of the Canaanite gods for ancient Israel. Here, as so many places in Gen 1, the pagan god is *not* a god, but God’s creation, ever attentive and responsive to God’s invitational instruction for the good ordering of the earth.

Verse 10 concludes with the report of God’s evaluation: **And God saw that it was good.** We may have expected this affirmation at the end of day two. However, on the earth’s surface, we experience and observe three great vistas: earth, sky, and sea. Only at this point in the third creation day did all three become evident. Thus, the evaluation expected at the end of day two occurs here (Cassuto 1961, 40), the real conclusion of this step in God’s creative process.

■ **11-12** The next stage follows the now-established pattern: God gave a command; the author reported the fulfillment of the command. God called on **the land to produce vegetation**; we could translate *vegetate vegetation*, since the verb and the noun are from the same root. The earth responded by bringing forth vegetation. The text is clear that the earth produced at the command/invitation of God the Creator. Contrary to the earth-goddess theology of most of ancient Israel's neighbors, the earth does not produce anything of its own volition; it does not possess the independent power to do so. The text mentions only two categories of vegetation: the *green plant seeding seed according to its kind and the tree making fruit, which its seed is in it, according to its kind* (v 12).

With only two broad botanical categories listed, we cannot press this statement too far. Some nonwoody plants produce fruits; some trees produce fruits that are neither large nor edible. In this creation narrative, the big picture is only and always in mind, never its minutiae. Nevertheless, the stability of life on this earth requires the order and normal predictability reflected in the phrase *according to its kind*. The fertility, and thus the endurance, of species normally depend on their offspring being of the same species as the parents.

Here again, we see a corrective to the pagan belief in the erratic unpredictability of nature, with its consequent need to appease, placate, or bribe the gods, if the fields, orchards, and gardens were to produce the food necessary for human and animal life. The true God, truly responsible for all the earth's goodness, said, *Let the earth bring forth vegetation* (v 11), and *the earth brought forth vegetation* (v 12). Neither bribery nor wheedling nor sympathetic magic is necessary; none of these is effective. The earth is not a goddess, but another of God's good creations. A lushly productive earth was and is God's intention from the beginning. Even here, what is diminished by humankind's turning our back upon God shall one day be restored.

Verse 12 concludes with the typical report of God's evaluation: **And God saw that it was good.**

Basil the Great on Gen 1:11

For the voice that was then heard and the first command became, as it were, a law of nature and remained in the earth, giving it the power to produce and bear fruit for all succeeding time. (Louth 2001, 14)

■ **13** The refrain **And there was evening, and there was morning** concludes each of the six "work" days of the creation week, marking them off with elegant literary cadence as separate paragraphs in the narrative. For days three, four, and five—the middle three of the *seven* days of the complete creation week account—the refrain is given verse numbers all to itself (vv 13, 19, 23). Though this creates a certain symmetry, it is an accident of the much later versification of the text, rather than an original intent of the narrator.

FROM THE TEXT

Some poetic passages in the Hebrew Scripture do speak of God controlling the rebellious seas by force. Some of these reassure us of God's present control of nature, even when violent storms seem to show the seas as rebellious (e.g., Ps 89:9-10; Nah 1:4). Others depict foreign empires metaphorically as the sea, or a monstrous sea creature, rebelling against the Creator (e.g., Ps 65:7). Still others depict the sea as unruly at the time of Israel's exodus, either as a metaphor for Egypt or simply as uneasy in the presence of God's awesome acts on Israel's behalf (e.g., Ps 74:13-14; Hab 3:8-10, 15).

That this passage, however, is a scene of the primeval ocean's peaceful response to God's further creative instruction is clear from the several other passages referring to the sea at the time of creation. The foremost example is Job 38:8-11, where the sea is depicted, not as a raging monster, but as a newborn infant. There, God, as the sea's divine "Parent," simply marked off the play area of the energetic child so it could hurt neither itself nor God's other valued creations. Ocean storms are not rebellious temper tantrums, but a joyous indulgence of the oceans' God-given powers, powers of immense benefit (though now of too-frequent destructive force, also) to the dry land and its creatures, as modern meteorological and other sciences have discovered.

It is not legitimate exegesis to press the phrase *according to its kind* into service as evidence against the hypothesis of evolution. First, evolutionists do not claim parents of one species produce offspring of another species; rather (they say), most evolutionary transitions occur in countless tiny steps. Second, individuals of two different species (both of plants and of animals) occasionally do mate and produce viable offspring; sometimes, such offspring even are fertile and produce another—we may call it a hybrid—species.

This phrase is repeated ten times in Gen 1 for the purposes both of praising God's wisdom and of thanking God for God's great goodness, in creating and superintending this marvelous, orderly, and dependable creation. As a statement of biological science, it says "only" that, all things being equal, like begets like. That is a very large "only"; we should be content with it as it is.

3. Days of Population (1:14-31)

a. Stationing the Luminaries (1:14-19)

BEHIND THE TEXT

Perhaps more than with any other paragraph in this creation account, an accurate understanding of *this* paragraph hinges on an understanding that Gen 1 was written with two original purposes in mind. One purpose is obvious—glorifying Yahweh (whose name appears for the first time in Gen 2) as the only God, and as sole Creator. The second purpose is not so obvious to Christians

with a millennium or more of monotheistic belief and understanding as our heritage. This second purpose is the correction of the dominant pagan theologies of Israel's neighbors, including their faulty views of creation, and of the purposes and mechanisms of creation upon this earth.

All ancient Israel's pagan neighbors regarded the sun, the moon, the five visible planets, the twelve signs of the zodiac, other major constellations, and several individual stars, as deities—as gods and goddesses. Many Israelites themselves, at various times in their history, abandoned their worship of Yahweh or added to it the worship of one or more of these heavenly bodies as gods (see, e.g., Jer 44:15-19; Ezek 8:16). In this paragraph, especially, the narrator of Genesis marshaled vocabulary choice, syntax, and the order of the paragraph as a whole to combat this diminished theology. We hasten to agree with Westermann, however, that his intention was “not to degrade [the heavenly bodies], but to set their limits” (1984, 129).

IN THE TEXT

■ **14-15** As we have seen, day one of the creation week narrative records God's calling light into existence. Day four, its partner in the pairing of the days of God's creative work, records God's making of the luminaries, the light-bearers. God's command, **Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky** (v 14), is the most obvious example of the author's phenomenological approach in this narrative. The author already has defined **the expanse** as what we call today, scientifically, the atmosphere. Yet, here, God proposed and placed the **lights** in the atmosphere, **in the expanse**. Phenomenologically, that is true; that is how we see and experience the sun, the moon, and the stars. Similarly, further into the paragraph, these **lights** are discussed in terms of their time-keeping functions on this earth, without denying their other characteristics and other functions, because these are the ways the vast majority have experienced them throughout human history.

The author structured this account very carefully for an important theological reason. First, note that all the heavenly bodies are subsumed under the single noun, **lights**, then the three ordained tasks of these lights with respect to the earth are enumerated: (1) **to separate the day from the night**; (2) one task with four aspects, marking the progression of time as we measure time by various lengths: **to serve as signs**; **to mark seasons**; [to mark] **days**; [to mark] **years**; (3) **to give light on the earth**.

Cyril of Jerusalem on Gen 1:14-15

Men ought to have been astonished and amazed not only at the arrangement of the sun and moon but also at the well-ordered movements of the stars and their unfettered courses and the timely rising of each of them; how some are signs of summer, others of winter; how some indicate the time for sowing, others the times of navigation. (Louth 2001, 17)

And it was so is proleptic (as also in vv 11*b*, 24*b*). God's spoken word of command/instruction was sufficient guarantee of the appearance of the entities and processes commanded. Yet the text continues in all three places, reporting that "the land produced" (v 12), and "God made" (vv 16, 25). God spoke *and* God acted. Word and action, action and word; stated purpose and ensuing fulfillment—the seamless narrative reflects the sure wisdom of the God who does not misstep or flounder between resolve and act but carries God's purposes forward, unhesitatingly and unerringly. The emphasis is not on the timing or the duration but on the certainty of God's flawless completion; the text also suggests God's joy and satisfaction both in the proposing and in the doing.

■ 16 Second, only after enumerating their functions for the benefit of the earth did the author refer to these **lights** separately; then, only to the two most obvious ones separately; and finally, to these two not by name, but only by circumlocution—the **greater light** and the **lesser light**! All the rest of the majestic and multitudinous heavenly host are subsumed in a single common noun: *and the stars*. (He also made is not in the Hebrew text of v 16.) The functions of the **greater light** and the **lesser light** are to *rule* (*māšal*, "to have dominion," "rule," "reign") **the day** and **the night**, respectively. The text is clear that God not only **made** these lights but also delegated to these created entities the task of regulating the cycle of day and night.

The purposely omitted Hebrew names include *šemeš* (the sun) and *yārēah* (the moon). Of the unnamed stars and planets, the planet Venus was the most prominent as a goddess among Israel's neighbors, variously known as Inanna, Ishtar, and Astarte. Even in Judah's final days as a vassal state under Babylon, Judean women were worshipping her (as "The Queen of Heaven"), and her paramour Tammuz, with their husbands' knowledge and consent (Jer 44:15-30; Ezek 8:14).

Enuma Elish and Gen 1

That Gen 1 was written with the Sumerian/Babylonian account we now know as the *Enuma Elish* especially in mind is disputed by hardly any today. The best-known version is Babylonian, with Marduk, Babylon's patron god, as its hero. Earlier versions and fragments demonstrate that this story originated in Sumer, south of Babylon at the head of what usually we call today the Persian Gulf. It is a safe assumption that (at least) educated ancient Israelites knew of this polytheistic cosmogony by oral account, if not in one of its written versions.

In the Babylonian version of creation, Apsu was the god of the fresh waters, the rivers and streams, lakes and springs. Tiamat, the goddess of the primeval saltwater oceans, mainly the Persian Gulf for the Sumerians, was his consort. Apsu and Tiamat were the parents and grandparents of the younger gods. Some of these killed Apsu, in circumstances that are less than clear.

Obviously, Tiamat did not take kindly the murder of her husband and threatened the gods with annihilation. As the goddess of the primeval oceans,

she easily could have swept in and inundated everything in the marshy Sumerian homeland. The gods cowered together in fear, not knowing what to do. In the Babylonian version, Marduk, a strapping young god, stood up and volunteered to meet Tiamat in mortal combat. He demanded a price, however. Before he would fight Tiamat, the other gods had to make Marduk king. Not seeing an alternative, they agreed and Marduk became king of the gods.

Marduk did defeat and kill Tiamat in battle. Following a brief celebration, he split her carcass into two halves. From one half, he formed the earth; from the other, the skies. Translators even have translated “the firmament” at that point in this story. Marduk placed others of the gods as “great gods” in the firmament—sun, moon, planets, constellations, etc.

The gods who had sided with Tiamat in her “rebellion” Marduk forced into servitude, to wait on him and the gods who had sided with him. When the servant-gods became tired of their service, they came to Marduk, asking for relief. Ea, the wise counselor of the gods, gave Marduk a plan. They executed Kingu, Tiamat’s closest confidant in her battle against Marduk. From Kingu’s blood, mixed with mud, Ea [or Marduk in some texts] formed “man” to serve the gods, replacing the lesser gods who had been on the “wrong” side in the divine battle.

■ **17-19** Verse 17 begins with the author’s categorical statement, **God set them**—all these lights—in the **expanse of the sky**. Verses 17 and 18 then comprise a second listing of their three functions (see the first list in vv 14-15), in chiasmic (reverse) order, and in similar but not identical language: (1) **to give light**; (2) **to govern**, i.e., to regulate time; (3) **to separate light from darkness**. The heavenly bodies emphatically are *not* gods, as claimed in the *Enuma Elish*. They are God’s creations and servants, established in their places and in their movements by God, for God’s purposes. These include, but are not limited to, their services to God’s smaller creations upon this earth.

Augustine on Gen 1:17-18

Everyone understands that there is a great difference between astrological prediction and observing the stars as natural phenomena, in the way that farmers and sailors do, either to verify geographical areas or to steer their course somewhere . . . There is a great difference between these practical customs and the superstitions of men who study the stars . . . in an effort to peer into the predestined outcome of events. (Louth 2001, 18-19)

Finally, in the paragraph as a whole, the author recorded that “God said” (v 14), “God made” (v 16), **God set/placed** (v 17), and **God saw** [evaluated] (v 18)—four verbs with God explicitly the subject of each, the only four indicative action verbs in the paragraph. Nothing could be more explicit, or more clear: Elohim (Yahweh Elohim in Gen 2), *not* Marduk, is the God who creates and sustains all else that is. The Babylonian creation account, the *Enuma Elish*, does not even claim that Marduk created everything, but what it does

claim for Marduk, Gen 1 denies and corrects. For our day, the claim is equally forceful, partly because the text does *not* divert attention with details: nothing and no one except God is eternally existent; nothing arose spontaneously. God created all that exists. Verse 18 ends with the typical report of God's evaluation of what God had made, followed by the refrain, **and there was evening, and there was morning—the fourth day** (v 19).

FROM THE TEXT

All this day four description together—extremely sketchy as it is from the standpoint of astronomical science, yet so vividly extraordinary even with its economy of words—compels the reader to ask, Why?

The author of Genesis, in this account, was at pains to establish that these heavenly bodies, powerful and impressive to every human being though they are, are not gods. So far are they from being gods that in this account, celebrating the wisdom and power of God's creative work, they are not even named, lest their names remind Israelite hearers/readers that their neighbors worshipped them as gods. Nameless here, they reflect God their Creator's glory the more brightly.

The luminaries are, in fact, God's creations and God's servants, with specific tasks to perform at God's behest, for the benefit of God's tiny creation—measured in astronomical distances—upon this minuscule sphere in the middle of this smallish solar system, itself at the edge of our medium-sized galaxy. But size does not measure importance; by itself, dominance does not merit worship. The dominion of the sun and the moon in the heavens, a real dominion only from our vantage point, is appointed them by their Creator, just as our dominion upon the earth is appointed by that same Creator. They cannot forsake their appointed tasks until God releases them. We ought not forsake ours.

The Inca Pachacuti on the Sun as God's Servant

The name Inca refers properly to the ruler of the Andean Quechua Empire before Pizarro's arrival. The Inca Pachacuti, ruling about 1438-71, built temples to Inti (the sun) in various Quechua centers, in what now is Peru. Upon further reflection, he realized the sun could not be the supreme deity. Acting like a laborer and a servant, Inti always follows the same path and keeps the same hours—Pachacuti's capital, Cuzco, is fewer than fourteen degrees south of the equator—and even a passing cloud can dim its light. Pachacuti redirected worship among the Quechuan upper classes from Inti, the servant, to Viracocha, "the Lord, the omnipotent Creator of all things," at that time nearly lost to Quechuan memory. All this more than fifty years before the European conquest of Pachacuti's Andean empire! (Adapted from Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts* [Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1984], 33-39)

b. Populating Seas and Skies (1:20-23)

BEHIND THE TEXT

In this paragraph, the author used the phrase *nepēš hayyâ* (“living creatures”) for the first time (v 20). Next, he employed the verb *bārāʾ* (“he created”) for only the second time in the creation account (v 21). Finally, the first blessing of anything by anyone occurs here (v 22), with God’s blessing (*bārak*; “he blessed”) of the first animate, sensate life, the creatures of the seas and the skies. These three significant vocabulary choices, brought together in this short paragraph, are the author’s tip-off to the reader that this day’s activity marked a signal advance in God’s creative design for and work upon the earth.

IN THE TEXT

■20 As day two marked the separation of *the waters . . . above* (the firmament, or sky) from *the waters . . . below* (the seas), now day five marked God’s command to the seas and skies to teem with the first animate life on the planet—largely speaking, the fishes and the fowls. A full translation is instructive, *Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds [or winged creatures] fly above the earth, against the face of the firmament of the heavens.*

God’s command, *Let the waters swarm*, is parallel to the previous command, *Let the earth bring forth* (vv 11-12). Here again, God invited what God already had created to participate as responsive partners in further acts of creation.

Here, the category *living creatures* corresponds to the animal kingdom of modern biological taxonomy. These are the first representatives of animal life on the earth, as contrasted with plant life. As we have noted earlier with respect to the gathering of the seas (v 9), neither can this part of the account be used either for or against the young earth or the old earth positions on origins. In fact, it agrees with both these positions that animal life originated in the seas.

The Hebrew category *‘ôp* refers to birds, but also goes beyond to include all flying or *winged creatures*. Again, the objective is not biological precision, but inclusiveness. The two prepositional phrases (both with Hebrew *‘al*) are further examples of the phenomenological approach of this narrative. As seen by humans from the earth’s surface, winged creatures fly **above the earth** and **against the face of the firmament**, i.e., the “surface” of the sky, as we see and experience it from “below.”

■21 As before (vv 9, 11-12, 14-16), the command is followed by its implementation.

The choice of the verb *bārāʾ* (**So God created**) is fitting because the focus here is on God’s creation of the first animate life on the earth, the fishes of

the sea and the fowl of the air. Nothing created in days one to three moves of its own volition. The author took great pains in reporting God's work of day four to emphasize that the luminaries move, but at God's will and in God's paths, and on God's errands, not their own. Here, for the first time, are creatures that move as they will, though much more by instinct than by reason.

Biblical writers, elsewhere in the OT, metaphorically present **the great creatures of the sea** as creatures that rebel against God, or as creatures that may try to resist God (see Job 7:12; Ps 74:13-14). Here, as with the waters of the primeval deep (Gen 1:2), there is no hint of that. Every creature in the sea, both great and small, and every bird of every kind in the sky, received its life from God. Again the phrase, *according to their/its kind*, reflects the writer's understanding and observation of various kinds (or, in our scientific term, "species") of sea creatures and flying creatures in the sky.

Verse 21 concludes with the typical evaluation: **And God saw that it was good**. This report conveys God's assessment that the animals of the seas and the skies exist and function as God planned and created them to be and do.

■ **22** Verse 22 reports the first blessing recorded in Scripture, **God blessed them**. The first animate life upon the earth, the sea creatures and birds of the sky, received God's blessing in the form of the power of sexual reproduction. In this way, the writer introduces blessing as an essential part of God's creational activity. We shall encounter a blessing fulfilling this purpose again, in the account of the creation of humankind on day six (1:28). Even the verbs of blessing/command here are those we shall see again in the blessing of humankind (*'ādām*): "be fruitful and multiply, and fill" (NRSV). The slightly different wording, **and let the birds multiply upon the earth**, credits the fact that, while birds fly in the skies, they nest upon, or close to, the earth. God's original creation intention was and still is that all creatures, great and small, multiply and fill their natural habitats to their natural healthy capacities. Scarcity in all its manifestations is a result and condition of the marring, scarring, and depletion caused by the breaking of relational harmony introduced into God's good creation by human sin.

John Wesley on Gen 1:22

Observe, 2, The *blessing* of them in order to their continuance. Life is a wasting thing, its strength is not the strength of stones; therefore the wise Creator not only made the individuals, but provided for the propagating of the several species, . . . Fruitfulness is the effect of God's blessing, and must be ascribed to it; the multiplying of the fish and fowl from year to year, is still the fruit of this blessing here. (Wesley 1975, 6)

■ **23** Verse 23 assigns God's creation of the sea creatures and the birds in the sky to the fifth day with the typical refrain, **and there was evening, and there was morning**.

FROM THE TEXT

We would not *need* any other biblical text than this paragraph to understand the value God places on the earth and its life forms, which God delighted in creating, then entrusted to our care as God's stewards. This text invites the people of God to be at the forefront with others who act out of concern for the earth and all its inhabitants. It is true that some approach these causes from a secular, or from other religious, perspectives, some even from a belief in the earth as a mother goddess. However, this is not a warrant for the community of Judeo-Christian faith to neglect God's stewardship mandate. After all, God has given us a proper historical and theological foundation for a biblical stewardship, rooted here and elsewhere in the biblical narrative. As humans created by God in the image of God, as stewards appointed by God upon this earth, we are to care for, bless, and enjoy what God created, blessed, and enjoys. We are to regard and value God's creation as God regards and values it.

c. *Populating the Land (1:24-25)*

BEHIND THE TEXT

This short section presents the third of God's command/instructions for an already existent entity to bring forth life (see vv 11, 20, above), to respond to God's invitation and become a kind of junior partner in creation. This third time the instruction was for the earth/land to *spring forth living creatures*. This time, however, the narrative records that God **made** rather than "created," 'āsâ rather than bārā'. The use of bārā' in v 21 emphasizes the magnitude of the step from inanimate to animate life, in God's initial creation of sense life in the seas and the skies. Using 'āsâ here conveys the (now) "normal" continuance of God's bringing forth animal life, but now upon the land.

Moreover, as the dry land appeared on day three, so now the land animals were created on day six. Thus, the third of the three pairings of creation days and their works is introduced, and the symmetry is complete.

IN THE TEXT

■ **24** Let the land produce living creatures; produce (yāsâ, "to go out," "to come out," "to go forth"; see also v 12) we may understand as "send forth." This corresponds to its occurrence in v 12, where the narrator used the same verb to describe the land causing vegetation to spring forth on day three. Certainly this was a conscious choice, the writer acknowledging the earth as God's appointed bearer and nurturer of all life, inanimate and animate alike. Moreover, in a number of important respects, and on the level of the cell, life's basic building block, all life is more alike than different.

Verse 24 presents the living creatures of the sixth day in three groups (see v 21). While the modern reader may see these as “prescientific” categories for classifying land animals, they make perfect sense in an agrarian subsistence culture, such as ancient Israel’s. First listed are the **livestock**, the domesticated animals; cattle, sheep, goats, and the donkey would have been important species within this first group.

Second to be listed are the **creatures that move along the ground**, including many smaller (and undomesticated) mammals, reptiles, and amphibians, among others. Not all these creatures *crawl* on the ground as, e.g., KJV’s “creeping thing” could imply. However, from the vantage point of human height looking down—i.e., phenomenologically, once again—many of them appear to creep or crawl even when they are moving on four legs. Walton tentatively suggests this group comprises mostly the wild animals that move about in herds and later were permitted for food (9:2-3), as distinct from the larger (also wild) predators—which he then would place in the third group, below (2001, 341-43).

The third group includes the larger **wild animals**, or the *living creatures of the land*, those that do not belong to the domesticated group of the farmstead and/or the courtyard stable of the house. Though many of the animals in this group are dangerous to humans at close range, we see here a glimpse of the marvelous variety of God’s creation from the beginning.

1:24-25

Fretheim on Human and Nonhuman Vocation

We have suggested that it is a mistake to consider creation as an activity that moves in only one direction: from God to creature. Creatures are also involved in creative activity—for *God’s sake*. It is also a mistake to think that vocation moves only in one direction: from the human to the nonhuman. . . . I want to claim that vocation also moves from the nonhuman to the human. Thus I speak of a *mutuality of vocation*; both humans and nonhumans are called to a vocation on behalf of each other in the furtherance of God’s purposes for the creation. (2005, 273, emphases original)

■ **25** Again, what God proposed and commanded, God caused to come to pass. Again, the completion of this part of the creation is reported, so the reader/hearer can know it was, in fact, accomplished. And again, the wording of the report is slightly different from the proposal, this time with a different order of the three major groupings (the **wild animals** first, then the **livestock**, and finally the **creatures that move along the ground**). Again, the repetition of the phrase, *according to its kind*, with each animal group in vv 24-25, shows the significance of God not only creating, organizing, and ordering various types of animal life out of the disorder of inanimate life but also establishing a process for the continuation of life.

Verse 25 ends with the typical evaluation, **And God saw that it was good**, though the report of God’s work on day six continues in vv 26-31. The evaluation here pertains to the land creatures. We find another evaluation at the end of the activities on day six, there with respect to the whole of creation, following its culmination in the creation of humankind (v 31; compare the two evaluations of vv 10, 12, both pertaining to day three).

FROM THE TEXT

Once again, the multiple repetition—five times in these two verses—of the notation **according to its kind**, stands as an emphatic reminder that, while God is sovereign, God is not totalitarian in God’s rule, even toward those creatures who are not said to reflect God’s image as humans do. God designed, formed, and gave life to myriad species, but endowed them with procreative powers, bringing them into partnership with God in the ongoing existence of God’s good creation. As Hamilton succinctly states it, “The Creator makes creators” (1990, 132).

The repeated phrase **according to its kind** also emphasizes the importance of the reasoned and reasonable order God established in and for the creation. One may see here a foundation for subsequent biblical teaching on the order of godly relationship(s) inherent in the reality and the experience of holiness. While we may characterize this idea as a “typological” interpretation, the repetition of the phrase indicates that this was a legitimate concern of the narrator. We note this emphasis without asking it to bear more theological weight than the writer may have intended; it is a reflection, not a dogma.

d. Creating the ^ʾ*ādām* as Male and Female (1:26-28)

BEHIND THE TEXT

“What’s past is prologue”; in the literary ordering of this creation chapter, we have reached the climactic act. The author signals this in several ways: (1) this is the last act of creation in the creation week; (2) v 26 implies a heavenly “council”—**Let us make ^ʾ*ādām***; this was not done previously; (3) the verb *bārāʾ* (**he created**) used only seven times in the entire account, occurs three times in v 27.

Once again, we will understand this climactic act of God’s earthly creation better if we understand its literary precursor, the *Enuma Elish*, and that text’s profoundly pessimistic account of the formation of humankind, and the gods’ reasons for it. As noted above, in that account Marduk executed Kingu, Tiamat’s chief ally, and formed man from his blood.

Marduk’s Speech and the Forming of Humankind in *Enuma Elish*

“Blood will I form and cause bone to be;

Then will I set up *lullu*, ‘Man’ shall be his name!
 Yes, I will create *lullu*: Man!
 (Upon him) shall the services of the gods be imposed that they may be at rest.”

.....
 They bound him [Kingu] and held him before Ea;
 Punishment they inflicted upon him by cutting (the arteries of) his blood.
 With his blood they created mankind;
 He [Ea] imposed the services of the gods (upon them) and set the gods free.
 (Heidel 1951, 46-47)

At another place, the text speaks of Ea “nipping” bits of clay from a large lump and forming each bit into a “man,” as part of this process. Thus, we are to understand that human beings were formed from the blood of a rebellious, executed minor deity, mixed with clay—i.e., we were formed from bloody mud, tainted by the gravest guilt and shame, from our creation.

Israel’s creation theology critiques and corrects this (and other) inadequate versions of human origins.

The verb, **Let us make** (a single verb in Hebrew), naturally raises the question of to whom God was speaking. Commentators have proposed a number of answers to this question. Early on, many of the church fathers read this as the first OT reference to the Trinity.

A second view is that the first person plural in this phrase is a plural of divine majesty; God was speaking of himself in the first person plural form. Perhaps more common today is a third explanation, that God was speaking to the “heavenly council” of angels and other created beings in attendance around God’s heavenly throne. These two views are not mutually exclusive, and even could stand, conceivably, with the fourth view discussed below. In potential support of the third, we have hints of such a heavenly council in other OT passages, perhaps most notably Job 1:6; 2:1.

Cassuto (1961, 55-56), Westermann (1984, 145), and others adopt, and Hamilton (1990, 133-34) treats as plausible, a fourth view, interpreting this verb as a plural of self-exhortation, as when a person says to himself or herself, “Let’s go!”; “Let’s get on with it!” This view, too, may not be incompatible with one or more of the others and encourages us to see God as passionate about God’s creation. Indeed, we know from all of Scripture that God loves and delights in creation. Why should not God have been keen to get on with the crown of God’s earthly creation, *’ādām*, since all else now was ready?

IN THE TEXT

■ **26** Verse 26 introduces a significant transition in the narrative. The shift from the more impersonal jussives, “let there be . . .,” “let the waters . . .,” and “let the land . . .,” to the emphatically personal cohortative **let us make . . .**, indicates that God’s creation of humankind was to be a new and different order of action. Though we may not be able to define with complete confidence the

full range of meaning of **us** in this text (see above), what is clear is that God involved himself fully and without the direct participation of other entities already created. The verb **make** (*‘āsâ*, “do,” “make”), with God as subject, often conveys the idea of God creating something (e.g., vv 7, 16). The psalmists confessed that humans are made by God (Ps 100:3), even that we are made by the *hands* of God (Ps 119:73; see also Job 31:15).

Gregory of Nyssa on Gen 1:26a

This same language was not used for (the creation) of other things. The command was simple when light was created; God said, “let there be light.” Heaven was also made without deliberation. . . . These, though, were before (the creation of) humans. For humans, there was deliberation. He did not say, as he did when creating other things, “Let there be a human.” See how worthy you are! Your origins are not in an imperative. Instead, God deliberated about the best way to bring to life a creation worthy of honor. (Louth 2001, 28)

The focus of vv 26 and 27 is on God making/creating the *’ādām*, or humankind. The subsequent context (vv 28-31) confirms that both *’ādām* in v 26 (*without* the definite article) and *hā’ādām* in v 27 (*with* the definite article) refer to human beings in a generic sense. In our discussion of Gen 2 (below), we will treat in greater detail the use of *’ādām* in the larger narrative of Gen 1—5.

The two prepositional phrases together, **in our image, in our likeness**, constitute a brief example of the well-known Semitic device called parallelism, a literary usage in which the second line (here, phrase) repeats the idea of the first, but not in identical language. Thus, **image** (*šelem*) and **likeness** (*dēmût*) are essentially synonyms in Hebrew, as in English. Both terms mean that God created the *’ādām* like God, or reflecting God, as a mirror reflects the image of the one looking into it, as a fine sculpture is the likeness of the one it was made to represent or, even better, perhaps, as a child is the likeness of the parent.

The clear teaching of Christian Scripture, though, is that God became human only in the incarnation of Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity. Thus, the creation of *’ādām* in the **image** of God cannot mean here, “in God’s physical image.” Rather, we are in God’s image as spiritual beings, as possessing the powers of love, reason, and wisdom, of imagination and creativity, and real emotions, among other attributes or characteristics.

The divine speech, **And let them exercise stewardship dominion/oversight**, prefigures the task(s) God would assign to the *’ādām*. This rendering is appropriate in light of the more specific naming of the tasks, **to serve it and to guard it**, given to the first human when God placed him in the garden (2:15). As we shall see in 1:27, “them” refers to male and female together, thus to humankind collectively.

All three realms of life upon the earth (see comments on vv 9-10, above) are included within the sphere of humankind’s stewardship dominion—seas,

skies, and dry land. God's creation purpose in this regard is that the whole earth and all its creatures should benefit from humankind's wise, caring, and conscientious stewardship, arising from our love, honor, and respect for God, and from our identification with our fellow creatures *as* fellow creatures in our common home, God's good earth.

■ **27** The first noteworthy feature of v 27, reporting the completion of God's purpose to create 'ādām, is the use of bārā' three times in three lines. As noted above (see sidebar, 1:1), bārā' is used fewer than fifty times in the entire Hebrew text of the OT, seven times in this chapter. That three of these seven occurrences are in one verse, three consecutive lines, is extremely significant. The creation of the 'ādām is very special, indeed! God intended and regards 'ādām as the goal and crown of God's earthly creation.

So what, or who, is 'ādām? 'ādām is the one creature on this earth created **in the image of God**. This is the first "theological" understanding the author wished the reader/hearer to gain from this verse, so he said it twice. Furthermore, the second line is *more* emphatic than the first; **in the image of God** comes before the verb. (In the normal Hebrew sentence order, the verb is first.) As though this were not emphasis enough, the author used the noun rather than the pronoun in the second line—**in the image of God**, rather than "merely" **in his own image**—to build a crescendo of emphasis from the first to the second line.

The third and the really climactic line of v 27 reveals that **male and female** are the two genders of 'ādām. Written in a patriarchal society, and intended for the instruction of patriarchal cultures of every time and place, this final climactic line is a real blockbuster. **Female**, too, is specially created; **female**, too, is 'ādām; **female**, too, is **in the image of God**! This line can mean nothing less than that God's creation intention is human gender equality.

Also important here is to note use of the singular pronoun in the second line, **he created him**, and the plural pronoun in the third line, **he created them**. As Brueggemann has stated, "Humankind is a single entity. All human persons stand in solidarity before God. But on the other hand, humankind is a community, male and female. And none is the full image of God alone. . . . God is . . . not mirrored as an individual but as a community" (1982, 34).

■ **28** What just had been clearly and unequivocally stated, now could be assumed: **God blessed them** [male *and* female] **and said to them** [male *and* female]. Moreover, the five imperative verbs constituting God's blessing of the first pair all are plural; the humans were partners in receiving God's blessing, as well as in fulfilling the commission of the fivefold instruction.

Another indicator of human physical kinship with the rest of God's earthly animate creation is that the first three imperatives are the same as the three by which God instructed the sea creatures at the end of day five. The first of the three was, **Be fruitful**. Since human reproduction (as with most earthly life) requires sexual congress, it follows that sexual activity, in and of

itself, cannot be sinful. Sustained bringing forth of children, then, would lead to the fulfillment of the second and third of these five commands, **increase in number** and **fill the earth**. The ordinary meaning of the verb *mil'û*, and the necessary meaning here, is **fill**, “populate,” or some synonym. The KJV translation “replenish” the earth is wrong and misleading. This mistranslation of the KJV is partly responsible for the rise of the erroneous gap theory we discussed (and dismissed) in our commentary on 1:2.

Subdue and **rule over**, together, do constitute God’s mandate for human governance of our fellow creatures upon the earth. This is clear especially since the creatures of all three already prepared and filled habitats of the earth are mentioned here—**fish**, **birds**, and **every living creature** of the sea, the air, and the ground, respectively. However, as noted already with our translation of v 26, we must establish the meaning of these two verbs, not in isolation from, but within, their literary and theological context. The narrative of 2:5-17 (v 15, particularly) stipulates the intended meaning of the verbs **subdue** and **rule over**. In 2:15, the mandate to the human was to “serve” and to “guard/watch over/keep/protect” the garden. By logical inference, this vocation included not just the trees and other plant life in the garden but also its animals. The human vocation is to care for, protect, and preserve the earth and its plant and animal life—not to exploit, destroy, or abuse God’s creation.

Gregory of Nyssa on the Image of God

God creates man for no other reason than that God is good; . . . the perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by his both bringing man into being from nothing and fully supplying him with all good gifts. . . . The language of Scripture therefore expresses it concisely by a comprehensive phrase, in saying that man was made “in the image of God,” for this is the same as to say that he made human nature participant in all good; for if the Deity is the fullness of good . . . then the image finds its resemblance to the archetype in being filled with all good. (Louth 2001, 34)

Brueggemann on Humans in the Image of God

There is one way in which God is imaged in the world and only one: humanness! This is the only creature, the only part of creation, which discloses to us something about the reality of God. . . . God is known peculiarly through this creature who exists in the realm of free history, where power is received, decisions are made, and commitments are honored. . . . The image of God in the human person is a mandate of power and responsibility. But it is power exercised as God exercises power. The image images the creative use of power which invites, evokes, and permits. There is nothing here of coercive or tyrannical power, either for God or for humankind. (1982, 32)

FROM THE TEXT

These three verses comprise the introduction of human beings, the first scriptural mention of *ʾādām*, here in the primal account of the planet's origins. As such, they constitute a paradigmatic text, against which other, subsequent texts must be measured. This text and the considerably more detailed account of ch 2, together, comprise the biblical record of God's intentions for humans—our being and our place—in the original design of creation, before our turning from God fractured relationships at every level. Because of its narrative primacy in the creation accounts, and because of its canonical primacy with respect to all other texts, this announcement of God's creation of humans, with all the meaning it conveys, shapes our understanding of every subsequent text, and not the other way around. Other texts do not interpret this text, though they may illumine it. *This* text interprets every *other* text. This is true even for several points in our understanding of the more detailed account of ch 2, as we shall see below.

So what *do* these three verses tell us about *ʾādām*, the human being? Already in v 26, when God declared the divine intention of making *ʾādām* in God's own image and likeness, God's declared purpose for doing so, in this statement, was to let **them** exercise stewardship dominion over the rest of God's earthly creation. This, before the reader even is told who **them** may be!

Verse 27 reveals the identity of the plural *ʾādām*; it is male and female. *Only* male and female, *both*, created in God's image—that is, *neither* the one *nor* the other, *alone*. In v 28, God blessed both male and female and gave the word of blessing/command to both male and female. This means that to be female is to be in God's image; to be male is to be in God's image. Not even a hint of the possibility of subordination of one to the other—whether female to male or male to female—ever would occur to the reader, from this text. That has to be imported from elsewhere, and thus is illegitimate here. Moreover, if we were to make such an ill-advised interpretive decision on this text, it would support subordination of the male to the female equally as well as subordination of the female to the male.

In fact, female subordination to the male as God's creation intention usually has been “discovered” in the more detailed account of ch 2, then imported back into this account. But the influence must go the other way. Since this text does not hint at subordination of either to the other, we ought to look again at our understanding of the male/female relationship as presented in ch 2. This we shall do below.

John Wesley's “Analogy of Faith”—the principle that we must interpret unclear passages of Scripture by those passages that are clear—is essential to our hermeneutical practice here. Interpreters (and critics of faith) often make some such claim as, “The Bible is patriarchal.” As the first and clearest declaration of God's original creation intention, this text governs our understand-

ing of all other texts. This report clearly does not represent God's intention for humans as either patriarchal or matriarchal. Therefore, the appropriate response to the false charge that the Bible is inherently and intentionally patriarchal is to affirm that this text *precludes* patriarchalism. As we shall see below in ch 3, our first parents' choice to break relationship with God resulted in the broken human relationships of patriarchalism, matriarchalism, and all other unethical power relationships of some humans over other humans.

That this is God's intention also in the grand plan of redemption/restoration is clear from the paradigmatic NT text on the matter, Paul's statement, ***There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is not male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*** (Gal 3:28). ***Neither Jew nor Greek*** invalidates "spiritual" or ethnic privilege falsely perceived as God-ordained. ***Neither slave nor free*** invalidates social and economic privilege falsely perceived as God-ordained. ***There is not male and female*** means that gender is not abolished in Christ, as the other categories ultimately are. However, in most of first-century Greco-Roman-Jewish culture, adult females usually found their standing, and sometimes even their hope of salvation, only in and through their married state, which is to say, in and through their husbands. Our text, and Paul, both invalidate gender privilege falsely perceived as God-ordained. Woman does not need man to experience relationship with God; God extends that to her on her own, just as God does to man. That our understanding of Gen 1:26-27 is correct is affirmed by Paul's grounding his radical evangelistic ("Good News") egalitarianism in his affirmation that all this is so "in Christ." If it is "in Christ" in redemption/restoration, then it also is "in Christ" by God's original creation intention.

The use of the plural verb, **let us make**, and the two plural pronouns, **in our image, in our likeness**, has led to much discussion. Almost all Jewish, and many Christian, exegetes have taken these as plurals of divine majesty, following on the fact that the title for God used throughout this chapter also is a plural form, *Elohim*, and certainly is used as a plural of divine majesty for the one, the only, transcendent God.

Some Christian writers have read this verse as saying more, pointing to it as the first explicitly Trinitarian reference in the Bible. Exegetically, this is going too far. We cannot press this verse to be, in and of its own intent, a Trinitarian declaration, and then use it as a proof text for the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The most we may do with integrity, as Christian interpreters who accept that God is the Three-in-One, is to include this as the first (or second, cf. 1:2) of a number of OT hints, prefigurings, or foreshadowings of the Trinitarian nature of God. We come to this understanding of God in Gen 1 only because we already believe, from the NT and the early church's Spirit-led understanding, that God is Trinity. (See, however, Hamilton 1990, 134, for a spirited and plausible defense of going a bit further than we have gone here.)

Augustine on the Prefiguring of the Trinity in Gen 1:26-27

For God said, “Let us make man in our image and likeness”: a little later, however, it is said “And God made man in the image of God.” It would certainly not be correct to say “our,” because the number is plural, if man were made in the image of one person, whether Father, Son or Holy Spirit. But because he is made in the image of the Trinity, consequently it was said “in our image.” Again, lest we choose to believe in three gods in the Trinity, since the same Trinity is one God, he said, “And God made man in his image,” as if he were to say “in his [own triune] image.” (Louth 2001, 30)

Finally, wise, compassionate stewardship as the standard of human care for the earth and for our fellow creatures upon it is implicit in the record of God’s exquisite care in the creation of it all, to this point in the text. God would not throw away all God had so carefully and joyously made, by handing it over to humans with the *instruction* to be careless, destructive stewards. Our translation, *exercise stewardship dominion*, reminds us that stewards are charged with promoting the welfare of all things and all creatures entrusted to their supervision. Collectively and individually, humankind will render to God an accounting of and for our stewardship of the planet God has entrusted to our care.

Genesis 1 (along with many others) helps us understand love as God’s true nature and character. John Wesley regarded the love God shows, and the love God engenders in us, as the touchstone of Christian faith and practice. Whatever does not arise from love, whatever does not exhibit love, is less than whole. Though the word “love” does not occur in Gen 1, we may conclude with confidence that God did everything this chapter reports from the motivation of the love that is God’s nature, God’s essential characteristic.

If “God is love” (1 John 4:8), then the human species whom God created in God’s image also was characterized by love, originally. We may think of the first humans as God’s agents in representing God’s love to all earthly creation; this was part of the exercise of their stewardship/dominion upon and for the earth and its inhabitants. Of course, we do not have a lengthy account of their exercise of that stewardship; they forsook that agency relatively early in their tenure upon the earth. But as God’s “image” and “likeness,” while they displayed it in the perfection of their original creation, certainly they comported themselves, and acted toward all creation, in love.

In the person and work of Jesus Christ, the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45-47), God restored the possibility and the reality of humans once again becoming and acting in the image and likeness of God, as God’s agents of love in and for all this earthly creation. As Wesley rightly understood, this is our calling both individually and together, as the body of Christ (John 17:22-26; 1 Cor 12:12-27).

e. Provision and Benison (1:29-31)

IN THE TEXT

■ **29-30** God's direct speech to the newly created 'ādām continues in v 29. Here, the idea of stewardship dominion over, of care for and protection of the earth and its resources, is carried further in at least two ways. First, God assigned the plants and trees—much of the vegetation created on day three—as food for the humans and for the rest of the animal kingdom. Second, the implication of giving plants as food is the withholding, at least in the beginning, of permission to eat flesh. Of course, we may not press this too far; the silence of a text on a matter is not proof. Taking this paragraph as a whole, however, we at least may wonder whether it would have occurred to the first humans to look at their fellow creatures as a source of food. (See, also, Walton 2001, 341-43; his alternative approach to this issue is worth serious consideration.)

God's opening words, *Behold, I have given to you*, are further evidence of God's goodness and of God's goodwill toward humans and the others of God's animal creation on the earth. *Upon the face of all the earth* is a reminder of God's creation mandate to "fill the earth" (v 28). Wherever the 'ādām would go in fulfillment of this mandate, there they would find plants for food, at least in the beginning, before sin disrupted the earth, as well as the humans upon it.

God's instruction to the humans let them know that God's provision also extended to the other creatures with whom they shared the earth. We should read v 30 as mentioning only the two broadest categories of creatures that do not live in the waters, *And also to every living creature of the earth—even to every flying creature of the heavens, and to every creature that moves about upon the earth, which in it [them] is sensate life—[I have given] every green plant for food*. This instruction functions syntactically as the conclusion of the sentence begun in v 29 with the verb *I have given*. As indicated, the verb is not actually repeated in the Hebrew text of this verse. Even the syntax of this lengthy sentence revealed to the first couple their common animate life with their fellow creatures. From a very basic and generalized perspective, we eat the same food. Humans are *more* than "animal," but we are not *less*.

And it was so; this is now the sixth occurrence of this refrain. It occurs once in the account of the second day (v 7), and twice in the account of the third day (vv 9, 11); it occurs once in the account of the fourth day (v 15), and now twice in the account of the sixth day (vv 24, 30). Cassuto's comment makes clear the narrator's intent, "So it came to pass, and so it has remained for all time" (1961, 34).

■ **31** This is God's concluding evaluation of *all that [God] had made*, as distinct from the previous (usually daily) partial evaluations. Now that all was finished, God declared it, not just *good* in its several parts and systems, but

very good as a whole. This final word functions as a summative, overall evaluation of *all* God's good creation upon this good earth, as it came unspoiled from the mind, heart, and hand of the Creator. With this positive evaluation, the six days of creative work were finished.

Gregory of Nazianzus on the Goodness of God's Creation

He made a first day, a second, a third, and so forth until the seventh day which was a rest from work. According to these days, everything created was subdivided, brought into an order by inexpressible laws. So creation was not an instantaneous act by the all-powerful Word; for him to think or to speak is to accomplish a task. If humans were last to enter the world—and in such a way as to honor God's handiwork with God's image—is this not marvelous? It is like saying that as a king he prepared the palace, and then, as king, when everything was already prepared, led in the procession. (Louth 2001, 44-45)

FROM THE TEXT

God not only created the humans and the animals but also provided for their existence. The provisions in vv 29-30 are God's gift, at God's initiative. Even after the human turning from God became universal, God's provision continued, though human sin has made both our work and our enjoyment of God's provision more difficult. Today, human shortsightedness and outright wickedness cause many to suffer privation and death. The bondage under which the earth finds itself now causes famine and other disasters. Nevertheless, God remains well-intentioned toward us in the provision of the physical and other needs with which, after all, God created us.

God's evaluation, **very good**, is a strong refutation of Gnosticism in all its forms. Matter is not evil, but very good. God is not an inferior demiurge, unimportant or even evil, a half-god (as Marcion taught), but the transcendent Maker and, therefore, the Sovereign Lord of all else that is. This distinction is at the heart of the difference between God's revelation—the basis of the comprehensive theology and philosophy generally known today as the Judeo-Christian heritage—and all other religious and philosophical (as distinct from moral and ethical) systems.

John Wesley on Gen 1:31

It was *good* . . . for it is all agreeable to the mind of the creator. Good, for it answers the end of its creation. Good, for it is serviceable to man, whom God had appointed lord of the visible creation. Good, for it is all for God's glory; there is that in the whole visible creation which is a demonstration of God's being and perfections, . . . Now *All* was made, every part was *good*, but all together *very good*. (Wesley 1975, 9)

Many fascinating questions must remain unanswered for now. Everything we currently know from prehistoric anthropology indicates that our ancestors were flesh-eaters from the beginning. Yet Gen 1:29-30 seems to imply, though it does not state, that the first humans were vegetarian. Either Genesis does not mean what it seems to imply or the anthropological record is incomplete or some other explanation awaits discovery. For the present, we must be content to hold a question with no satisfactory answer.

4. Day of Rest (2:1-3)

BEHIND THE TEXT

This paragraph also serves to correct the seductive cosmogony of Israel's neighbors, as represented in the Sumerian/Babylonian *Enuma Elish*. There, too, we are told the "gods" rested, both the victorious gods, Marduk and his allies, and the defeated gods, allies of the slain Tiamat and Kingu. But in that falsification of the earth's beginnings in the *Enuma Elish*, the gods gained their rest at the expense of human beings, who were created to take over the defeated gods' wearisome toil. Here, God (*Elohim*) rested because God's initial creative work was finished. The work appointed to humans was not (in the beginning) drudgery, nor was it excessively arduous or onerous. Finally, as the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue makes abundantly clear (Exod 20:11), humans are invited to join God in a weekly Sabbath rest, *because* God rested on this seventh day of the creation week, the first Sabbath.

We treat Gen 2:1-3 as a unit. The summative statement of completion (v 1) also functions as a transition statement to the record of God's institution of the Sabbath (vv 2-3). Transition statements in the Bible (and in other Semitic literature), however, are not trivial. They function also as important statements of positive (or negative) evaluation, and of completion. A text without such a conclusion/transition often would have been regarded as incomplete. This short statement also serves another important purpose, however. It is the first line of a five-line, semi-poetic paragraph relating God's institution of the Sabbath from the very beginning.

IN THE TEXT

■ 1-3 The five-line poem we may translate and set out, for clarity:

*Thus, the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts.
Now, God [Elohim] had completed by the seventh day his work which
he had made.
So he ceased on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.
Therefore, God [Elohim] blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [set
it apart].
Because in it he ceased from all his work which God [Elohim] had
creatively made.*

As “the heavens and the earth” were the focus of the short introductory paragraph (1:1), so they begin the summary of this concluding paragraph; the narrator has begun to bring the reader full circle. The myriad works of the creative project are summarized here in the phrase, *and all their hosts*, i.e., everything that is a part of them or pertains to them. What once (v 2) was *a desert [or emptiness] and a vacancy* (*tōhū vāvōhū*), now is filled with *hosts*, all the created entities the author has presented in the intervening narrative.

All these **were completed** (passive voice), but the narrator also was at pains once again to remind the reader that **God [Elohim]** was the one who **had completed** them (active voice; v 2). Neither Marduk nor Ptah (for the ancients) nor unaided chance and time (for modern readers) had anything to do with bringing this marvelous creation into being.

The middle three lines of this paragraph contain seven words each in the Hebrew text, and in each, the words **the seventh day** conclude the first half-line (Cassuto 1961, 61). *Elohim*, God’s most important and frequently used title of majesty, occurs three times in this paragraph. Finally, a crescendo of reference to God’s work goes as follows: *his work which he had made* (v 2a); *from all his work which he had made* (v 2b); *from all his work which God [Elohim] had created to make [creatively made]* (v 3b). Such is the exalted setting of the first announcement of Sabbath day and Sabbath rest.

The primary meaning of *vayyīšbōt* (from *šābat*, meaning “cease,” “rest,” “desist”) is “he [God] ceased” from the work God had done in the previous six days, not because God was tired, but because the work was completed. The heavens and the earth were the way God wanted them to be. Just as we may sit back, reflect on, and enjoy a project we have completed to our own satisfaction, so God did with this six-day project of creation, the heavens and the earth.

Chrysostom on Gen 2:2

You see, in saying at this point that God rested from his works, Scripture teaches us that he ceased creating and bringing from nonbeing into being on the seventh day, whereas Christ, in saying that “my father is at work up until now and I am at work,” reveals his unceasing care for us: he calls “work” the maintenance of created things, bestowal of permanence on them and governance of them through all time. If this wasn’t so, after all, how would everything have subsisted, without the guiding hand above directing all visible things and the human race as well? (Louth 2001, 46)

God blessed the seventh day (v 3); this is the third time the narrative reports that **God blessed** something. God had blessed the first animate life, in the seas and the skies (1:22), and by implication the land creatures that followed; animate life represents a major step in the forms of life upon the planet. God had blessed the humans (1:28); humans represent a major step

from the rest of animate life, in that we are created in God's image. Now God blessed a day, the seventh day, upon which God ceased from the major creative labor of establishing the earth and its inhabitants in their respective functions; having completed something also is a major step. Moreover, as with any threefold repetition, the three blessings within this account signal a major emphasis on blessing.

God's blessing is affirmation of God's positive intention toward the object of the blessing, to establish it in shalom, i.e., in wholeness and overall well-being. With respect to the Sabbath day, this blessing celebrates, first, the completion of God's major creative work upon the earth. Second, it marks the beginning of God's occupancy of this special place prepared for God's own pleasure—a large part of which is regular communion with humankind (3:8). In light of the later development of Sabbath theology, we may say also that God's blessing of the Sabbath day here anticipates God's intention to provide for a regular time of positive encounter in the process of (and toward) redemption/restoration, even in the vastly changed conditions beyond Eden.

God *sanctified* (*yiqadēš* from *qādaš*, meaning “consecrate,” “set apart,” “sanctify,” etc.) the seventh day, that is, set it apart as a joy-filled memorial of the **very good** completion of the initial creation, to be celebrated each week by all God's human creation. However, little more is made of Sabbath in the biblical text until its inclusion as the Fourth Commandment of the Decalogue given at Sinai (Exod 20:8-11). Modern observance of a seven-day week, and also of an every-seventh-day Sabbath and Lord's Day observance by Jews and (most) Christians, respectively, is rooted in this account of God's ceasing from new creative work on the seventh day of the creation week.

The Hebrew clause in which the author used the verb *bārā'* for the sixth time in this creation narrative could be rendered as follows: **Which God [Elohim] had creatively made** (v 3). A more literal rendering, but clumsy in English, would be **which God [Elohim] had created, to make**. This difficult syntax is a reminder that to create (*bārā'*) is not a unique *manner* of making, but the special character or quality of that which is said to be created; one could say, in this narrative, even a step up, as it were, from what had come before. *How* God created (in very general terms, not in anything like what we would call “scientific” detail today) is reported by a fairly wide variety of verbs, as we see in both Gen 1 and 2.

Walton on the Earth as God's Residence/Temple

In the “after” picture the cosmos is now not only the handiwork of God . . . but it also becomes God's residence—the place he has chosen and prepared for his presence to rest. People have been granted the image of God and now serve him as vice regents in the world that has been made for them. Again it is instructive to invoke the analogy of the temple before and after its inauguration.

After priests have been installed and God has entered, it is finally a fully functioning temple—it exists only by virtue of those aspects. (2009, 98)

As many readers will be aware, scholars do not agree on whether Gen 2:4 closes this creation account (1:1—2:4), opens the second (2:4-25), or both (e.g., dividing as v 4a and v 4b). We have chosen to treat 2:4 as primarily intended to begin the second account, but with major qualifications; that discussion leads the commentary on 2:4-25, below.

FROM THE TEXT

This final paragraph tells us God ceased from the work of initial creation, because this creative project was completed to God's satisfaction at that time. This does not mean God never created again, nor that God does not intend to create again in the future. Neither does this mean God ceased from all work of every kind on this first Sabbath. The rest of the biblical witness is that God continues to create, both in ways we can know and understand now, and in ways we will not know until all is revealed. This includes God's re-creative activity in the redemption and restoration of all things—accomplished in Christ's life, death, and resurrection (though not all is as yet revealed), and announced in the proclamation of Rev 21:5, "I am making everything new!" Moreover, God continued and continues the work of sustaining creation (Col 1:17), if we may call that "work" (a small task for the Infinite One!). God did not become legalistic and obsessive about avoiding all that possibly could be called work, whether by cultural definition, by some more precise and minute definition from the realms of physics, or by any other measure. God finished the project of this creation; God ceased from the work of substantially new creation; God enjoyed the creation God had completed.

This is emphasized by Jesus' *midrashim* (commentaries) on the Sabbath in several of his confrontations with his legalistic opponents during his earthly teaching ministry. Establishing a moral authority to heal on the Sabbath, Jesus compared his healing to his opponents' rescue of a sheep, should they discover it fallen into a pit on the Sabbath (Matt 12:11-12). An even larger principle resides in Jesus' dictum, *The Sabbath was made for the human being* [*anthropon*], *not the human being* [*anthropos*] *for the Sabbath* (Mark 2:27). Humans rest in reflection of God's Sabbath rest, and extend Sabbath rest to their livestock (Exod 20:10; Deut 5:14) in reflection of God's beneficent care for all creation. When Sabbath regulations become onerous, rather than restful, they no longer are in the liberating spirit of God's initial rest from God's creative work.

Exodus 20:11 cites this report of God's seventh-day rest as warrant for the Fourth Commandment, the instruction that humans need a weekly Sabbath. The privilege of Sabbath rest *within* creation is conferred, theologically, by the Creator's rest *from* creative work on this first Sabbath. The second Pen-

tateuchal version of the Decalogue varies from the first most dramatically at this point, yet a second look shows not so much variation, as supplementation. Deuteronomy 5:15 places Sabbath rest as a perpetual memorial of Israel's Egyptian servitude, when they did not have the privilege of rest on any day at their own initiative. Thus, Sabbath rest also functions as a solemn *and* joyful reminder that no one has the arbitrary right to another's labor at any time, under any circumstances. The Creator rested; the Creator's gift of Sabbath rest cannot be violated with impunity. The Creator labored freely; every human's labor, and the fruit of it, is his or hers alone to use or to assign to another. Sabbath rest is a perpetual reminder that the Creator alone is sovereign.

This is true in another way also, as much in rabbinic tradition teaches. By taking our hands off the wheel, so to speak, one day in every seven, we acknowledge that we are not in control. Our Sabbath rest reminds us of our finitude, of our dependence upon God and even upon each other. God created the universe and this earth without our help; God can sustain it without our help. Much as we are welcomed into, and valued in, partnership with God and with God's people, we are not indispensable. This weekly dose of reality and appropriate humility is good for us. If we take it to heart in the right spirit, it also makes our presence and our contributions all the more valuable and welcome. A renewed Sabbath/Lord's Day theology can guide us in accepting and observing the Sabbath as the good gift God intended it to be.

Brueggemann on Sabbath

Sabbath is the end of grasping and therefore the end of exploitation. Sabbath is a day of revolutionary equality in society. On that day all rest equally, regardless of wealth or power or need. . . . [T]he keeping of sabbath, in heaven and on earth, is a foretaste and anticipation of how the creation will be when God's way is fully established. Sabbath is an unspoken prayer for the coming of a new sanity shaped by the power and graciousness of God. (1982, 35-36)

Finally, the question of which day of the week we should observe as the Sabbath cannot be determined from this paragraph. No one on earth could calculate back to this first Sabbath—if such a chronology is (or were) the intent of this text—and assert with confidence that it was our Saturday, our Sunday, or any other day of our modern week. Nor has God revealed this information to anyone past or present. Because of Christ, most Christians traditionally have observed Sunday, the day of his resurrection, as our Sabbath, but as Paul instructed the Colossian church, *which* day we set aside for rest and worship ultimately is of little import. *That* we worship and follow Christ is what counts (Col 2:16-17).