Studies in the Book of Genesis  
Part 1:  

The Curse of Canaan  

Allen P. Ross  

The bizarre little story in Genesis 9:18-27 about Noah's drunkenness and exposure along with the resultant cursing of Canaan has perplexed students of Genesis for some time. Why does Noah, the spiritual giant of the Flood, appear in such a bad light? What exactly did Ham do to Noah? Who is Canaan and why should he be cursed for something he did not do? Although problems like these preoccupy much of the study of this passage, their solutions are tied to the more basic question of the purpose of the account in the theological argument of Genesis.  

Genesis, the book of beginnings, is primarily concerned with tracing the development of God's program of blessing. The blessing is pronounced on God's creation, but sin (with its subsequent curse) brought deterioration and decay. After the Flood there is a new beginning with a renewal of the decrees of blessing, but once again corruption and rebellion leave the human race alienated and scattered across the face of the earth. Against this backdrop God began His program of blessing again, promising blessing to those obedient in faith and cursing to those who rebel. The rest of the book explains how this blessing developed: God's chosen people would become a great nation and inherit the land of Canaan. So throughout Genesis the motifs of blessing and cursing occur again and again in connection with those who are chosen and those who are not.  

An important foundation for these motifs is found in the oracle of Noah. Ham's impropriety toward the nakedness of his father prompted an oracle with far-reaching implications. Ca-
naan was cursed; but Shem, the ancestor of Israel, and Japheth were blessed. It seems almost incredible that a relatively minor event would have such major repercussions. But consistently in the narratives of Genesis, one finds that the fate of both men and nations is determined by occurrences that seem trivial and commonplace. The main characters of these stories acted on natural impulse in their own interests, but the narrator is concerned with the greater significance of their actions. Thus it becomes evident that out of the virtues and vices of Noah's sons come the virtues and vices of the families of the world.¹

The purpose of this section in Genesis, then, is to portray the characteristics of the three branches of the human race in relation to blessing and cursing. In pronouncing the oracle, Noah discerned the traits of his sons and, in a moment of insight, determined that the attributes of their descendants were embodied in their personalities.² Because these sons were primogenitors of the families of the earth, the narrator is more interested in the greater meaning of the oracle with respect to tribes and nations in his day than with the children of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.³

Shem, the ancestor of the Shemites to whom the Hebrews belonged, acted in good taste and was blessed with the possession of the knowledge of the true God, Yahweh. Japheth, the ancestor of the far-flung northern tribes which include the Hellenic peoples,⁴ also acted properly and thus shared in the blessing of Shem and was promised geographical expansion. In contrast, Ham, represented most clearly to Israel by the Egyptians and Canaanites, acted wrongly in violating sexual customs regarded as sacred and as a result had one line of his descendants cursed with subjugation.⁵

So the oracle of Noah, far from being concerned simply with the fortunes of the immediate family, actually pertains to vast movements of ancient peoples.⁶ Portraying their tendencies as originating in individual ancestors, the book of beginnings anticipates the expected destinies of these tribes and nations. Vos fittingly notes that it occurred at a time when no event could fail to influence history.⁷

The Prologue (Gen. 9:18-19)

Genesis 9:18-19 provides not only an introduction to this narrative but also a literary bridge between the Flood narrative
and the table of nations. The reader of Genesis is already familiar with the listing of the main characters of this story: Noah and his three sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth (5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9:1; and later in 10:1). But in this passage two qualifications are supplied. They were the sons of Noah who came out of the ark, and they were the progenitors from whom all the nations of the earth originated. The first description connects the characters to the Flood account, and the second relates them to the table of nations.

Of greater significance for the present narrative, however, is the circumstantial clause in verse 18, "Now Ham was the father of Canaan." Many have thought that this is a primary example of a redactor's attempt to harmonize the deed of Ham and the curse of Canaan portions of this narrative. If that were the case, it could have been done more effectively without leaving such a rough trace. The point of this clause seems rather to show the connection of Canaan with Ham. However, far from being merely a genealogical note, which would be superfluous in view of chapter 10, the narrative is tracing the beginnings of the family and shows that Ham, acting as he did, revealed himself as the true father of Canaan. The immediate transfer of the reference to Canaan would call to the Israelite mind a number of unfavorable images about these people they knew, for anyone familiar with the Canaanites would see the same tendencies in their ancestor from this decisive beginning. So this little additional note anticipates the proper direction in the story.

The Event (Gen. 9:20-23)

NOAH'S BEHAVIOR

The behavior of Noah after the Flood provided the occasion for the violation of Ham. Noah then acted so differently from before the Flood that some commentators have suggested that a different person is in view here. But the text simply presents one person. The man who watched in righteousness over a wicked world then planted a vineyard, became drunk, and lay naked in his tent. Or, as Francisco said it, "With the opportunity to start an ideal society Noah was found drunk in his tent."

This deterioration of character seems to be consistent with the thematic arrangement of at least the early portion of Genesis, if not all of the book. Each major section of the book has the heading commonly translated "these are the genera-
tions of." The narratives that follow each heading provide the particulars about the person, telling what became of him and his descendants. In each case there is a deterioration from beginning to end. In fact the entire Book of Genesis presents the same pattern: The book begins with man (Adam) in the garden under the blessing of God, but ends with a man (Joseph) in a coffin in Egypt. The "

The narratives of Noah began in 6:9 with the note that Noah was righteous and blameless before the LORD, and ended in 9:18-27 with Noah in a degraded condition. But it was a low experience from which God would bring brighter prospects in the future.

Noah, described as a "man of the soil" (9:20), began by planting a vineyard. This epithet ("man of the soil") is probably designed to say more than that he was a human farmer. In view of the fact that he is presented as the patriarch of the survivors of the Flood, Noah would be considered as the master of the earth, or as Rashi understood it, the lord of the earth. The two verbs ("he proceeded to plant") in the sentence are best taken as a verbal hendiadys, "he proceeded to plant" a vineyard. Whether he was the first man in history to have done so is not stated, but he was the first to do so after the Flood. The head of the only family of the earth then produced the vine from the ground that previously produced minimal sustenance amid thorns.

The antediluvian narratives represent various beginnings, none of which appear particularly virtuous. Besides Noah's beginning in viticulture, the first "hunter" is mentioned in 10:8. Nimrod was the first ("first") "to be a mighty warrior on the earth." And in 11:6, concerning the activities of Babel, the text reads, "they have begun ("they have begun") to do this." The use of the same verb in all these passages provides an ominous note to the stories.

The planting of the vineyard, however, appears to be for Noah a step forward from the cursed ground. Since Lamech, Noah's father, toiled under the curse, he hoped that his son would be able to bring about some comfort (5:29) and so he called him Noah, which means "comfort." Perhaps Noah hoped that cheer and comfort would come from this new venture.

The vine in the Bible is considered noble. The psalmist described the vine as God's provision, stating that it "gladdens the heart of man" (104:15). A parable in Judges has a vine saying, "Should I give up my wine, which cheers both gods and men?" (9:13). Not only did the fruit of the vine alleviate the pain of the cursed, but also it is the symbol of coming bliss in the Messianic
age. Zechariah 8:12 and Isaiah 25:6 describe the future age by employing this idea.\textsuperscript{14}

But while it may be that wine alleviates to some degree the painful toil of the ground, the Old Testament often warns of the moral dangers attending this new step in human development. Those taking strong vows were prohibited from drinking wine (Num. 6); and those assuming responsible positions of rulership were given the proverbial instruction that strong drink is not for kings, but for those about to die (Prov. 31:4-5).

The story of Noah shows the degrading effects of the wine - drunkenness and nakedness. No blame is attached in this telling of the event, but it is difficult to ignore the prophetic oracles that use nakedness and drunkenness quite forcefully. Habakkuk, for one, announced, "Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies" (2:15). Jeremiah also used the imagery for shame and susceptibility to violation and exploitation, lamenting, "You will be drunk and stripped naked" (Lam. 4:21).

Since the prophets view drunkenness and nakedness as signs of weakness and susceptibility to shameful destruction, many have condemned Noah's activities. The Talmud records that Noah was to be considered righteous only when compared with his wicked generation.\textsuperscript{15} All that Rashi would say was that Noah degraded himself by not planting something else.\textsuperscript{16} Most commentators at least view it as an ironic contrast in Noah's character\textsuperscript{17} if not an activity that is in actual disharmony with the picture of the man given earlier.\textsuperscript{18}

On the other hand there have been many who have attempted to exonerate Noah in one way or another. Medieval Jews took it in an idealistic way, saying that Noah planted the vine in order to understand sin in a better way and thus to be able to warn the world of its effects.\textsuperscript{19} Various scholars have tried to free Noah from blame by viewing the passage as an "inventor saga."\textsuperscript{20} Noah, the inventor of wine, was overpowered by the unsuspected force of the fruit and experienced the degradation of the discovery.\textsuperscript{21}

Cohen takes the exoneration a step further. Observing that the motif of wine in the ancient world was associated with sexuality, he argues that Noah was attempting to maintain his procreative ability to obey the new commission to populate the earth. To substantiate his view, Cohen drew on the analogy of Lot with his daughters (Gen. 19:30-38) and David with Uriah and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:12-13), since wine was used in each case to promote
sexual activity. Cohen acclaims the old man for playing the role so well.

It cannot be denied that wine has been used in connection with sex. However, Cohen's theory, no matter how fascinating, must be rejected as a highly speculative interpretation. It is more plausible to proceed on clear evidence and to take a normal, sensible approach. Later biblical allusions show drunkenness and nakedness to be shameful weaknesses, often used figuratively for susceptibility before enemies. Noah is thus not presented in a good light.

In view of this, it appears that along with the primary intent of the narrative to set the stage for the oracle, the passage also presents a polemic against pagan mythology. The old world saw Armenia as the original home of wine, but Egyptian literature attributed the invention of wine to the god Osiris, and Greek literature attributed it to Dionysius. The Genesis account, by contrast, considers the beginning of wine and its effect on man as less than divine. It has the trappings of depravity. Cursing and slavery, rather than festive joy, proceed from its introduction into the world. Any nation delighting in the vices of wine and nakedness, this polemic implies, is already in slavery.

HAM'S VIOLATION

Noah's condition prompted the sin of his son Ham. Ham, who again is said to be the father of Canaan, "saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside" (9:22). They in response carefully came in and covered the old man. When Noah learned what Ham had done to him, he cursed Canaan but he blessed Shem and Japheth.

What did Ham do that was serious enough to warrant such a response? One answer is that Ham did nothing at all to deserve such a blistering curse. Many writers believe that two traditions have been pieced together here, one about Ham and another about Canaan. Rice asserts, "All the tensions of Gen. 9:18-27 are resolved when it is recognized that this passage contains two parallel but different traditions of Noah's family." In fact he states that no interpretation that considers the story to be a unity can do justice to the text. But it must be noted in passing that positing two traditions in no way solves the tension; instead it raises another. If the parts of the story were from two irreconcilable traditions, what caused them to be united? To assert that two differing accounts were used does not do justice to the final,
fixed form of the text. The event was obviously understood to be the basis of the oracle which follows in 9:24-27.

Some commentators attempt to reconstruct what took place. Figart suggests that Ham and his brothers came to see Noah, and that Ham went in alone, discovered his father's condition, and reported it to his brothers who remedied the situation. Figart's point is that there was no sin by Ham. He suggests that Canaan, the youngest, must have been responsible for the deed that incurred the curse.

But it seems clear enough that the story is contrasting Ham, the father of Canaan, with Shem and Japheth regarding seeing or not seeing the nakedness. The oracle curses Ham's descendant, but blesses the descendants of Shem and Japheth. If Canaan rather than Ham were the guilty one, why was Ham not included in the blessing? Shufelt, suggesting also that Canaan was the violator, reckons that Ham was reckless. But it seems that the narrative is placing the violation on Ham.

Many theories have been put forward concerning this violation of Ham. Several writers have felt that the expression "he saw his nakedness" is a euphemism for a gross violation. Cassuto speculates that the pre-Torah account may have been uglier but was reduced to minimal proportions. Greek and Semitic stories occasionally tell how castration was used to prevent procreation in order to seize the power to populate the earth. The Talmud records that this view was considered by the Rabbis: "Rab and Samuel [differ], one maintaining that he castrated him, and the other that he abused him sexually." The only possible textual evidence to support such a crime would come from Genesis 9:24, which says that Noah "found out what his youngest son had done to him." But the remedy for Ham's "deed" is the covering of Noah's nakedness. How would throwing the garment over him without looking undo such a deed and merit the blessing?

Bassett presents a view based on the idiomatic use of the words "uncover the nakedness." He suggests that Ham engaged in sexual intercourse with Noah's wife, and that Canaan was cursed because he was the fruit of that union. He attempts to show that to "see another's nakedness" is the same as sexual intercourse, and that a later redactor who missed the idiomatic meaning added the words in 9:23.

But the evidence for this interpretation is minimal. The expression הֲנַעַר הָאָנָחִי is used in Scripture for shameful exposure, mostly of a woman or as a figure of a city in shameful punishment,
exposed and defenseless. This is quite different from the idiom used for sexual violation, הָנַעַר אַל הַנְּנַעַר, "he uncovered the nakedness." It is this construction that is used throughout Leviticus 18 and 20 to describe the evil sexual conduct of the Canaanites. Leviticus 20:17 is the only occurrence where הָנַעַר is used, but even that is in a parallel construction with הָנַעַר, explaining the incident. This one usage cannot be made to support Bassett's claim of an idiomatic force meaning sexual intercourse.

According to Genesis 9 Noah uncovered himself (the stem is reflexive). If there had been any occurrence of sexual violation, one would expect the idiom to say, "Ham uncovered his father's nakedness." Moreover, Rice observes that if Ham had committed incest with his mother, he would not likely have told his two brothers, nor would the Torah pass over such an inauspicious beginning for the detested Canaanites (see Gen. 19:30-38).

So there is no clear evidence that Ham actually did anything other than see the nakedness of his uncovered father. To the writer of the narrative this was apparently serious enough to incur the oracle on Canaan (who might be openly guilty in their customs of what Ham had been suspected of doing).

It is difficult for someone living in the modern world to understand the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality. Nakedness in the Old Testament was from the beginning a thing of shame for fallen man. As a result of the Fall, the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened, and, knowing they were naked, they covered themselves. To them as sinners the state of nakedness was both undignified and vulnerable. The covering of nakedness was a sound instinct for it provided a boundary for fallen human relations.

Nakedness thereafter represented the loss of human and social dignity. To be exposed meant to be unprotected; this can be seen by the fact that the horrors of the Exile are couched in the image of shameful nakedness (Hab. 3:13; Lam. 1:8; 4:21). To see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation.

By mentioning that Ham entered and saw his father's nakedness the text wishes to impress that seeing is the disgusting thing. Ham's frivolous looking, a moral flaw, represents the first step in the abandonment of a moral code. Moreover this violation of a boundary destroyed the honor of Noah.

There seems to be a taboo in the Old Testament against such "looking" that suggests an overstepping of the set limits by iden-
The Curse of Canaan

Ham desecrated a natural and sacred barrier by seeing his father's nakedness. His going out to tell his brothers about it without thinking to cover the naked man aggravated the unfilial act.\(^{35}\)

Within the boundaries of honor, seeing the nakedness was considered shameful and impious. The action of Ham was an affront to the dignity of his father. It was a transgression of sexual morality against filial piety\(^ {36}\). Because of this breach of domestic propriety, Ham could expect nothing less than the oracle against his own family honor.\(^ {37}\)

**SHEM'S AND JAPHETH'S REVERENCE**

Shem and Japheth acted to preserve the honor of their father by covering him with the garment (Gen. 9:23). The impression is that Ham completed the nakedness by bringing the garment out to his brothers.

The text is very careful to state that the brothers did not see their father's nakedness. Their approach was cautious, their backs turned to Noah with the garments on their shoulders. In contrast to the brevity of the narrative as a whole this verse draws out the story in great detail in order to dramatize their sensitivity and piety. The point cannot be missed--this is the antithesis of the hubris of Ham.

**The Oracle (Gen. 9:24-27)**

With the brief notice that Noah knew what his youngest son\(^ {38}\) had done to him, the narrative bridges the event and the oracle. The verb פִּידָא would suggest either that Noah found out what had transpired or that he knew intuitively. Jacob suggests that "the different ways of his sons must have been known to him."\(^ {39}\) Certainly Noah knew enough to deliver the oracle, as Jacob much later had such knowledge about his sons (Gen. 49).

The essence of the oracle is the cursing of Canaan: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." Even when the blessings are declared for the brothers, the theme of Canaan's servitude is repeated both times.

The very idea of someone cursing another raises certain questions as to the nature of the activity. Scharbert points out that (a) the curse was the reaction of someone to the misbehavior of another in order to keep vigorously aloof from that one and his
deed; (b) the one cursed was a subordinate who by the cursing would be removed from the community relationship in which he had enjoyed security, justice, and success; (c) the curse was no personal vendetta but was used to defend sacral, social, and national regulations and customs; and (d) the curse was effected by divine intervention.

In the ancient world the curse was only as powerful as the one making it. Anyone could imprecate, but imprecation was the strongest when supernatural powers were invoked. The Torah had no magical ideas such as sorcery and divination (Exod. 22:17-18). The curse found its way into Israel as part of an oath to protect its institutions. One who committed a serious transgression against covenant stipulations was delivered up to misfortune, the activation of which was Yahweh's (Deut. 28; Josh. 6:26; 1 Sam. 26:19).

So the curse was a means of seeing that the will of Yahweh was executed in divine judgment on anyone profaning what was sacred. It is an expression of faith in the just rule of God, for one who curses has no other resource. The word had no power in itself unless Yahweh performed it. Thus it was in every sense an oracle. God Himself would place the ban on the individual, thus bringing about a paralysis of movement or other capabilities normally associated with a blessing.

In this passage the honor of Noah and the sanctity of the family, one of God's earliest institutions, are treated lightly and in effect desecrated. Noah, the man of the earth, pronounced the oracle of cursing. It is right, and Yahweh will fulfill it.

The second part of verse 25 specifies the result of the curse—abject slavery. This meant certain subjugation, loss of freedom for autonomous rule, and reduction to bondage. A victor in war would gain dominion over the subjugated people so that they might be used as he pleased. However, in the Old Testament slaves were to be treated favorably, protected by law, and even freed in the sabbatical year (Exod. 21:2, 20).

But Noah was not content to give a simple pronouncement of Canaan's slavery. By using the superlative genitive "servant of servants", he declared that the one who is cursed is to be in the most abject slavery. Canaan would serve his "brothers" (normally understood to refer to Shem and Japheth since the main idea of the curse is repeated in the next lines).

The fact that Canaan, and not Ham, received the curse has prompted various explanations. Of course there are those, as
already discussed, who posit separate traditions and see two distinct stories that were later fused into a single account. Others have found reason for excusing Ham on the basis of the blessing in 9:1. Not only would it be unusual for a person to curse what God had blessed, but also one would not normally curse his own son.  

While this may partially explain Noah's choice, it cannot be the whole explanation.

Kidner sees the principle of talionic justice in the passage. For Ham's breach of family, his own family would falter and that through the youngest. But is it right to curse one for the action of another?

The Torah does incorporate this measure-for-measure judgment from one generation to another, but in such cases the one judged is receiving what he deserves. A visitation of the sins of the fathers on later generations will be on those who hate Yahweh (Exod. 20:4). A later generation may be judged for the sin of an ancestor if they are of like mind and deed. Otherwise they may simply bear the fruit of some ancestor's sin.

It is unlikely that Canaan was picked out for cursing just because he was the youngest son of Ham. On the contrary, the Torah, which shows that God deals justly with all men, suggests that Noah saw in him the evil traits that marked his father Ham. The text has prepared the reader for this by twice pointing out that Ham was the father of Canaan. Even though the oracle would weigh heavily on Ham as he saw his family marred, it was directed to his descendants who retained the traits.

In this regard it must be clarified that Canaan the people, not the man, are in view for the fulfillment of the oracle. The names Canaan, Shem, and Japheth all represent the people who were considered their descendants. So by this extension the oracle predicts the curse on the Canaanites and is much wider than a son's being cursed for his father, although the oracle springs from that incident in the family. Therefore the oracle is a prophetic announcement concerning the future nations. To the Hebrew mind, the Canaanites were the most natural embodiment of Ham. Everything they did in their pagan existence was symbolized in the attitude of Ham. From the moment the patriarchs entered the land, these tribes were there with their corrupting influence (Gen. 13:18; 15:16; 18:32; 19; 38).

The Torah warned the people of the Exodus about the wickedness of the Canaanites in terms that call to mind the violation of Ham (Lev. 18:2-6). There follows a lengthy listing of such vile
practices of the Canaanites (18:7-23) that the text must employ euphemisms to represent their deeds ("nakedness" alone is used twenty-four times). Because of these sins the Canaanites were defiled and were to be driven out before the Israelites.

The constant references to "nakedness" and "uncovering" and even "seeing" in this passage, designating the people of Canaan as a people enslaved sexually, clearly reminds the reader of the action of Ham, the father of Canaan. No Israelite who knew the culture of the Canaanites could read the story of their ancestor Canaan without making the connection. But these descendants of Ham had advanced far beyond his violation. The attitude that led to the deed of Ham came to full fruition in them.

Archaeology has graphically illustrated just how debased these people were. Bright writes, "Canaanite religion presents us with no pretty picture.... Numerous debasing practices, including sacred prostitution, homosexuality, and various orgiastic rites, were prevalent." Wright and Filson add that "the amazing thing about the gods, as they were conceived in Canaan, is that they had no moral character whatever. In fact, their conduct was on a much lower level than that of society as a whole, if we can judge from ancient codes of law.... Worship of these gods carried with it some of the most demoralizing practices then in existence." Albright appropriately adds to this observation.

It was fortunate for the future of monotheism that the Israelites of the conquest were a wild folk, endowed with primitive energy and ruthless will to exist, since the resulting decimation of the Canaanites prevented the complete fusion of the two kindred folk which would almost inevitably have depressed Yahwistic standards to a point where recovery was impossible. Thus, the Canaanites, with their orgiastic nature worship, their cult of fertility in the form of serpent symbols and sensuous nudity, and their gross mythology, were replaced by Israel, with its nomadic simplicity and purity of life, its lofty monotheism, and its severe code of ethics.

So the text is informing the reader that the Canaanite people, known for their shameless depravity in sexual matters and posing a continual threat to Israel's purity, found their actual and characteristic beginning in Ham. Yet these descendants were not cursed because of what Ham did; they were cursed because they acted exactly as their ancestor had. That moral abandon is fully developed in the Canaanites. The oracle announces the curse for this.

In actual fact Noah was supplicating God to deal with each group of people as they deserved, to the ancestor and descendants...
alike. Since this request was in harmony with God's will for the preservation of moral purity, He granted it.\textsuperscript{51} If the request had not been in harmony, Noah's curse would have had no result.

Canaan, then, is the prototype of the population that succumbed to enervating influences and was doomed by its vices to enslavement at the hands of hardier and more virtuous races.\textsuperscript{52} Because Ham, the "father" of Canaan, had desecrated the honor of his father by seeing his uncovered nakedness, this divine and prophetic oracle is pronounced on the people who would be known for their immorality in a shameful way, a trait discernible in this little story in the history of beginnings.

The blessing aspect is given to Shem, but the wording is unexpected: "Blessed be the LORD [Yahweh], the God of Shem." The emphasis on the possession of God by his name is strengthened in this line in a subtle way. Delitzsch says, "Yahweh makes himself a name in becoming the God of Shem, and thus entwines His name with that of Shem, which means ‘name.’"\textsuperscript{53}

By blessing one's God, the man himself is blessed. The idea is that Shem will ascribe his good fortune to Yahweh his God, for his advantage is not personal merit; his portion is Yahweh.\textsuperscript{54} The great line of blessing will be continued through Shem from Noah to Abram, the man of promise.

Here again, however, the point of the oracle looks to the descendants. It would then be clear to Israel, who found themselves in such a personal, covenantal relationship with Yahweh, that they were the heirs of this blessing.

The announcement of Japheth's share in the blessing of Shem is strengthened by the play on his name "Japheth" (נפת), from the verb "to enlarge." Here too the descendants are in mind, for they will expand and spread out in the world. The second part of this verse is the resultant wish that Japheth will dwell in the tents of Shem. This is most likely an expression of the prospect of peaceful cohabitation.\textsuperscript{55} Certainly the prospect of this unification is based on the harmony of the ancestors in the story. As a partner in covering up Noah, Japheth's descendants are granted alliance with Shem in the subjugation of Canaan.

The church fathers saw this as the first sign of the grafting in of the Gentiles in spiritual blessings, but later revelation speaks more of that. All that can be said of Genesis 9:27 in the oracle is that peaceful tenting of Japheth with Shem was a step toward that further ideal blessing.
The Epilogue (Gen. 9:28-29)

The narrative, as well as the תֹּלְדֹת, ends with verses 28 and 29 supplying the final note of the genealogy of Noah, the last name on the table of Genesis 5. A new תֹּלְדֹת begins in chapter 10.

The essential part of this narrative is most certainly the oracle, and the dominant feature of that oracle is the cursing of the Canaanites.\(^{55}\) They are doomed to perpetual slavery because they followed in the moral abandon of their distant ancestor. Their subjugation would be contrasted by the blessing on the others: Shem has spiritual blessings by virtue of knowing Yahweh; Japheth has temporal blessings with the prospect of participation with Shem.

The curse narrative of Genesis 9 immediately precedes the listing of the families and their descendants in Genesis 10; if there were any question as to whom the narrator had in mind, the lines could be traced immediately.

Japheth, whose expansion was already anticipated in the oracle, represented the people who dominated the great northern frontier from the Aegean Sea to the highlands of Iran and northward to the steppes beyond the shores of the Black Sea. Those best known to the writer were the Hellenic peoples of the Aegean coastlands.\(^{57}\)

Shem also is pictured as expanding, dwelling in tents. The oracle looks beyond the ancestor to his descendants, among whom were the Hebrews. It would be difficult to understand the narrator's assuming Yahweh to be covenanted with any other people. The possession of the blessing would be at the expense of the Canaanites whom Israel would subjugate, thus actualizing the oracle.

Canaan represents the tribes of the Canaanites who were considered to be ethnically related to the other Hamites, but were singled out for judgment because of their perverse activities. The curse announced that they would be enslaved by other tribes, a subjugation normally accomplished through warfare.

On the whole, this brief passage expresses the recoiling of Israelite morality at the licentious habits engendered by a civilization that through the enjoyment and abuse of wine had deteriorated into an orgiastic people to whom nothing was sacred. In telling the story, the writer stigmatizes the distasteful practices of these pagans.\(^{58}\)
Being enslaved by their vices, the Canaanites were to be enslaved by others. This subjugation, effected through divine intervention, is just: the moral abandon of Ham ran its course in his descendants.

It is not possible to take the oracle as an etiology, answering the questions as to why the Canaanites had sunk so low, or why they were enslaved by others. At no time in the history of Israel was there a complete subjugation of Canaan. Many cities were conquered, and at times Canaanites were enslaved, but Israel failed to accomplish her task. These Canaanites survived until the final colony at Carthage was destroyed in 146 B.C. by the Romans. So there was really no time in the history of Israel to fit a retrospective view demanded by an etiology.

Rather, the oracle states a futuristic view in broad, general terms. It is a sweeping oracle announcing in part and imprecating in part the fate of the families descending from these individuals. It is broad enough to include massive migrations of people in the second millennium as well as individual wars and later subjugations.

The intended realization, according to the design of the writer, would be the period of the conquest. Israel was called to conquer the Canaanites. At the same time as the Israelite wars against the Canaanites (down through the battle of Taanach), waves of Sea Peoples began to sweep through the land against the Hittites, Canaanites, and Egyptians. Neiman states, "The Greeks and the Israelites, willy-nilly, were allies against the Canaanites and the Hittites during the great world conflict which came down through the historical memory of many peoples by many different names."

In their invasions these people from the north sought to annex the coastland territory and make homes for themselves. Israel felt herself in the strongest moral contrast to the Canaanites (as Shem had felt to Ham). Any help from the Japhethites would be welcomed. Such a spirit of tolerance toward the Gentiles would not have been possible in the later period of Israel's history. Thus the curse oracle would have originated at a time before the Conquest, when the Canaanites were still formidable enemies.

In all probability the event and its oracle were recorded to remind the Israelites of the nature and origin of the Canaanites, to warn them about such abominations, and to justify their subjugation and dispossession through holy warfare. Israel received the blessing, but Canaan received the curse.
Notes


2 Arthur C. Custance attempts to classify the characteristics of the major races in connection with this oracle (*Noah’s Three Sons* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975], p. 43). It seems to this writer that much of the discussion goes beyond the evidence.

3 The second oracle in Genesis based on the character traits of sons comes at the end of the patriarchal material (Gen. 49).


13 The terms used in the passage reflect the description in Genesis 3.

14 Christ’s first sign (John 2), changing water to wine, announces the age to come.

15 Sanhedrin 108a, 70a and b.

16 Isaiah and Sharfmen, *Genesis*, p. 85.


19 Zohar, 1:248.


21 This view was proposed by Origen and Chrysostom earlier.


27 The Torah found the account repulsive, Israeliite conscience found it shocking, and it was not right to attribute such an act to Noah (Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, pp. 150-52).
The Curse of Canaan

28 According to Philo Byblius, a legend among the Canaanites said El Kronos used a knife to prevent his father from begetting children.

29 Sanhedrin 70a. The Midrash here also tries to explain the problem by saying that a lion took a swipe at Noah on leaving the ark and destroyed him sexually, and that Ham discovered it.


34 Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, p. 151.

35 Calvin wrote, "Ham alone eagerly seizes the occasion of ridiculing and inveighing against his father; just as perverse men are wont to catch at occasions of offence in others, which may serve as a pretext for indulgence in sin" (Commentaries on the *First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 2 vols. [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 19481, 1:302).

36 Kidner sees this as the reverse of the fifth commandment, which makes the national destiny pivot on the same point - a call to uphold God's delegated authority (Derek Kidner, *Genesis* [Chicago: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967], p. 103).

37 This idea of "seeing the nakedness" as a gross violation of honor is also related by Herodotus in the story of Gyges, who when seeing the nakedness of Candaules' wife - which Herodotus said was a shame among the Lydians - either had to kill Candaules or be killed himself (Herodotus 1:8).

38 It seems to this writer that the listing of "Shem, Ham and Japheth" is not chronological. According to Genesis 9:24 Ham is the youngest of the three, and according to 10:21 Shem is the older brother of Japheth. So the proper order would be Shem, Japheth, and Ham. (However, the New International Version's translation of 10:21 suggests that Japheth was the older brother of Shem, in which case the order would be Japheth, Shem, and Ham. But either way Ham is still the youngest.)

39 Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 68.


45 Jacob, *Genesis*, p. 68. In Genesis 27 the patriarch Jacob could not change the blessing he had given.

46 Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 104.

47 Dillmann, *Genesis*, p. 305.


52 Skinner, *Genesis*, p. 185.

54 Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 133.
56 Figart correctly affirms that "there is not one archaeologist, anthropologist, or Biblical scholar who has ever associated the Canaanites with Negroid stock. Canaan is listed in Genesis 10:15-19 as the father of eleven tribes, all Caucasoid with no Negro characteristics" (*A Biblical Perspective on the Race Problem*, p. 55).
57 Neiman, "The Date and Circumstances of the Cursing of Canaan," p. 126.
58 Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 63.
60 Neiman, "The Date and Circumstances of the Cursing of Canaan," p. 131.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
Studies in the Life of Jacob
Part 2:

Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel

Allen P Ross

Introduction

Why is it that many people of God attempt to gain the blessing of God by their own efforts? Faced with a great opportunity or a challenging task, believers are prone to take matters into their own hands and use whatever means are at their disposal. In it all there may even be a flirtation with unscrupulous and deceptive practices --especially when things become desperate.

Jacob was much like this. All his life he managed very well. He cleverly outwitted his stupid brother--twice, by securing the birth-right and by securing the blessing. And he eventually bested Laban and came away a wealthy man--surely another sign of divine blessing. Only occasionally did he realize it was God who worked through it all; but finally this truth was pressed on him most graphically in the night struggle at the ford Jabbok.

By the River Jabbok Jacob wrestled with an unidentified man till dawn and prevailed over him, and though Jacob sustained a crippling blow, he held on to receive a blessing once he perceived that his assailant was supernatural (Gen. 32:22-32). That blessing was signified by God's renaming the patriarch "Israel," to which Jacob responded by naming the place "Peniel." But because he limped away from the event, the "sons of Israel" observed a dietary restriction.

Gunkel, comparing this story with ancient myths, observes that all the features--the attack in the night by the deity, the
mystery involved, the location by the river, the hand-to-hand combat--establish the high antiquity of the story.\(^1\) It is clear that the unusual elements fit well with the more ancient accounts about God's dealings with men. To be sure, something unusual has been recorded, and the reader is struck immediately with many questions, some of which probably cannot be answered to any satisfaction.\(^2\) Who was the mysterious assailant? Why was he fighting Jacob and why was he unable to defeat the patriarch? Why did he appear afraid of being overtaken by the dawn? Why did he strike Jacob's thigh? Why was the dietary taboo not included in the Mosaic Law? What is the meaning of the name "Israel"? What is the significance of this tradition?

Von Rad warns against the false expectations of a hasty search for "the" meaning, for he along with many others is convinced that a long tradition was involved in forming and interpreting the record.\(^3\) A survey of the more significant attempts to understand the present form of the text will underscore the difficulties.

INTERPRETATIONS

Several interpreters have suggested that this is a dream narrative. Josephus understood it to be a dream in which an apparition (φαντάσμα) made use of voice and words.\(^4\) Roscher followed the same basic idea, but said that it was a case of incubation, induced by the obstruction of the organs of respiration, producing a vivid dream of a struggle like that of mortals with Pan Ephialtes in antiquity.\(^5\)

Others have given the story an allegorical interpretation. Philo saw a spiritual conflict in literal terms, a fight of the soul against one's vices and passions.\(^6\) Jacob's combatant was the Logos; it was his virtue that became lame for a season. This allegorical approach was accepted in part by Clement of Alexandria; he said that the assailant was the Logos, but understood that the Logos remained unknown by name in the conflict because He had not yet appeared in flesh.\(^8\)

Beginning with Jerome, many have understood the passage to portray long and earnest prayer. Schmidt relates how Umbreit, reacting to the concept of a fight with the Almighty, expanded this view to say it was a prayer that involved meditation in the divine presence, confession of sin, desire for pardon and regeneration, and yearning for spiritual communion.\(^9\)

Jewish literature, however, recognizes that an actual fight is at the heart of the story. R. Hanna b. R. Hanina said it was a real
struggle but with the prince or angel of Esau.\footnote{Rashi followed this explanation, and the Zohar (170a) named the angel Samael, the chieftain of Esau.} The passage has proved problematic for critical analysis as well. Schmidt explains, "The usual criteria fail. Yahwe does not occur at all, not even on the lips of the renamed hero. Elohim is found everywhere, but in a way that would not be impossible even to a writer usually employing the name Yahwe. The words and phrases generally depended on by the analysis are not decisive."\footnote{As a result there has been little agreement among critical scholars. Knobel, Dillmann, Delitzsch, and Roscher assigned the passage to E (Elohim sources in the documentary hypothesis). And DeWette, Hupfeld, Kuenen, Studer, Wellhausen, Driver, Skinner, Kautzsch, Procksch, and Eichrodt assigned it to J. Some of these, however, gave Genesis 32:23 and 29 to E, and verse 32 to a glossator. W Max Muller tried to explain the confusion over the sources as being due to the disguising of the main features. He argued that the language of verse 25a was ambiguous—the low blow should have been struck by Jacob. The weeping in Hosea's account (12:4) should then be referred to the angel (according to Meyer). In short, a solution of sorts was found in the suggestion that the record had been revised in tradition.} Gunkel attempted to muster evidence from within the narrative to show that two recensions of an old story had been put together: (1) verse 25a records that the hip was dislocated by a blow, but verse 25b suggests that it happened accidentally in the course of the fight; (2) verses 26-28 present the giving of the name as the blessing, but verse 29 declares that the assailant blessed him; (3) verse 28 has Jacob victorious, but verse 30 records that he escaped with his life.\footnote{Because of such tensions, and because Yahweh is not named in the narrative, modern critical scholars have attempted to uncover an ancient mythical story about gods fighting with heroes, a story that could have been adapted for the Jacob narratives. Fraser, Bennett, Gunkel, and Kittel thought that the old story included a river god whose enemy was the sun god which diminished the river with its rays (especially in summer). In other words the Hebrew tradition was "pure fiction" (Schmidt) based on an old myth about a river god named Jabbok who attempted to hinder anyone from crossing. Peniel was his shrine.} The myth was also identified with the deity El, the God of the land of Canaan. McKenzie suggests that the narrative followed an
old Canaanite myth in which the "man" was at one time identified. When Jacob became attached to the story, he argues, the Canaanite deity so named was deliberately obscured, being replaced by a mysterious being who may or may not be taken as Yahweh. This, McKenzie suggests, was left vague because there was a hesitancy to attribute such deeds to Yahweh. Later the role was transferred to intermediate beings, such as the angel of Esau.

To say that the account gradually developed from some such ancient myth greatly weakens a very important point in the history of Israel and solves none of the tensions that exist. Gevirtz, combining a synchronic study of the text with its geopolitical significance, provides a more constructive approach:

The passage cannot be dismissed merely as a bit of adopted or adapted folk-lore—a contest with a nocturnal demon, river spirit, or regional numen who opposes the river's crossing—towards which "secondary" matters of cultic interest have been added, but is rather to be understood as bearing a distinct and distinctive meaning for the people who claim descent from their eponymous ancestor. Where, when, and how Jacob became Israel cannot have been matters of indifference to the Israelite author or to his audience.

This ancient tradition about Jacob's unusual experience was recorded for Israel because the events of the patriarch's life were understood to anticipate or foreshadow events in Israel's history—receiving the blessing of the land in this case.

ANALYSIS

*Observations.* Several observations give direction to the interpretation of the story. First, the geographical setting is important. The wrestling occurred at the threshold of the land of promise. Jacob had been outside the land ever since his flight from Esau, from whom he wrestled the blessing.

Second, the unifying element of the story is the naming, that is, the making of Jacob into Israel. The new name is not merely added to an old narrative; it is explained by it.

Third, the account is linked to a place name, Peniel. The names Peniel (Gen. 32:30), Mahanaim (Gen. 32:1-2), and Succoth (Gen. 33:17) are each given and etymologized by Jacob in his return to Canaan, and so are important to the narratives.

Fourth, the story is linked to a dietary restriction for the sons of Israel. This taboo was a custom that grew up on the basis of an event, but was not part of the Law. The event in the tradition both created and explained it.
Significance. The theme of the story is the wrestling--no one suggests anything else. However, one cannot study the account in isolation from the context of the Jacob cycle of stories. The connection is immediately strengthened by the plays on the names. At the outset are בֹּקֶף, the man, בֹּקֶף, the place, and בֹּקֶף המַעֲשָׂה the action. These similar sounding words attract the reader's attention. Before, a "Jacob" might cross the "Jabbok" to the land of blessing, he must fight. He attempted once more to trip up his adversary, for at that point he was met by someone wishing to have a private encounter with him, and he was forced into the match. Fokkelman says:

Tripping his fellow-men by the heel (ב) has for Jacob come to its extreme consequence: a wrestling (ב) with a "man" which to Jacob is the most shocking experience of his life, as appears from the fact that thereafter he proceeds through life a man changed of name, and thus of nature, and under the new name he becomes the patriarch of the "Israelites." (This comes out even more strongly in Jacob's own confession in v. 31) [English v. 30].

Ryle notes that the physical disability he suffered serves as a memorial of the spiritual victory and a symbol of the frailty of human strength in the crisis when God meets man face to face.

Structure. The event recorded in the narrative gives rise to two names: God renames Jacob "Israel," and Israel names the place "Peniel." It is clear that these names reflect a new status because of the divine blessing. Therefore everything in the record leads up to the giving of the name "Israel"; the giving of the name "Peniel" reflects the significance of the entire encounter as it was understood by Jacob. These names together provide a balanced picture of the significant event.

In a helpful analysis of the structure of this passage, Barthes evaluates the namings as follows:

1. The demand of a name, _______ The response _______ The result: name change
   from God to Jacob of Jacob (v. 27) (v. 27) (v. 28)
2. The demand of a name, _______ An indirect _______ The result: decision
   from Jacob of God response (v. 29) _______ Name change:
   (v 29) Peniel (v. 30)

This parallel arrangement is instructive: The direct response of Jacob to his assailant leads to his being renamed "Israel"; but the indirect response of the assailant leads Jacob to name the place
"Peniel," for he realized that it was God who fought ("Israel") with him face to face ("Peniel"). One name is given by the Lord to Jacob; the other name is given by Jacob in submission to the Lord.

The passage may be divided into three sections with a prologue and epilogue. Of the three sections, the first (the event, vv 24b-25) prepares for the second (the blessing, vv 26-28), and the third (the evaluation, vv 29-30) reflects the first two.

The Narrative

PROLOGUE (32:22-24a)

These opening verses record the crossing of the Jabbok by Jacob and his family. Because verses 22-32 provide an interlude in the return of Jacob to Canaan, they can be understood as a unit with their parts treated accordingly. The first verse (v. 22) provides a summary statement of the crossing of the river by the entire clan. The crossing is then developed in verses 23-31. Verse 23 introduces the narrative; verse 31 completes it. Between the time Jacob sent his family across and the time he joined them, the wrestling and blessing occurred.

Jacob's being left alone (v. 24a) is not explained. One suggestion is that he intended to spend the night in prayer before meeting Esau. This harmonizes with the allegorical view of the wrestling. More likely, however, Jacob was anticipating an encounter with Esau, and so at night he began crossing the river to establish his ground in the land. Whether he anticipated an encounter in the night or simply was caught alone, is difficult to say. If Jacob remained behind to make sure everything was safely across, then the meeting came as a complete surprise. When he was alone, he was attacked by a man—he was caught in the match.

At any rate the narrative goes to great lengths to isolate Jacob on one side of the river. The question of his plans is irrelevant to the story. The important point is that he was alone.

THE FIGHT (32:24b-25)

Only four sentences in the Hebrew are used for the fight; no details are given, for the fight is but the preamble to the most important part—the dialogue. Yet the fight was real and physical. Dillmann says the limping shows it was a physical occurrence in a material world. The memory of Israel's limping away from the night that gave rise to the dietary restriction attests to the physical reality of the event.
The verb used to describe the wrestling is בְּדֻחַיָּא, "and he wrestled." It is rare, being found only here in verse 24 and in verse 25. Since the word בְּדֻחַ "dust," this denominative verb perhaps carries the idea of "get dusty" in wrestling. Spurrell suggests that it might possibly be connected to בּוֹדָה, or that it might be a dialectical variant of this for a wordplay.23

Martin-Achard concludes that this very rare verb was selected because of assonance with בָּדוָה and בָּנַפְּסָה the sounds b/v and k/q forming strong alliterations at the beginning of the Story.24 The verb plays on the name of the river as if to say בָּדוָה were equal to בּוֹדָה, meaning a "wrestling, twisting" river.25 The wordplay employs the name of the river as a perpetual reminder of the most important event that ever happened there.

At this spot "a man" wrestled with Jacob. The word שְׁיֶךֶל is open to all interpretations. It suggests a mystery but reveals nothing.26 But this is fitting, for the "man" would refuse to reveal himself directly. The effect of the word choice is that the reader is transported to Jacob's situation. Jacob perceived only that a male antagonist was closing in on him. The reader learns his identity as Jacob did--by his words and actions.

The time of the match is doubly significant. On the one hand it is interesting that the struggle was at night. Darkness concealed the adversary's identity. The fact that he wished to be gone by daylight shows that he planned the night visit. As it turned out, had the assailant come in the daytime, Jacob would have recognized the man's special authority (v 29) and identity (v 30b). If Jacob had perceived whom he was going to have to fight, he would never have started the fight, let alone continued with his peculiar obstinacy.27

On the other hand the fact that the wrestling lasted till the breaking of day suggests a long, indecisive bout. Indeed, the point is that the assailant could not be victorious until he resorted to something extraordinary.

The turning point of the long bout is clear. After a long, indecisive struggle, the man "touched" Jacob. The "touch" was actually a blow--he dislocated his hip.28 But the text uses a soft term for it, demonstrating a supernatural activity (cf. Isa. 6:7, he "touched" Isaiah's "lips").

The effect of this blow is clear. The assailant gave himself an unfair advantage over the patriarch, for he was already more than a match for Jacob. The one who might be expected to take advantage of the other was himself crippled by a supernatural blow from his
assailant. In a word, like so many of his own rivals. Jacob now came against something for which he was totally unprepared.

THE BLESSING (32:26-28)

The blow was revealing for Jacob. The true nature of the nameless adversary began to dawn on him as the physical darkness began to lift. He is the One who has power over the affairs of men! He said, "Let me go, for the day breaks!" (author's trans.). But Jacob, having been transformed from a devious fighter into a forthright and resolute one, held on for a blessing. He said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me" (v. 26). Fokkelman characterizes Jacob by stating that "from the most miserable situation he wants to emerge an enriched man." Jacob may not have been aware of all the implications (the narrator certainly was), but he knew the source of blessing.

The blessing for which Jacob pleaded finds expression in a changed name. The assailant first asked the patriarch, "What is your name?" (v. 27)–undoubtedly a rhetorical question. The object was to contrast the old name with the new. When one remembers the significance of names, the point becomes clear: a well-established nature, a fixed pattern of life must be turned back radically! In giving his name, Jacob had to reveal his nature. This name, at least for the narratives, designated its owner as a crafty overreacher. Here the "heel-catcher" was caught and had to identify his true nature before he could be blessed.

"And he said, ‘Not Jacob shall your name be called from now on, but Israel, for you have fought with God and man and have prevailed’" (v. 28, author's trans.). This renaming of Jacob is an assertion of the assailant's authority to impart a new life and new status (cf. 2 Kings 23:34; 24:17).

What is the meaning of the name "Israel"? Both Genesis 32:28 and Hosea 12:3 interpret the meaning of the name with a verb "to fight." The meaning of "Israel" would then be defined as "God contends, may God contend, persist." Based on the context in Genesis, the verb should be understood in the sense of fighting.

Coote analyzes Genesis 32:28b and concludes that (a) the syllabic meter is 8:8; (b) the parallel pairs are sry/ykl, ‘m/’m, and 'lhym/'nsym; (c) the archaic parallelism of the suffixed and prefixed conjugations is present; and (d) the arrangement is chiastic (sry-twkl). The last word is isolated to combine the clause:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{ky sryt} & \text{ ‘m } \text{ lhym} \\
w \text{ ‘m } \text{ ‘nsym wtwkl} & \text{ for you fought with God and with men, and you prevailed}
\end{align*}
\]
Therefore the root קְרַעֲלָל is used to explain the name לֶכֶרֶאֲלָל because it sounds the same, is derived from the very story, and is otherwise infrequent. The verb קָרַע is used to explain the outcome of קְרַעֲלָל.

So the narrative signifies that the name לֶכֶרֶאֲלָל means "God fights." It is as if one were to say קְרַעֲלָל קָרַע; the idea is similar to the epithet יָהֳ הֶזֶזָה לֶכֶרֶאֲלָל. But the meaning of the name involves an interpolation of the elements: "God fights" is explained by "you fought with God." Thus the name is but a motto and a reminder of the seizing of the blessing which would be a pledge of victory and success. Gunkel states that this explanation of the significance of the name was affectionately and proudly employed to show the nature of the nation to be invincible and triumphant; with God's help Israel would fight the entire world and when necessary would fight even God Himself.

Many have been troubled by the difficulties with this explanation. First, if the name means "God fights," then how is it reversed to say Jacob fights with God? The name must be explained on the basis of Semitic name formations. Consequently the form is an imperfect plus a noun that is the subject, as Nestle pointed out long ago. Thus any interpretation with El as object drops out of consideration as the morphological etymology of the name.

Second, the verb קָרַע is very rare, making a clear definition difficult. It occurs only in connection with this incident. But the meaning of קָרַע may be "contend" and not "fight." Since God has no rivals, such a name is unparalleled and unthinkable.

Third, the 'versions did not all understand the distinction between קָרַע, "to contend," and לֶכֶרֶאֲל, "to rule." The Septuagint has ἐνίσχυσις, Aquila has ἡμέρας, Symmachus has ημέρας, and the Vulgate has *fortis fuisti*. The problem may be traced to the pointing of the verb לֶכֶרֶאֲל in Hosea 12:4, which seems to be from a geminate root לֶכֶרֶאֲל (Symmachus, Aquila, and Onkelos). As a result the versions and commentators follow either the idea of "rule" or "contend, oppose" (Josephus).

Various other suggestions for the etymology of "Israel" have been made. A. Haldar suggests that the root is isr/sr, "happy," and that it could possibly be connected to the Canaanite god Asherah. In this view the name change would represent the merging of the two religions.

E. Jacob connects the name with the root רָכִּשׁ, "just, right." He finds confirmation for this idea in the noun "Jeshurun" (וֹכֶרֶאֲל, Deut. 32:15; 33:5; 33:26; Isa. 44:2), a poetic designation of Israel,
as well as in the words "Book of Jashar" (מֵפֶר עֲשָׁר), the old collection of national songs (Josh. 10:13; 2 Sam. 1:18). This could be the book of Israel, the righteous one, the hero of God, according to E. Jacob. The major problem with this interpretation is that it involves a change of the sibilant.

Albright takes the name from yasar "to cut, saw," with a developed meaning of "heal": "God heals." He finds Arabic wasara, "cut, saw"; Akkadian sararu, "shine" (cf. sarru, "king"); and Ethiopic saraya, "cure, heal," to be the most plausible roots. In connection with the root wasara, he points out that the Arabic root nasara, "revive," could be equated due to morphological contamination of I-Waw and I-Nun roots. Albright argues that the original name was *Yasir-'el from a verbal stem רָשָׁא, with the developed meaning of "heal" (supported by Ethiopic saraya, and the equation/interchange in Arabic of nasara for wasara). He states, "The fact that the stem yasar is not found in biblical Hebrew is rather in favor of the combination, since its disappearance would explain how the meaning of the name came to be so thoroughly forgotten."

Coote, also using the strong letters sr (1-Yod, I-Nun, Geminate, reduplicated, or III weak), chooses the Akkadian root wasaru and traces a semantic development of cutting>deciding>counseling (Arabic 'asara, "counsel" and musir, "counselor"). He notes that the root htk, "cut," develops to mean "decide or determine." Coote's idea is that htk and sry are parallel in root meaning and development.

Coote finds confirmatory evidence in Isaiah 9:6-7, where there is confluence of sar and sry as in Genesis 32. The word for "government" is the key there. He concludes that the name יְשׁרֵא ל means "El judges" and is from either ysr or sry. It has the meaning of govern by rendering a decree or judgment (Ps. 82:1).

Noth, taking it to be from a third weak root sara, suggests the meaning "to rule, be lord over." Through this, God takes action in the world and particularly helps His own. "Israel" then means "God will rule" or "May God rule."

It is certainly possible that one of these Semitic roots is etymologically connected to the name, and that the name meant something like "judge" or "heal" at one time (for the name occurred before this time, as the Eblaite material suggests). The popular etymology in Genesis is giving the significance of the name. But most of these other suggestions are no more compelling than the popular etymology given in the text of Genesis. The fact that the
word is rare should not lead to the assumption that it means "contend" or "vie with" as a rival. The concept of God's fighting with someone is certainly no more a problem than the passage itself. And the reversal of the emphasis (from "God fights" to "fight with God") in the explanation is because of the nature of popular etymologies, which are satisfied with a wordplay on the sound or meaning of the name to express its significance.

The name serves to evoke the memory of the fight. The name ("God fights") is freely interpreted to say that God is the object of Jacob's struggle. Hearing the name יְדֵי גֹּד one would recall the incident in which Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed. These words were full of hope to the Israelites. Dillmann says that even after the name would tell the Israelites that when Jacob contended successfully with God, he won the battle with man. Thus the name "God fights" and the popular explanation "you prevailed" obtain a significance for future struggles.

THE RESPONSE (32:29-30)

Jacob afterward attempted to discover his adversary's name. The "man" had acted with full powers and spoken with authority. He had gotten to the bottom of Jacob's identity; He could not be mortal. Thus Jacob sought to discover His name. But the answer was cautious: "Why do you ask my name?" (author's trans.). On the one hand it is as if He was saying to Jacob, "Think, and you will know the answer!" But on the other hand He was unwilling to release His name for Jacob to control. The divine name cannot be had on demand nor taken in vain, for that would expose it to the possibility of magical manipulation.

Jacob had to be content with a visitation from a "man" whom he realized was divine. Jacob might have recalled that Abram was visited by "men" (Gen. 18) with such powers. Lot also received those men in the night, and was saved alive when the sun arose (Gen. 19). Apparently this was the manner of manifestation of the Lord in Genesis.

Jacob named the place "Peniel" because he had seen God face to face and had been delivered. This is the second part of the basic structure. First, God demanded and changed his name. Here, Jacob was not given the divine name, but named the place to commemorate the event. He had power over that realm, but could not overreach it. The play on the name is clear: Having seen God "face to face" he named the place Peniel, "face of God."
The impact of the encounter was shocking for Jacob. Seeing God was something no man survived (Gen. 48:16; Exod. 19:21; 24:10; Judg. 6:11, 22; Judg. 13). But this appearance of the "man" guaranteed deliverance for the patriarch. God had come as close to Jacob as was imaginable. Jacob exclaimed, "I have seen God face to face and I have been delivered" (Gen. 32:30, author's trans.). The idea is not "and yet" I have been delivered, but rather "and my life has been delivered" (יָדָע). His prayer for deliverance (vv. 9-12) was answered by God in this face-to-face encounter and blessing. Meeting God "face to face" meant that he could now look Esau directly in the eye.

EPILOGUE (32:31-32)

Verse 31 provides the conclusion for the narrative. As the sun rose, Jacob crossed over Peniel with a limp. Ewald says that he limped on his thigh "as if the crookedness, which had previously adhered to the moral nature of the wily Jacob, had now passed over into an external physical attribute only." The final verse of the story is an editorial note that explains a dietary restriction that developed on account of this event. The wounding of the thigh of Jacob caused the "children of Israel" not to eat of the sciatic nerve "until this day." This law does not form part of the Sinaitic Code, and so according to some scholars may have been a later custom in Israel. This is argued from the fact that the reference is made to Israelites rather than the "sons of Jacob," suggesting that the custom is post-Sinaitic.

The expression "until this day" is usually taken as a sure sign of an etiological note. Childs concludes that in the majority of the cases it is the expression of a personal testimony added to and confirming a received tradition, a commentary on existing customs. He concludes that this cultic practice was introduced secondarily into the narrative. It provided a causal relation for the customary taboo.

Summary

THE NATURE OF JACOB

The special significance of Jacob's becoming Israel is the purification of character. Peniel marks the triumph of the higher over the lower elements of his life; but if it is a triumph for the higher elements, it is a defeat for the lower. The outcome of the match is a paradox. The victor ("you ... have prevailed," Gen.
wept (Hos. 12:4) and pleaded for a blessing: once blessed he emerged, limping on a dislocated hip. How may this be a victory and a blessing?

The defeat of Jacob. Because Jacob was guilty, he feared his brother and found God an adversary. Jacob prepared to meet Esau, whom he had deceived, but the patriarch had to meet God first. God broke Jacob's strength before blessing him with the promise of real strength (the emphasis is on God's activity).

When God touched the strongest sinew of Jacob, the wrestler, it shriveled, and with it Jacob's persistent self-confidence. His carnal weapons were lamed and useless--they failed him in his contest with God. He had always been sure of the result only when he helped himself, but his trust in the naked force of his own weapons was now without value.

The victory of Jacob. What he had surmised for the past 20 years now dawned on him--he was in the hands of One against whom it is useless to struggle. One wrestles on only when he thinks his opponent can be beaten. With the crippling touch, Jacob's struggle took a new direction. With the same scrappy persistence he clung to his Opponent for a blessing. His goal was now different. Now crippled in his natural strength he became bold in faith.

Thus it became a show of significant courage. Jacob won a blessing that entailed changing his name. It must be stressed that he was not wrestling with a river demon or Esau or his alter ego, but with One who was able to bless him.

He emerged from the encounter an altered man. After winning God's blessing legitimately, the danger with Esau vanished. He had been delivered.

THE PROMISES TO JACOB

What, then, is the significance of this narrative within the structure of the patriarchal history? In the encounter the emphasis on promise and fulfillment seems threatened. At Bethel a promise was given: at the Jabbok fulfillment seemed to be barred as God opposed Jacob's entrance into the land. Was there a change of attitude with Yahweh who promised the land? Or was this simply a test?

In a similar but different story, Moses was met by God because he had not complied with God's will (Exod. 4:24). With Jacob, however, the wrestling encounter and name changes took on a greater significance because he was at the frontier of the land promised to the seed of Abraham. God, the real Proprietor of the
land, opposed his entering as Jacob. If it were only a matter of mere strength, then He let Jacob know he would never enter the land. The narrative, then, supplies a moral judgment on the crafty Jacob who was almost destroyed in spite of the promise. Judging from Jacob's clinging for a blessing, the patriarch made the same judgment on himself.

THE DESCENDANTS OF JACOB

On the surface the story seems to be a glorification of the physical strength and bold spirit of the ancestor of the Israelites. However, like so much of the patriarchal history, it is transparent as a type of what Israel, the nation, experienced from time to time with God. The story of Israel the man serves as an acted parable of the life of the nation, in which the nation's entire history with God is presented, almost prophetically, as a struggle until the breaking of day. The patriarch portrays the real spirit of the nation, engaging in the persistent struggle with God until they emerge strong in His blessing. Consequently the nation is referred to as Jacob or Israel, depending on which characteristics predominate.

The point of the story for the nation of Israel entering the land of promise is clear: Israel's victory will come not by the usual ways nations gain power, but by the power of the divine blessing. And later in her history Israel would be reminded that the restoration to the land would not be by might, nor by strength, but by the Spirit of the Lord God who fights for His people (Zech. 4:6). The blessings of God come by His gracious, powerful provisions, not by mere physical strength or craftiness. In fact there are times when God must cripple the natural strength of His servants so that they may be bold in faith.

NOTES

1 Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1917), p. 361. Gunkel understands these features to be characteristic of a certain type of religious story in which the hero fights a god (e.g., Hercules). His observation of the antiquity of the story must be seen in this connection.
2 Nathaniel Schmidt points out that the passage was intended to answer certain questions about customs and traditions: yet on a closer reading many other questions surface ("The Numen of Penuel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 45 [1926]:265).
4 Josephus *Antiquities* 1. 331.
On the other hand such tensions can be plausibly harmonized: verse 25b may be the natural effect of verse 25a, the giving of the name is the token of the blessing, and the victory involves the crippling of human devices.


15 S. Gevirtz. "Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford." Hebrew Union College Annual 46 (1975):50. While Gevirtz’s reaction to these suggestions is helpful, his own interpretation is rather fanciful, as will be mentioned later.


19 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 211.

20 The River Jabbok is the Wadi ez-Zerka. "the blue," that is, a clear mountain stream. It is on the frontier of the land.

21 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 211.


25 Gunckel says, "Ye’abeq-das Wort nur bier and 26; Anspielusig and wisprunglich wol Erklarungs versuch des Namens Yabboq" (Genesis, p. 326).

26 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 213.


28 The verb יָּפְּקָד implies a separation or dislocation. It is used figuratively in Jeremiah 6:8 and Ezekiel 23:18. In the Hiphil it represents some form of execution, but its precise form is uncertain. The solemn execution of the seven men in 2 Samuel 21:6 may be a hanging or impaling.


30 Von Rad suggests that this is a basic feature of human nature. In desperation Jacob clung to the divine for help (Genesis, p. 321).

31 It may be observed that the praying began after the fight was over. So the fighting cannot signify intense praying.

32 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 215.

33 The name Jacob has as its probable meaning "May he protect" or in its fullest form. Jacob-el, "may God protect" (Martin Noth, Die israelitischen Personennamen im Rahmen der gemeinsameritischen Namengebung [Stuttgart: Verlag von W Kohlhammer, 1928], pp. 177-78: also see W F Albright, From the Stone Age to Christianity [Garden City. NY: Doubleday & Co., 1957], p. 237, n. 51). The protection is that of a rearguard, one who follows behind the group. In the naming of the infant (Gen. 25), the mother selected a name that would instantly recall how the
Jacob at the Jabbok, Israel at Peniel

younger child grasped the heel of his brother (בָּלַע/בָּלְעָה) -after all, the mother had received the oracle about the twins and so would note such unusual developments. But the parents would in no wise name a child "overreacher" or "deceitful." But in his lifetime Jacob "tripped" his brother twice, prompting Esau to reinterpret his name: "Is he not rightly called Jacob? He has deceived me these two times" (Gen. 27:36, author's trans.). After those incidents the significance of the name became that of a deceiver, one who dogged the heels of another to trip him and take unfair advantage. Jeremiah later would say, "Every brother is a'Jacob... (Jer. 9:4, author's trans.).

39 Robertson Smith writes: "The very name of Israel is martial, and means 'God (El) fightheth,' and Jehovah in the Old Testament is Iahwe cebaath, the Jehovah of the armies of Israel. It was on the battlefield that Jehovah's presence was most clearly realized. ..." (The Prophets of Israel [Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 18821, p. 36).
41 Gunkel writes, "Es ist ein grossartiger und sicherlich uralter Gedanke Israels, es sei im Stande, nicht nur die ganze Welt mit Gottes Hulfe, sondern auch, wo notig Gott selber zu bekampfen and zu überwinden" (Genesis, p. 328). Gunkel restated this in the 1917 edition: "denn wen selbst die Gottheit nicht bezwingen konnte, den wird kein Feind bawaltigen!"
42 Martin Noth, Die israelitischen Personennamen, p. 208.
43 W F Albright, "The Names 'Israel' and 'Judah' with an Excursus on the Etymology of Todah and Torah," Journal of Biblical Literature 46 (1927):159. Nestle's discussion was in Die israelitischen Eigennamen. There are exceptions, of course, such as לָעַל in 2 Chronicles 29:12.
44 Albright, "The Names 'Israel' and 'Judah.'"
45 The pointing of הָלַע is in itself unexpected; a shewa would be expected under the ה. Albright suggests a secondary development under the influence of the Greek tradition (Albright follows Max Margolis, "The Pronunciation of the לַע according to New Hexaplaric Material," The American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature [1909]:66). When the shewa is followed by a laryngeal we have an a vowel in Greek (Ὀρσαῆ). So the shewa had an a coloring before the weak laryngeal in the pre-Masoretic age. The Masoretes, under the influence of Aramaic reduced a short a in the open syllable to shewa, except in two well-known names, הָלַע and גָּלַע, where it was too well-established to be eliminated (Albright, "The Names of 'Israel' and 'Judah,'" p. 161).
48 "El est droit on juste" (Edmond Jacob, Theologie de L'Ancient Testament [Neuchatel: Delachaux et Niestle Editeurs, 19551, p. 155 [p. 203 in the English translation]). Jacob says that the explanation given in Genesis is philologically untenable.
49 Ibid., p. 50.
50 Albright, "The Names 'Israel' and 'Judah." " p. 166.
51 Ibid., p. 168. Of course the fact that a root הָרָא, meaning "fight." is rare was taken as an objection to that meaning. Argument based on rarity loses its force.
52 Coote, "The Meaning of the Name Israel," p. 139.
53 Noth, Die israelitischen Personennamen, pp. 191. 208.
55 Popular etymologies are satisfied with a lose connection between the words. Rarely are they precise etymologies such as with the explanation of Joseph in Genesis 30:23-24 (יְשַׁעֲרִי, "may he add"). Most often they express a wish or sentiment that is loosely connected by a wordplay For example, Seth is explained with עִזָּה', "he appointed": Simeon with עֵשָׂבָה, "he heard": Ephraim with עִבְרָי, "he made me fruitful": Levi with עֶזֶר, "he will be attached": Judah with עֲבֹד, "I will praise." On occasion the popular etymology employs a completely different root. For example, Jabez (גֶּבֶר) is explained with the word: עֶבֶר and Reuben is explained with עֶבֶר, "he has looked on my affliction." Such popular etymologies are more interested in the significance of the name than in the technical etymology
56 Von Rad, Genesis, p. 322.
57 Dillmann, Genesis, 2: 279.
60 Here the word is spelled לֶאַהָל, but later מִנָהוֹל (LXX has Εἰδός θεοῦ). The 1 and the * that serve as binding vowels are probably old case endings (see E. Kautzsch and A.
Skinner suggests that it is not improbable that the place is named for its resemblance to a face (Genesis, p. 410; Strabo mentions such a Phoenician promontory θεοῦ πρόσωπον [16. 2. 15-16]). The story would then be an etiological narrative designed to explain such a phenomenon. More likely the name was used to fit the experience rather than the experience to fit the name.
61 Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 219.
64 Ibid., p. 288.
66 Dillmann, Genesis 2:280.
67 The figure of Jacob is exalted in Isaiah 41:8; 44:1, 2, 21: 48:20: and 49:3. Compare, however, the juxtaposition of Jacob and Israel in 1 Kings 18:3 1.
68 Von Rad, Genesis, p. 325.
69 But the direction Gevirtz takes on this is surely extreme. He argues that the sinew of the hip (הָרָא מַרְגָּא) is an allusion to Gad and Manasseh, who had the Jabbok as their common border. The lesson of the allusion was then that the emergence of Israel depended on the confederation of Gad and Manasseh.
This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204
www.dts.edu
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
Studies in the Life of Jacob
Part 1:

Jacob's Vision:
The Founding of Bethel

Allen P. Ross

Introduction

The clear revelation of God's gracious dealings with man can transform a worldly individual into a worshiper. It is a drama that has been repeated again and again throughout the history of the faith. Perhaps no story in Scripture illustrates this so vividly as Jacob's dream at Bethel, recorded in Genesis 28:10-22. Before this experience Jacob was a fugitive from the results of his sin, a troubled son in search of his place in life, a shrewd shepherd setting out to find a wife. But after this encounter with God he was a partner with Him as a recipient of God's covenant promises and a true worshiper. The transformation is due to God's intrusion into the course of his life.

THE NARRATIVE¹

The story unfolds quickly and dramatically. Being persona non grata in Canaan after deceiving Isaac and receiving the blessing, Jacob went on his way to Haran until things settled down. At sundown he stopped at a "place" and took "one of the stones of the place" to prepare for the night. But in a dream that night God appeared to him from the top of an angel-filled stairway and confirmed that the blessing was indeed his. When Jacob awoke he was afraid because he realized that the Lord was in that place; at dawn he set up the stone as a memorial, named the place Bethel, "the House of God," and vowed to worship there when he returned to his father's house in peace.

224
THE NARRATIVE'S LITERARY FEATURES

The literary devices in the passage are designed to show that the vision inspired the manner of Jacob's worship and gave new meaning to the place of his vision. The repetition of key terms throughout the narrative ties the whole account together and explains the significance of Jacob's response. In his dream Jacob saw a stairway standing (מֵיהַ) on the earth, and the Lord standing (נָצַךְ) above or by it. This repetition suggests that the stairway functioned to point to the Lord. Then in view of what he saw, Jacob took the stone he had used and set it up as a מֵיהַ ("pillar"), this word recalling the previous two. By setting up the stone in this way Jacob apparently wanted to establish forever that he had seen the Lord standing over the stairway. The wordplays then focus the reader's attention on Jacob's vision of the Lord -- the standing stairway pointing to it and the standing stone being a reminder of it.

The repetition of the word מֵיהַ also confirms this connection between the two parts. Jacob had seen the stairway with its top (בֵיתַ) in the heavens, and so he anointed the top (הוּלְרַע) of the stone that he set up in commemoration, a stone he had used for the place of his head (לְעָנַף). Moreover, the key words in verses 11-12, the last part of the vision, are reversed in their order in the first part of the response. Jacob saw the stairway reaching to heaven, on it the angels of God, and above it the Lord. That the central focus is on the Lord is clear from the inversion; what came last in the vision is the first thing Jacob was concerned with. He exclaimed, "The Lord is in this place.... This is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!" (vv 16-17).

The story deliberately emphasized the place's insignificance, which leads up to its naming in verse 19. The word "place" (מַקָּמִים) is used six times in the story. Verse 11 reports that Jacob came upon a place to spend the night, took one of the stones from the place, and lay down in that place. But in the second half of the narrative, after the theophany, Jacob said, "Surely the Lord is in this place," and "How terrifying is this place!" Then "he named that place Bethel," though it was formerly called Luz (v. 19). It was not an anonymous place after all; there was a city nearby called Luz. But for the sake of this story it was just a "place" until it became Bethel.

The literary features, then, strengthen the development of the motifs of the narrative to show how a place became a shrine, a
stone became an altar, and a fugitive became a pilgrim--God in His grace revealed Himself to Jacob in that place.

THE FUNCTION OF THE NARRATIVE

The two most significant events in the life of Jacob were nocturnal theophanies. The first was this dream at Bethel when he was fleeing from the land of Canaan, which ironically was his by virtue of the blessing. The other was his fight at Peniel when he was attempting to return to the land. Each divine encounter was a life-changing event.

But the location of these episodes in the Jacob stories is strategic. The Bethel story forms the transition from the Jacob-Esau cycle to the Jacob-Laban cycle, and the Peniel story forms the connection back to the Esau story. In each of the encounters with God there is instilled in the patriarch great expectation for the uncertain future. In this incident at Bethel Jacob's vow expresses his anticipation for the future. God would now be with him and help him, even though he might be slow to realize it. The promise of God's presence and protection would bring continued encouragement during the 20 years with Laban.

The parallels between this story and the beginning of Genesis 32 are striking, showing that the story of Jacob's sojourn in Aram is deliberately bracketed with supernatural visions. In this story Jacob saw the angels of God (סַרְאָנִים אֱלֹהִים) on the stairway, but in 32:1 the angels of God (סַרְאָנִים אֱלֹהִים) met him. These are the only two places in the Book of Genesis where reference is made to the "angels of God." In addition, in both passages (28:11; 32:1) the construction of the verb "encountered, met" is the same, a preterite form of הָעַל and the object. In 28:16-17 it is used four times, the last two being in the statement, "This is the House of God, this is the gate of heaven"; and in 32:2 it reappears in the clause "this is the camp of God." Also in both accounts Jacob names the spot, using the same formula for each: "and he named that place ... (יָשָׁם אֱלֹהִים פְּסֵל הוֹדָא). "And finally, "going" and "the way" (וַיַּלְךָ, אֱלֹהִים הַגָּדָה) in 28:20 are reflected in 32:2.

The stories about Jacob's encounters with God or His angels also form an interesting contrast with the other Jacob stories. Jacob is usually working against another individual in the narratives, first Esau in the Jacob-Esau cycle of chapters 25-27, and then Laban in the Jacob-Laban cycle of chapters 29-31, and then Esau again in 33. The account in chapter 34 of the defile-
ment of Dinah also shows a crisis, though Simeon and Levi figure more prominently in that narrative. But in the encounter passages (28:10-22 at Bethel, 32:2-3 at Mahanaim, 32:23-33 at Peniel, and 35:1-7, 14-15 at Bethel again, the latter forming a conscious liturgical conclusion to the whole complex) Jacob alone is mentioned. Neither Esau nor Laban were with him. In fact Esau never experienced any divine appearance, and Laban received only a warning dream. But when Jacob had these appearances he participated in liturgical acts. The narratives, then, heighten what the Bethel story declares, namely, that Jacob's life functioned on two levels, his conflicts with individuals and his encounters with God. The encounters assured Jacob that he would prevail in the conflicts.

This liturgical motif forms the climax in the Bethel story. In fact Westermann calls the whole story a sanctuary foundation narrative. It explains how Bethel came to be such an important center for the worship of the Lord. Because God actually met the patriarch on this spot, it was holy ground. Here then was a place where worship was appropriate.

**Exegesis**

**THE SETTING**

The story begins with Jacob's departure from Beersheba for Haran. The preceding narrative in Genesis explains the reason for this trip--Esau was threatening to kill him for stealing the blessing. So it was, as Kidner says, that Jacob was thrust from the nest he was feathering.

To be sure, Jacob had obtained the blessing by deception at first, but then had it confirmed by the shaken Isaac (28:1-4) who, realizing what had happened, was powerless to change it (27:37). But were the promises actually his? If he truly was the heir, why must he flee from the land? Would God's blessing be his as it had been Abraham's and Isaac's before him? Nothing less than a sure word from God would ease his doubts and give him confidence for the future.

The narrative unfolds in a disarmingly casual manner. Jacob came upon a place where he would stay for the night, for the sun had set. The only detail that is mentioned is that he took "one of the stones" at random to lay by his head while he slept. But this casual finding of an anonymous place and taking one of the stones in the darkness of night begins to build suspense.
THE VISION

With an abrupt change of style that brings the vision into the present experience, the narrative introduces the dream. Up to this point the narrative sequence has employed preterites (אָכֵל, יָכֵל, אָכֵل); but this is now broken off abruptly by means of the repetition of נַחַל followed by participles. Jacob was surprised by what he dreamed, and the reader is vividly made aware of this. Fokkelman points out that the particle נַחַל functions with a deictic force; it is pre- or para-lingual. It goes with a lifted arm, an open mouth: "--there, a ladder! oh, angels! and look, the Lord Himself!"11

The arrangement of the clauses also narrows the focus to the central point of the vision, the Lord. Each clause in Hebrew is shorter than the preceding; the first has seven words, the second six, and the third four:

There was a stairway standing on the earth with its top reaching the heavens, and there were angels of God ascending and descending on it, and there was the Lord standing over it.

Attention is focused first on the setting, then narrowed to the participants, and then to the Lord.12

The first thing noticed is the stairway. מִלָּע, translated "ladder" or "stairway," is a hapax legomenon, a word or form occurring only once in the biblical corpus. It has been traditionally connected to the root לָע, "to heap up, cast up." Related nouns are מָלַע, "paved way" (but not of a street in a city), and 17b, "a bank, siege-ramp" (2 Sam. 20:15). These suggested etymological connections, however, do not clarify the meaning.

The Greek text translated מִלָע with κλίμακα, which can be translated "ladder" or "staircase." So too is the case with the Latin scala. The same uncertainty of meaning prevails with the versions.

Several specific interpretations have been offered for מִלָע,13 but the one that has the most to commend it is the view that connects the מִלָע with Mesopotamian temple towers. The Akkadian word simmiltu, cognate to מִלָע, provides the link.14 It is used to describe the "stairway of heaven" extending between heaven and the netherworld with messengers ascending and descending on it.15 The comparison is certainly an attractive one. Another possible connection is with the celestial ladder
found in the Pyramid Texts of Egypt. But this may be too different. Pyramid text 267 shows that the function of the stairway was to lead the deceased (king) to heaven.

The connection to Akkadian simnītū with the Mesopotamian background is the most probable view. In the myth of "Nergel and Ereshkigal" communication between the netherworld and heaven takes place via the long stairway of heaven that leads to the gate of Anu, Enlil, and Ea. The idea of a ziggurat with its long staircase to the temple top would be behind the idea. Nothing in Genesis 28, however, describes a ziggurat. The most that can be said is that a word used in ziggurat settings is cognate to the word used here, a word that fits the way of communication between heaven and earth. So Hebrew מְלָאך is appropriate to the point of the story--here was a place that heaven and earth touch, where there is access to God.

The second feature of the vision is the angelic hosts "ascending and descending" on the stairway, suggesting their presence on earth along with their access to heaven. Driver writes, "The vision is a symbolic expression of the intercourse which, though invisible to the natural eye, is nevertheless ever taking place between heaven and earth." Nothing is said here about the function of the angels; likewise no hint can be found in the corresponding episode at Mahanaim which simply reports that the angels "met him." Other references to angels in Genesis are more helpful. Of course the cherubim in 3:24 guard the way to the tree of life. Then in chapter 18 three visitors came to Abraham, and in chapter 19 two went on to meet with Lot in Sodom. In 18:2 they are simply called "three men." That this may be a manifestation of the Lord is suggested by the context and reinforced by the use of וַיִּתֵּן in 18:2 which corresponds to 28:13. But in 19:1 the two who went to Sodom are called הַמַּעֲלֵה. Their task was to rescue Lot before the judgment on the city.

The expression מִלְּאך הוֹיָה, "the angel of the Lord," is used interchangeably with "the Lord" in 22:11, 15. In 48:16 Jacob apparently was referring to the Lord when he said, "The angel (וְמִלְּאך) who protects me from all evil bless the lads...."

The activities in these passages are guarding, communicating, rescuing, and protecting. In this vision, then, the angels of God communicated God's protection for Jacob, the recipient of the promises.
The third and central feature of the vision, however, was the Lord who was standing over the stairway. Later, in Genesis 48, Jacob would identify the Lord as God Almighty (יְהֹוָה יָדֵי לֹא מַסֵּד), explaining that God had given him the blessing at Bethel.

THE PROMISE

The word of the Lord in this vision took the form of a covenantal communication and extended the patriarchal promises to Jacob. The message begins with the identification of the Lord as the covenant God: "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father, and the God of Isaac." This pattern of self-revelation was used in Genesis 15:7 for Abraham; it also appears in Exodus at the beginning of the covenant (Exod. 20:1) and throughout the Law when God stressed His covenant relationship to His people. The identification of Abraham as the "father" of Jacob shows the latter's continuity with the covenant.

The first part of the revelation guaranteed that Jacob would receive the blessings at first promised to Abraham. The wording of the promises is close to that in Genesis 13:14-16 and 22:17-18. Prominence is attached to the promise of the land, for it is mentioned before the seed promise and stressed by the word order: "The land, upon which you are lying, to you I will give it and to your seed." The mention of the seed here would have been encouraging to Jacob who was going to find a wife, and is further elaborated on by the statement that the seed would "break out" and settle in every direction in this Promised Land (cf. 13:12-18). Finally, the promise that all the families of the earth would be blessed in Jacob shows that the Abrahamic blessing had indeed been carried forward to Jacob (cf. 12:3).

These promises given to Jacob so dramatically would have provided him with confidence. Though he had been deceitful in gaining the blessing, God in His grace gave it to him; and even though he was fleeing from his land, God promised to give him the land.

The second part of the revelation guaranteed protection for Jacob in the sojourn. It begins with the promise of God's presence: "Indeed, I will be with you" (אִם אִינָה אֵלֵךְ). The promise of the divine presence carried God's chosen people through many times of danger and difficulty. It assured them that they did not have to accomplish His plan by themselves. Moses, for example, drew great comfort from this in his early career. When he was afraid to go to deliver the people God said, "Surely I will be with
you (כֹּל אֲחֹתת עַמָּנוּ)." The writer of Psalm 46 also realized the benefits of God's presence: "The Lord of hosts is with us (עִמָּנוּ), the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:7, 11). This passage also brings to mind Isaiah's oracle that promises "God is with us (כִּלּוּ אֲחֹתת עַמָּנוּ)" (7:14).

That God's presence would guarantee safety is verified by the next verb, "and I will keep you." His presence, then, meant that God would be Jacob's "Keeper," so that no harm would come to him wherever he should go. Joshua also reminded the people how God had protected them on their sojourn (Josh. 24:17). This is a theme that Psalm 121 develops for the pilgrim on his way to Jerusalem, where he would hear the high priestly blessing announce the same divine intent: "The Lord bless you and keep you" (Num. 6:24). The promise of divine protection does not exclude conflict and tension, but it does guarantee the outcome for the good of the covenant and its recipient.

The promise concludes with the statement that God will restore Jacob to the land to receive the promises. The statement "I will not forsake you until I shall have done" need not imply that once God fulfills the blessing He will abandon Jacob; rather, it provides assurance that the promises just made will be fulfilled. God's protective presence will work toward the fulfillment of the promise.

THE REALIZATION

When Jacob awakened he was overwhelmed with the fact that the Lord was "in this place" (v 16). He had never imagined that this rather ordinary place could be a holy place. Jacob here realized what God had promised--His presence was with him. Jacob's attitude of fear was appropriate for such a meeting with the Lord. The term "fear" is used in the Bible to describe a mixture of terror and adoration, a worshipful fear (cf. Exod. 19:16). People may revere the Lord (the positive, worshipful, aspect of the word), but when they comprehend more fully His sovereign majesty, they shrink back in fear. All worshipful acts must begin with and be characterized by reverential fear at the presence of the Lord (Exod. 3:6; 19; Ps. 2:11). Of Jacob, Bush says, "His feelings upon awakening were those of grateful wonder mingled with emotions of reverential awe, bordering close upon dread." Jacob realized that this place was holy: "How frightening is this place! This is none other than the House of God, and this is
the gate of heaven." Here the motif of "house" is first introduced (בֵּית אֱלֹהִים, house of God). By using this term Jacob designated the place as a shrine. No literal house was there, nor an actual gate. But it would now be known as a place where people could find access to God, where God could be worshiped. He had "seen" God in the heavens, and so God's "house" on earth was man's gate to the heavens.

THE WORSHIP

Devotion. Early in the morning Jacob arose and stood the stone up as a pillar at which he could express his submission through worship. The preparation for worship by setting up a pillar raises questions about the custom. Graesser shows how standing stones in the ancient world would serve as markers, arresting the attention of the onlooker because they were not in their natural position. Such a standing stone had to have been put that way; it would mark a grave (Rachel's pillar in Gen. 35:20), form a boundary (the treaty with Laban in Gen. 31:45), note some important event (Samuel's Ebenezer in 1 Sam. 7:12), or, as here, mark out a sacred area where God could be "found," where prayer could reach Him. This pillar would be a commemoration of the vision, recalling the stairway to heaven.

Jacob's offering took the form of oil poured on top of the stone, perhaps pointing to the Lord at the top of the stairway. Pouring the oil before the Lord was a gift to God, for it conveyed much the same attitude as making a sacrifice. It was a symbolic ritual act by which Jacob demonstrated his devotion to the Lord and consecrated the spot as holy to Him. Later, oil was used in worship to sanctify the holy places and holy things (Lev. 8:10-11). So this duly consecrated altar served to commemorate the appearance, express the patriarch's devotion, and guarantee the seriousness of the oath of the worshiper (cf. Gen. 12:8; 13:18; 26:25).

Commemoration. According to the story Jacob named the place "Bethel" because God had come near to him there. This naming actually transformed the place from being merely a Canaanite town called Luz into God's "house" for Jacob and his descendants to use for worship. Modern scholarship suggests that this spot was an original Canaanite shrine or sanctuary city, founded before the time of Abram and dedicated to the god El. Von Rad says that Bethel must have been known as a cult center before the time of Israel.
because a god named Bethel was worshiped there. It is true that the name "Bethel" does not always seem to be a place name but at times is a divine name, perhaps developing metonymically through association with a shrine. The evidence for this deity does not, however, include Phoenician or Ugaritic literature, and so the presentation of such a deity for the second millennium B.C. in Canaan cannot be convincingly defended. As far as the Hebrew account is concerned, the name of Bethel derives its significance from the fact that the Lord appeared to Jacob there. The motivation for the name came in the speech of verse 17 which is a stylized reaction to the theophany (cf. Judg. 6:22; 13:22; Gen. 16:13b; Exod. 20:18; Deut. 5:24).

This part of the passage develops the theme of "house." The key is the patriarch's exclamation, "This is the House of God." He then preserved the vision by naming the place "House of God." But the word נַעֲרָ is repeated in verses 21a, b, and 22a. It is as if this fugitive was saying that when he returned to settle in the land God would settle with him. God would go with him and bring him back to his father's "house" in peace. When he returned, there would be a "house" for God in the Promised Land.

Dedication. Jacob's promise to worship God at Bethel was solemnized by oath. Vows were not made to induce God to do something He was not willing to do. They were made to bind the worshiper to the performance of some acknowledged duty. Jacob made his vow on the basis of what God had guaranteed to do. So he was taking God at His word and binding himself to reciprocate with his own dedication.

The oath then must be divided between a protasis and an apodosis--"if... then." It is not easy to determine just where to make this division. The protasis should form the foundation for his promise and should include what God had promised to do. The apodosis should record what Jacob wanted to do for God. So the most appropriate place to start the apodosis may be in verse 22. The vow would then read:

If the Lord God is with me.
and keeps me in this way in which I am going,
and gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear,
so that I return in peace to the house of my father,
and the Lord becomes my God.
then this stone which I set up as a pillar
will be the house of God,
and all which you give me a tenth I will give to you (author's trans.).
God had promised to be with him, keep him, bless him, return him in peace, in short, be his God; consequently, Jacob promised that the spot would be a place of worship and that he would tithe.

The vow to tithe is the only part of Jacob's promise that is a real action. Moreover, the structure of the speech changes to the second person in a personal address to God directly. His gratitude and submission to God would be expressed through the paying of a tithe.

So Jacob did more than consecrate Bethel as a place of worship for the nation of Israel. He himself was moved to worship there, and his acts formed a pattern for later worshipers to follow in the offering of their devotion and their substance to God.

**Conclusion**

This brief account tells how God deals graciously with His covenant people. It tells how God suddenly and unexpectedly broke into the life of the deceiver who was fleeing for his life, and assured him of the covenantal promises and His protective presence. But the point of the narrative is the effect on Jacob's life—he worshiped and prepared for the worship of his descendants at this "House of God."

The didactic level of the story for Israel would be clear. Jacob, who represents Israel in the story, who was anything but obedient at the outset, would spend a number of years outside the land (cf. Gen. 15:13-16). During that time God would protect and bless him (cf. Exod. 1:7, 12, 20) and ultimately return him to his inheritance. Such covenantal blessings should inspire worshipful devotion from God's people (cf. Exod. 5:1; 14:29-15:21; Josh. 4:19-24; 8:30-31).

The Christian experience is similar. The effectual revelation of God's protective presence and promised blessings for Christians will inspire devout and faithful worship. Those who fully realize God's gracious provision, those whom the Word of God has powerfully impressed, will respond with consecration and commitment. Where there is no reverential fear, no commitment or no devotion, there is probably very little apprehension of what the spiritual life is all about. Like the revelation to Jacob, the written revelation of God makes the believer aware of the Lord's presence and prompts him to a higher level of living.
Notes

1 The critical analysis of this passage is rather complex. Long says that J is partially preserved in verses 10, 13, 15, 16, and 19, but that it is now overlaid and dominated by E in verses 11, 12, 17, 18, and 20-22 (Burke O. Long, *The Problem of Etiological Narrative in the Old Testament* [Berlin: Alfred Topelmann, 19681, p. 60). Von Rad's combination is different. He argues that verses 16 and 17 are parallel, as are 19a and 22a, and he then takes verses 13-16 and 19 as J, and verses 10-12, and 17-22 (except 19) as E (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 19611, p. 278). According to von Rad only J contains the etymological formula on the name. Even if a case could be made convincingly for these sources, and if there was agreement on the divisions, one would still be left with the difficulties and tensions in the final, fixed form of the text. All the ideas in the story were apparently understood as a unified tradition of the founding of Bethel. Moreover, the literary design of the account bolsters its unity. The problem of the parallel passage in Genesis 35 could then also be understood as a stylistic device of confirmation and recapitulation.

2 The author is indebted to Fokkelman's discussion of the basic ideas about the literary features of this passage (J. P Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis* [Assen, Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 19751, pp. 65-81).


6 Ibid., p. 85.


8 The effect of this gracious revelation in Genesis 28 appears to have had just such an effect. In 29:1 the text says "And Jacob picked up his feet and went." In other words, with this assurance from God Jacob had a new gait in his steps.

9 The verb יָנָא adds to the note of casualness. It means "to encounter, meet." Fokkelman translates it "he struck upon" a place (*Narrative Art*, p. 48).

10 It is unlikely that a stone large enough to be a pillar should be a pillow. The word signifies what is at the head. It is used in 1 Samuel 26:7 in the same way: Saul lay sleeping within the trench, with his spear stuck in the ground "at his head."

11 Ibid., pp. 51-52. The KJV of course uses "behold" in all three places, as does the NASB. The Niv has not reflected the impact of יָנָא by translating the verses, "He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord...."

12 It is interesting to note that the next chapter uses יָנָא in a similar way. It first introduces the setting, "there is a well in the field" (29:2); then the participants, "and oh, there are three flocks of sheep lying by it" (29:2); and then the focus of the story, "and look, Rachel his daughter is coming with the sheep" (29:6). By the repetition of this pattern the narrative shows a direct correspondence between the sections, the second being the beginning of the outworking of the first.

13 Some of these area temple tower with a pathway winding around it, a tower with a stairlike entrance, and a staircase leading into a palace (see C. Houtman, "What Did Jacob See in His Dream at Bethel?" *Vetus Testamentum* 27 [19771:337-52;
14 The connection between מַסְמָלִיתָ and simmiitu involves a metathesis (see Sabatino Moscati, An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of the Semitic Languages [Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1964], p. 63).


18 If there is an implied connection to the ziggurat here, then this passage forms an antithesis to the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis which also has a Mesopotamian background. Comparing the two passages one could say that if there is communication between heaven and earth it is initiated in heaven (Gen. 28) and not on earth (Gen. 11).

19 Christ compared Himself to the stairway in John 1:51: "and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man." He is the Mediator between heaven and earth; He is the Way to God.


21 The prepositional phrase can be translated "over it" or "beside it" or "beside him." The use in Genesis 18:1 suggests "beside him," but the context here suggests "over it" because God's realm is in the heavens, and because Jacob anointed the top of the stone.

22 The purpose of the casus pendens is to throw the independent nominative to the beginning for emphasis.

23 Fokkelman observes what he calls a sound fusion, a melting of consonants in the transition: יַעַר נַחֲלָה is followed by יָעַר נַחֲלָה; the letters נ ה out of the prepositional phrase become the verb. He says, "The levels of sound and meaning have become integrated: they point to each other, they explain each other, they pervade each other" (Narrative Art, p. 59).

24 One clear example of this is Genesis 31:24 which records how God warned Laban in a dream not to harm Jacob (see also v. 29).


27 The shrine later became the place of corrupt, idolatrous worship (2 Kings 12. 28-29). Hosea alluded to this passage but altered the name by a wordplay from to יָעֵר נַחֲלָה to יָעַר נַחֲלָה, "house of vanity" (i.e., idols, Hos. 4:15). Amos 5:5 said that "Bethel shall come to nothing" (i.e., be destroyed), but expresses this with 28 Von Rad, Genesis, p. 286.

29 Some biblical passages may suggest "Bethel" could be used as a divine epithet. Jeremiah 48:13 says that "Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel, their confidence." Zechariah 7:2 could be interpreted to read "Bethel-shar-ezer," a personal name, instead of "the house of

30 Long, Etiological Narrative, p. 60.

31 Many translations begin the apodasis with "then the Lord will become my God," which is equally possible. If God actually promised to be his God in the words of the Abrahamic promises (as in Gen. 17:7), then it would not be something Jacob would be promising to do.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX  75204
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
Studies in the Book of Genesis

Part 4:

The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1-9

Allen P. Ross

Introduction to the Passage

THE NATURE OF THE ACCOUNT

The narrative in Genesis 11:1-9 describes the divine intervention among the human family to scatter them across the face of the earth by means of striking at the heart of their unity—their language. A quick reading of the passage shows that the predominant idea is not the tower of Babel but this scattering.

If the point is not simply the tower, then this passage does not present, as some have suggested, a Hebrew adaptation of the Greek Titans storming heaven to dislodge God. Rather, the characteristics of the people in this story are anxiety and pride through their own gregariousness. The tower, on the one hand, is born from the people's fear of being scattered across the earth; and on the other hand it is an attempt to frustrate God's plan to fill the earth (Gen. 9:1).

The sin. Since the story has the trappings of a judgment narrative in which Yahweh interrupts mankind's misguided activities and scatters them abroad, it may be assumed that the antithesis of this scattering must be the sin. The major error was not the building of a city, but the attempt of the race to live in one City. Therefore it appears that the human family was striving for unity, security, and social immortality (making a name) in defiance of God's desire for them to fill the earth.

Divine punishment. It is important to keep in mind that the "judgment" was not the destruction of the city but of the lan-
language that united the people. It was shattered into a multiplicity of languages so that the common bond was destroyed. Thus the text is demonstrating that the present number of languages that form national barriers is a monument to sin.

**Divine prevention.** Since the people's purpose was to make a name for themselves and to achieve power through unity, the apostasy of the human spirit would shortly bring the race to the brink of another catastrophe such as the Deluge. By frustrating their communication and dividing them into nations, it is evident that "it is the will of God, so long as sin is present in the world, to employ nationalism in the reduction of sin."4

For ages people have restricted themselves to native manners and customs and regarded diverse languages of foreigners with great horror.5 Thus Israel was delivered from a people of "a strange language" (Ps. 114:1) and was frequently warned of destruction by a fierce nation whose language would not be understood and whose deep speech could not be comprehended (Deut. 28:49; Isa. 28:11; 33:19; Jer. 5:15). The language barrier brought sudden fear and prevented unification.

Ringgren summarized the twofold aspect of Yahweh's intervention in Genesis 11 as divine reaction to pride.

Theologically, the building of the tower in Gen. 11 is interpreted as an act of human arrogance and rebellion against God; accordingly, Yahweh intervenes against its builders and scatters them over the whole earth. This action of God is both punishment and a preventive measure; it prevents men from going too far in their pride.6

Later prophets would draw on this narrative, recording the very beginnings of the divisions as they looked to the end of days when God Himself would unify mankind once again. Zephaniah 3:9-11 appears to be constructed antithetically to this passage with its themes in common with Genesis 11:1-9: the pure speech (i.e., one language),7 the gathering of the dispersed people (even from Cush),8 the removal of pride, and the service in the holy mountain. The miracle on the day of Pentecost is often seen as a harbinger of that end time.9

**LITERARY ANALYSIS OF THE PASSAGE**

The literary style of the narrative shows an artistic hand ordering the material in such a way as to mirror the ideas from the Babylonian background of the story as well as to contrast by means of antithetical parallelism the participants in the story. To such literary art, repetition and parallelism are essential.
Antithetical balance. In the antithetical parallelism of the narrative ideas are balanced against their counterparts. The story begins with the report of the unified situation at the beginning (11:1) and ends with a reminder of that unity and its resultant confusion for the scattering (11:9). This beginning and ending picture is reflected in the contrast of the dialogues and actions: 11:2-4 describes what the humans proceeded to do; 11:5-8 describes how Yahweh turned their work aside (beginning with the contrastive, "But Yahweh ... ").

Within these balanced sections many elements support the antithetical arrangement. As seen in the Hebrew, verse 1 is balanced with 9, 2 with 8, and 3 with 7, and the narrative turns at verse 5.10

Poetic devices. The mechanics of the writer can also be seen in the heavy alliteration and sound play throughout the account. First, the writer enhances the meaning of the ultimate word play (the הָבֵל/בֵּל exchange) by his sounds. The letters ב, ל, and נ, culminating in the word בֵּל; are frequently used. Verse 3 reads לָכַּה לָכַּה לָכַּה נָבִיא לָכַּה לָכַּה לָכַּה לָכַּה. Verse 4 has נָבִיא

Second, the wordplays in the passage strengthen the ideas. Bullinger calls such wordplays "paronomasias" which he describes as the employment of two words that are different in origin and meaning, but similar in sound and appearance to emphasize two things by calling attention to the similarity of sound.12 One is placed alongside the other and appears to be a repetition of it. Once the eye has caught the two words and the attention concentrated on them, then one discovers that an interpretation is put on the one by the other.

While this description gives the general nature of wordplays, it is too broad for distinguishing the types of wordplays within the group known as paronomasias. To be precise, it should be said that paronomasias involves a play on similarity of sound and some point in the meaning as well; those that have no point of contact.
in meaning are best classified as phonetic wordplays such as assonance, rhyme, alliteration, or epanastrophe.

This distinction becomes necessary in the exegesis of the narrative. In verse 3 is the exhortation, \( \text{לבול להבנדים} \), "let us make bricks" (literally, "let us brick bricks"). Immediately there follows a second exhortation: \( \text{מנראות להרבנדים} \), "let us burn them hard" (literally, "let us burn them for burning"). These are paronomasias in the strict sense since they offer a sound play and are etymologically connected.

However, the key play in the passage is not strictly paronomasia since there is no connection etymologically between \( \text{בלבל} \) and \( \text{בלבל} \). It is a phonetic wordplay. The people would say that the name was called "\( \text{בלבל} \)" because Yahweh "made a babble" (literally, "made a language.

All these devices enhance the basic antithetical structure of the passage. Fokkelman illustrates this by connecting the paronomasia of verse 3, \( \text{לבול להבנדים} \), with the response of God in verse 7, \( \text{לכל אלהים להבנדים} \), in a sound-chiasmus.\(^{13}\)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
L & B & N \\
N & B & L
\end{array}
\]

"let us make bricks"

"let us confuse"

The reversal of the order of the sounds reveals the basic idea of the passage: The construction on earth is answered by the destruction from heaven; men build but God pulls down. The fact that God's words are also in the form of man's words (as cohortative) adds a corroding irony to the passage. God sings with the people while working against them.\(^{14}\)

The same point is stressed with \( \text{שבעים,ブメシ,ブメシ} \), and \( \text{בעמיאו} \). To bring everlasting fame (ブメシ) they unite in one spot (ブメシ) as the base of operations for their attainment of fame which they make conditional on the encroachment of \( \text{בעמיאו} \), the abode of God. What drives them is hubris. What calls out the nemesis of Yahweh from heaven (ブメシ) and scatters them from there (own) is also hubris.\(^{15}\)

The "brackets" on the text illustrate this poignantly: what "all the earth" sought to avoid, namely, dispersion "all over the earth," happened (cf. v. 1 and v. 9).

SETTING FOR THE PASSAGE

*The Babylonian background.* That this passage has Babylon in mind is clear from the explication of the name "Babel" in verse 9. The first time this term was used was in the Table of
Nations in Genesis 10 where the beginning of the kingdom was recorded in the exploits of Nimrod from Cush (10:10). Not only is there this direct reference to proud Babylon, but also other evidences show that the background of the story was Mesopotamian. Speiser says, "The episode points more concretely to Babylonia than does any other portion of primeval history and the background that is here sketched proves to be authentic beyond all expectations."  

Babylon was a thing of beauty to the pagan world. Every important city of Babylonia was built with a step-tower known as a ziggurat (ziggurratu). In Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon itself, in the area of Marduk's sanctuary known as E-sag-ila, "the house whose head is raised up," there was a seven-storied tower with a temple top that was known as E-temen-anki. This structure, measuring 90 meters by 90 meters at the base as well as being 90 meters high, became one of the wonders of the world. The tower was a symbol of Babylonian culture and played a major role in other cultures influenced by it. 

The first of such towers must be earlier than Nebuchadnezzar's, for his were rebuildings of ancient patterns. Cassuto maintains that this reference must be to E-temen-anki (although he suggests that the occasion for the tradition giving rise to the satire would come from an earlier time, from the Hittite destruction of Babylon). Speiser does not agree. He points out that it cannot be E-temen-anki, which cannot antedate the seventh century. Therefore this account must be centuries earlier than E-temen-anki. Since Esarhaddon (seventh century) and Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century) were the first since Hammurabi to build such works, the biblical reference in Genesis 11 must be to a much earlier Babylon. 

So while the actual Neo-Babylonian Empire's architecture cannot be the inspiration for this account, one must conclude that their buildings were rebuildings of some ancient tower located in the same area.

But when the literary parallels concerning this architecture are considered, some very significant correspondences to the narrative are noted. 

First, there is a specific connection of this story with the account of the building of Babylon, recorded in the Akkadian *Enuma Elish*, tablet VI, lines 55-64: 

When Marduk heard this, 
Brightly glowed his features, like the days:
"Like that of lofty Babylon, whose building you have requested, 
Let its brickwork be fashioned. You shall name it the sanctuary."
The Anunnaki applied the implement; 
For one year they molded bricks. 
When the second year arrived, 
They raised high the head of Esagila equaling Apsu. 
Having built a stage tower as high as Apsu, 
They set up in it an abode for Marduk, Enlil, Ea; 
In their presence he adorned it with grandeur.24

Within this passage are several literary parallels to the biblical narrative. Line 62 reads, "They raised the head of Esagila mihrit apsi," (sa Esagila mihrit apsi ulla rest [su]). Speiser notes the word play of ullu resisu with Esagila, which means "the structure which raises the head," explaining that it evokes a special value for the Sumerian name, giving it a significant meaning in Babylon.25 Thus he concludes that resam ullaum became a stock expression for the monumental structures of Babylon and Assyria.

Speiser shows that apsu is a reference to the heavens. He allows that it often means "the deep," but that cannot be correct in the light of line 63 which says, "when they had built the temple tower of the upper (elite) apsu" (ibnuma ziggurat sa apsi elite). In line 62 then, mihrit apsi must be "toward heaven," and apsu must be celestial and not subterranean.26

A second important element is the bricks. The Hebrew text in Genesis 11:3 describes the brickmaking with a cognate accusative construction. Once the bricks are made, the tower is made. Speiser observes that the bricks figured predominantly in the Babylonian account where there is a year-long brick ritual.27 The Babylonian account not only records a similar two-step process (making bricks in the first year and raising the tower head in the second), but it also has a similar construction, using a cognate accusative, libittasu iltabnu (Hebrew: נבנה מבנים). In fact, the Hebrew and Akkadian words are cognate. The similarity is striking.

So in Enuma Elish and Genesis there are at least three solid literary connections: the making of the tower for the sanctuary of the gods, with Genesis reporting the determination to build the tower and city in rebellion to God; the lofty elevation of its head into the heavens, with Genesis recording almost the same reference; and the making of the bricks before the building of the city, with Genesis describing the process with the same grammatical construction.
Another correspondence is reflected in the great pride of the builders. One of the purposes of the Babylonian creation epic at its composition was to show the preeminence of Babylon over all the cities of the country, and especially the supremacy of Marduk over all deities. They were so pleased with themselves that they considered Babylon to be a celestial city, prepared by the Anunnaki gods and made for Marduk on behalf of his victory over Tiamat. It then became the pattern for the earthly city (Enuma Elish, tablet VI, lines 113-15). In fact Babylon, that metropolitan city for so many peoples, claimed to be the origination of society, their city having descended from heaven. Herein is the immense pride of Babylon.

Therefore with this world-famous city and tower culture claiming to be the heavenly plan and beginning of creation, the record in Genesis 11 is a counterblast and a polemic. To communicate this most forcefully, the text employs literary elements of that ancient, traditional theme preserved in the Babylonian culture, but the contents and thrust of the message differ remarkably.

The differences are pointed out in part by Vos. First, Genesis implies that nothing like this had ever been built before by man, but the ziggurats represent traditional workings. Second, Genesis presents the building as evidence of their disobedience, but the Babylonian work was for the purpose of worshiping a local deity. Third, Genesis describes this as the work of one united race of people that became the basis of the scattering and confusion into languages and tribes, but the ziggurats were man-made mountains of a national group (their towers were the symbol of their culture). Also these towers developed gradually over the centuries after the diffusion and scattering.

So Genesis, in setting forth the account of the divine intervention at Babel in the ancient past, deliberately alludes to the arrogance of Babylon that was represented in their literature. The result is a satire on the thing of glory and beauty of the pagan world. The biblical writer, having become familiar with the vain-glorious words in the traditions of Babylon, weaves his account for the purpose of deriding the literary traditions of that ancient city and establishing the truth. In fact traditions from Mesopotamia recorded the ancient division of languages as well. The Sumerians had recorded that there was originally one language since everyone came to worship Enlil with one tongue (Enmerkar Epic, lines 141-46).
Cassuto suggests a collection of satirical ideas that would have given rise to the Genesis narrative, and he paraphrases them as follows:

You children of Babylon ... you called your city Babel--Babili, "Gate of god," or Bab-ilani, "Gate of gods"--and your tower you designated "House of the foundation of heaven and earth." You desired that the top of your tower should be in heaven.... You did not understand that, even if you were to raise the summit of your ziggurat ever so high, you would not be nearer to Him than when you stand upon the ground; nor did you comprehend that He who in truth dwells in heaven, if he wishes to take a closer look at your lofty tower, must needs come down.... Your intention was to build for yourselves a gigantic city that would contain all mankind and you forgot that it was God's will to fill the whole earth with human settlements, and that God's plan would surely be realized.... You were proud of your power, but you should have known that it is forbidden to man to exalt himself, for only the Lord is truly exalted, and the pride of man is regarded by Him as iniquity that leads to his downfall and degradation--a punishment befitting the crime....

On account of this, your dominion was shattered and your families were scattered over the face of the whole earth. Behold, how fitting is the name that you have given to your city! It is true that in your language it expresses glory and pride, but in our idiom it sounds as though it connoted confusion--and confusion of tongues heard therein, which caused its destruction and the dispersion of its inhabitants in every direction.  

Babylon was the prototype of all nations, cities, and empires that despise God's instructions and raise themselves in pride. Babylon represented man's megalomaniacal attempt to achieve world peace and unity by domestic exploitation and power. They would be brought down in confusion; herein was the warning to the new nation of Israel: any disobedient nation would be abased and brought low in spite of her pride, ingenuity, and strength.

The "Babylon" motif became the common representation for the antithetheocratic program. Later writers drew on this theme and used the name as a symbol for the godless society with its great pretensions. Isaiah 47:8-13 portrayed Babylon's pleasures, sins, and superstitions. Isaiah 13:19 pictured her as "the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride"; and Isaiah 14:13 describes her sinful arrogance in exalting her throne above the Most High in the heavens only to be brought low. Jeremiah also predicted the cup of vengeance on this arrogant city (Jer. 51). Daniel recorded her persecutions against Judah. And Revelation 17-18 applies the theme to the spiritual Babylon in the eschaton, showing that it was her sins that reached heaven and
The Dispersion of the Nations in Genesis 11:1-9 127

brought the catastrophe to her, thus preparing the way for the true celestial city to come down to earth.\(^\text{35}\)

*The setting in the primeval narratives.* The present story of the scattering is part of the primeval events of Genesis which give a picture of man in open rebellion to God and of God intervening in judgment on each situation.\(^\text{36}\) The scattering of the race from Babel forms the capstone to the primeval history of the human race.\(^\text{37}\) This development of mankind is accurately described by Kidner.

The primeval history reaches its fruitless climax as man, conscious of new abilities, prepares to glorify and fortify himself by collective effort. The elements of the story are timelessly characteristic of the spirit of the world. The project is typically grandiose; men describe it excitedly to one another as if it were the ultimate achievement—very much as modern man glories in his space projects. At the same time they betray their insecurity as they crowd together to preserve their identity and control their fortunes.\(^\text{38}\)

So it is with this story that the common history of all mankind comes to an abrupt end, which leaves the human race hopelessly scattered across the face of the entire earth. It is this that makes the present narrative so different from those preceding it: In each judgment there was a gracious provision for hope but in this judgment there is none. It does not offer a token of grace, a promise of any blessing, a hope of salvation, or a way of escape. There is no clothing for the naked sinner, no protective mark for the fugitive, no rainbow in the dark sky. There is no ray of hope. The primeval age ends with judgmental scattering and complete confusion. The blessing is not here; the world must await the new history.

In view of this, the story of the scattering of the nations is actually the turning point of the book from primeval history to the history of the blessing. From this very confused and dispersed situation nations would develop in utter futility until God would make a great nation through one man who himself would be "scattered" from this alluvial plain to the land of Canaan. The blessings of final redemption and unification would come through his seed.

The beginning of Genesis 11 presupposes a linguistic unity and localization comparable to the beginning of Genesis 10. Since the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 describes the many families of the earth "after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, in their nations," and Genesis 11 describes the
divine intervention to scatter them, the question is how this story of the dispersion is compatible with the Table. They appear to be reversed chronologically.

Most modern scholars follow the critical view that Genesis 11 is independent of the ethnographic Table and is fundamentally irreconcilable with it. However, this is not seen as a major obstacle, for as von Rad states, "The chapters must be read together because they are intentionally placed next to each other in spite of their antagonism." So while critical scholars are bothered by the antagonisms, they recognize that the two chapters are complementary in referring to the same scattering.

The Table of Nations gives absolutely no explanation for the scattering, but "that the author was intending right along to treat of the confusion of tongues appears from 10:25." There it is stated that in the days of Peleg ("Division") was the earth divided. Writers have explained this division as some sort of tribal split, or some piece of trivia about conditions at the time, such as; for example, irrigation ditches. The word גל is often used for trenches and irrigation ditches, but the implication of the Table is toward universal events. It is worth noting that the root word occurs in Psalm 55:9 (Eng., 10) for a moral division: "Destroy, 0 LORD, and divide גל their tongues" (author's translation here and throughout the article). The prayer is that God would break apart their counsel into contending factions, an end that is comparable to the story of the division of the nations. So the point of contact appears to be the birth of Peleg (and thus his naming) in Genesis 10. At that point the incident of chapter 11 would have happened, causing the people to spread out into the earth until they settled in their tribes as described in chapter 10. Chapter 11 is the cause; chapter 10 is the effect.

The passages are arranged in a manner consistent with Genesis. The broad survey is given first; the narrowing and selection and/or explanation are given afterward. The order is thematic and not chronological. The choice of this reversed order is a stroke of genius. Jacob stated it well: "The placement of chapter 10 before this one is a special refinement. The absurdity of the undertaking becomes obvious if we know the numerical nations into which mankind should grow."  

THE PURPOSE OF THE DISPERSION NARRATIVE

It should be clear by now that the story of the dispersion is a sequel to the Table of Nations and is designed to explain how the
nations speak different languages in spite of their common origin and how they found their way to the farthest corners of the earth. The major theme of the passage is the dispersion of the nations because of their rebellious pride and apostasy in uniting at Babel. But the story is more than an explanation of the scattering; it is an explanation of the problems due to the existence of nations.

It was at Babel--that city founded by Nimrod, a descendant of Ham through Cush; that city known for its pride and vanity; that seat of rebellion toward the true God and pagan worship of the false gods--that Yahweh turned ingenuity and ambition into chaos and confusion so that the thing the people feared most came on them and that their desire to be men of renown was suddenly turned against them. For the Israelite nation the lesson was clear: If she was to survive as a nation, she must obey God's will, for the nation that bristles with pride and refuses to obey will be scattered. Thus the account of the scattering at Babel has a theological significance for God's people.

**Exegesis of the Passage**

**PROLOGUE (11:1)**

The first verse informs the reader that the entire race had a common language, thus showing that this beginning is parallel to 10:1. Knowing the previous arrangement of the scattered nations in chapter 10, Jacob explains that a tone of irony is already sounded in this verse.

The whole earth (= the inhabitants) had one "lip" (הָלֶשֶׁת to indicate speech) and one vocabulary (כָּל הָרֶפֶעַ to indicate the content of what was said). The point of this prologue is clear: The entire race was united by a common language.

**MAN'S PROCEDURE (11:2-4)**

**Settlement (11:2).** The narrative records that the human family migrated "off east" (שֶׁם) and settled in the region of ancient Babylon. The verb used to describe their journey (בָּא) carries the sense of bedouins moving tents by stages. This wandering continued in an easterly direction from Armenia until they settled (בָּא) in Shinar where they found a plain. This "valley of the world," as the Talmud calls it, became the designated place for the nomads-turned-settlers.

**Resolution (11:3-4).** The resolve of the race comes in two stages: in verse 3 they made bricks, and in verse 4, motivated by
their initial success, they moved to a grander scale by building a city with a tower. Bush follows Josephus in designating Nimrod as the leader of this founding of Babylon.\textsuperscript{52}

In their zeal for societal development, alliance, and fame, and with all the optimism of a beginning people, they began to organize their brickmaking. They were an ingenious lot, for they lacked the proper stone and clay and had to make do with makeshift materials.\textsuperscript{53} The writer's attitude toward this comes across in an appropriate pun: they had no clay (מַעַל) but they used asphalt (רָמַע). Jacob suggests the effect of this assonance sounds like a child's play song.\textsuperscript{54}

Met by initial success they advanced to a greater resolution: "Come, let us build. . . ." Couched in the same grammatical construction as the preceding resolve, their words display that they would use the materials made to make a city "with a tower."

The circumstantial clause draws the reader's attention to the tower. Once built, this tower would provide the pattern for fortresses and acropolises for others.\textsuperscript{55} Building it with its top in the heavens may reflect the bold spirit of the workers, even though it is hyperbolic language used to express security (cf. Deut. 1:28).

The purpose of their building venture was fame. They wished to find security by arrogantly making a name--a desire that is satirized in verse 9. But their desire to be renowned was betrayed by their fear of the oblivion of dispersion. Richardson observes this motivation.

The hatred of anonymity drives men to heroic feats of valour or long hours of drudgery; or it urges them to spectacular acts of shame or of unscrupulous self-preferment. In the word forms it attempts to give the honour and the glory to themselves which properly belongs to the name of God.\textsuperscript{56}

Thus the basic characteristics of culture are seen here: underlying anxiety (the fear of being separated and disconnected) and the desire for fame (a sense of security in a powerful reputation).\textsuperscript{57}

**THE INTERVENTION OF YAHWEH (11:5-8)**\textsuperscript{58}

*The investigation (11:5-6).* The second half of the passage reflects the first, beginning with Yahweh's investigation of the city and the tower which the humans had begun to build. The description, written so anthropomorphically, describes
Yahweh's close interest and participation in the affairs of man. He did not need to come down to look at their work (in fact His coming down implies prior knowledge). Procksch clarified this by pointing out that "Yahweh must draw near, not because he is near-sighted, but because he dwells at such tremendous height and their work is so tiny. God's movement must therefore be understood as a remarkable satire on man's doing." Or in the words of Cassuto one could say that no matter how high they towered, Yahweh still had to descend to see it. Yahweh's coming down does not alone strike this note of satire. The parallel construction of the cohortatives (11:7) reflects their plans made earlier. The point to be made is clear: The tower that was to reach the heavens fell far short.

The purpose of His coming down was "to see" the work. This is the second anthropomorphic expression in the line and announces that He will give the city a close investigation. The narrative is filled with condescension. In referring to them as בְּנֵי אָדָם ("sons of the earth"), he shows them to be earthlings. This strikes at the heart of the Babylonian literature which credited the work to the Anunnaki gods. The work, according to Genesis, was terrestrial, not celestial.

Verse 6 records the results of that investigation: "And Yahweh said, 'If as one people all having one language they have begun to act this way, now nothing that they propose to do will be out of their reach.'" The similarity of style and wording to Genesis 3:22 is most striking. The potential for calamity is dangerous to the race, and God will prevent it. The verb לַעֲלֹה is used here; the beginnings of man are commonly counterproductive. They will nullify the purposes of God in favor of their own purposes which are within reach. They will be at liberty for every extravagance if they can think only of their own confederation.

The resolution (11:7). Continuing to speak, Yahweh says, "Come, let Us go down and confound their language so that they cannot understand one another."

The internal difficulty concerns the relationship of the word וַיְלַעֲלֻהוּ ("let Us go down") with וַיָּלָם ("But [Yahweh] came down") of verse 5. The critical approach is to divide the two elements into strata, but that is not a satisfactory solution. Dillmann simply saw a return to heaven first, then a reflection (comparing 3:22), and then the coming in judgment. This may be the simplest way of understanding it. Cassuto takes והלך והקריב, "and He said, "as an explanatory connection of contemporaneous actions: "But
Yahweh came down ... thinking רָאָת אִישׁוֹ (literally, ‘saying’) ... they are one ... let us go down....

The second verb describes the actual purpose: "let Us confound." It was this confusion [לְבַע] that led to the diversity of their understanding and thus to their dispersion. Bush explains how this would come about.

This was to cause a dispersion of the multitudes congregated at Babylon; an end which did not require for its accomplishment the instantaneous formation of new languages, but simply such a confusion in the utterance of the old, as should naturally lead to misapprehension, discord and division. The dialectic discrepancies, however, thus originating, though perhaps not very great at first, would become gradually more and more marked, as men became more widely separated from each other, and by the influence of climate, laws, customs, religion, and various other causes, till they finally issued in substantially different languages.

Once the understanding of one another was confounded, the division would be effected.

The effect (11:8). "So Yahweh scattered them from there across the face of the whole earth, and they ceased building the city." Their greatest fear (v. 4) came on them. The place of unity (מַעָרָה) became the place of dispersion (מָעָרָה). Their view was toward centrality; God moved them universally. The result of this dispersion meant that the city was unfinished as they had planned it. The rebellious race as a unified people did not fulfill their goal.

EPILOGUE (11:9)

In a marvelously clever "etymological" word play, verse 9 announces, "Therefore [that is why] its name is called Babel, because there Yahweh confused the lip [language] of all the earth and scattered them across the face of the whole earth."

The formula נְעַרְיָה with עָרָיָה is quite common as an explanatory inference from a reported event and is used most often with place names. Here it introduces the meaning given by the Israelites for Babylon. The word לְבַע provided a satirical meaning of “confusion” for the proud Babylonians' name. The story shows how this gate of the gods fell far short of expectations, ending in confusion and chaos.

So Yahweh scattered them across the face of the earth. The text need not imply that the confusion was immediately reached nor the scattering instantaneous. The narrator fixed this point from which the division of the peoples and the languages would begin and move ever farther.
Conclusion

Irony is seen in the beginning and the ending of this passage. The group at Babel began as the whole earth (11:1), but now they were spread over the whole earth (11:9). By this the lesson is clarified: God's purpose will be accomplished in spite of the arrogance and defiance of man's own purposes. He brings down the proud, but exalts the faithful.

The significance of this little story is great. It explains to God's people how the nations were scattered abroad. Yet the import goes much deeper. The fact that it was Babylon, the beginning of kingdoms under Nimrod from Cush, adds a rather ominous warning: Great nations cannot defy God and long survive. The new nation of Israel need only survey the many nations around her to perceive that God disperses and curses the rebellious, bringing utter confusion and antagonism among them. If Israel would obey and submit to God's will, then she would be the source of blessing to the world.

Unfortunately, Israel also raised her head in pride and refused to obey the Lord God. Thus she too was scattered across the face of the earth.

Notes

3 Delitzsch explains that the primitive language through this intervention "died the death from which comparative philology is incapable of awakening it" (Franz Delitzsch, A New Commentary on Genesis, trans. Sophia Taylor [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 18991, p. 355).
7 Spoken of in the singular, the "pure lip" must mean the language barriers will be broken down to make one universal tongue. The second idea in the expression means that their speech will be cleansed.
8 The Bible uses this word for both Ethiopia and the Kassite power. What the connection is remains a matter of debate. In this connection, the similarities between Ethiopian and Akkadian are interesting for speculation.

10 Fokkelman diagrams it as follows:

A  כַּלְּכַלִּים שְׁפַתַּם אָמַר (v. 1)

B  שֶׁמָּה (v. 2)

C  אֲרוֹשׁ אַל כַּלְּכַלִּים (v. 3)

D  נָבָה לְעֵבָהֶן לַבְּנֵיהֶם (v. 3)

E  בְּנָהוּ לְתָמַּת (v. 4)

F  נָשׁ כַּלְּכַלִּים (v. 5)

X  עִנָּד יָוָתָה לְאָמַר (v. 5)

F'  אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה כִּי הָאָדָם (v. 5)

E'  מַדִּא אֲחָר תְּמוּנָתוֹ (v. 5)

D'  הַלּוֹבַּל . . . הָאָדָם (v. 7)

C'  לְעֵבָהֶן וּלְעֵבָהֶן (v. 7)

B'  מַשָּׂה (v. 8)

A'  כַּלְּכַלִּים שְׁפַתִּם וְאָמַר (v. 9)

(J. P. Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis [Assen Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1975], p. 22). In verse 1 is the strong statement of one language for the race. In verse 9 Yahweh confused them. In verse 3 they spoke to one another, but in verse 7 they were not able to understand each other. In verses 3 and 4 is the workers' double cohortative, and in verse 7 is Yahweh's cohortative mirroring their words. In verse 4 the people wish a tower in the heavens, and in verse 7 Yahweh comes down from heaven. In verse 4 they desire a name; in verse 9 the name is called Babel. In verse 4 they fear scattering; in verse 8 they are scattered (U. Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham, trans. J. Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1964], pp. 230-34).

11 While some may find such a discussion fanciful or strained, it cannot be ignored. There is in good literature a clear choice of words and a deliberate juxtapositioning of phrases to reflect and enhance the ideas. The style in this section and in much of Genesis 1--11 has been a prime factor in distinguishing this section from the second part in Genesis, namely, chapters 12-50.


13 Fokkelman points out that the fact that one word is the word with a prefix and the other is the root itself in no way destroys the effect of the sound of these letters which are played on six times in the story (Narrative Art in Genesis, pp. 14-15).


15 Hubris on the positive side is pride, megalomania, a wanting to be like God, and an overstepping of one's bounds. On the negative side it is the fear of having to live without safety and existential security, of being lonely and vulnerable. So their hubris leads them to act impiously and brings down God's judgment. It is crime and punishment, both of which are caused by pride that oversteps bounds (Fokkelman, Narrative Art in Genesis, p. 16; see also Donald E. Gowan, When Man Becomes God: Humanism and Hubris in the Old Testament (Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1975)).

16 E. A. Speiser, Genesis, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 75. It is riot to be inferred from this statement that Speiser holds a conservative view of this Scripture.

17 It is necessary to say at the outset that it is not that the writer saw a ziggurat and composed a myth about the origin of languages, and that this myth somehow found its way into the Book of Genesis. Rather, Genesis implies that such towers
had not been built before this and this would be quite unique (Howard F. Vos, *Genesis and Archaeology* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1963], p. 47).


20 Gressmann, *The Tower of Babel*, pp. 15-19. Gressmann thought the tower structure was related to their understanding of the world with God at the pinnacle, the door of heaven, and man on the slopes of the artificial mountain. The entire world rested on the breast of the underworld. Thus it was fitting for this to be included in primeval events. Most would view it as an artificial high place of worship erected on the plain.

21 Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, p. 228. Cassuto is (unnecessarily) assuming that the traditions demand a city and a tower in ruins. The judgment passage, however, says absolutely nothing of that at all. The most that is said is that this project was not completed.

22 E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 75. This argumentation is used here simply to show the difficulty in ascribing the identification to E-temen-anki even if one were to take the late date of the composition in accordance with a J document.

23 E. A. Speiser, "Word Plays on the Creation Epic's Version of the Founding of Babylon," *Orientalia*, n.s. 25 (1956):317-18. Speiser shows that there is a chronological problem with the date of J and E-temen-anki, but then he adds in his argumentation that other temples also had the -anki element in the name, such as Borsippa's which was E-ur-me-imin-anki, "house of the seven preceptors of heaven and earth," so that we are not limited to one reference that first fits the idea with -anki. His point is that the source was literary and not monumental (architectural).

24 James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 60. Speiser, who translated the Akkadian myths and epics for Pritchard's work, states at the outset that the majority of the scholars would assign Enuma Elish to the Old Babylonian period on internal evidence alone. Unger explains that it was composed in the days of Hammurabi in the mold of political and religious propaganda to show the preeminence of Babylon and supremacy of Marduk. "However, the poem itself, though one of the literary masterpieces of the Babylonian Semites, goes back to much earlier times. It is clearly based upon the earlier traditions of the Sumerians, the non-Semitic precursors of the Babylonian Semites in lower Babylonia" (Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 27).

25 Speiser, "Word Plays," p. 319. He compares this to other and similar phrases to show that they did it frequently.


27 The making of the first brick was a trial ordeal before the gods and was to be accomplished by the king. The ceremony of the bricks was to be a sign that the service was offered to the gods (Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948], pp. 272-74).

28 *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "Bbhel," by H. Ringgren, 1:467. Ringgren suggests that the metropolis with so many peoples (= lan-
guages) was natural for such an account of the dispersion.


30 It seems clear that the story did not originate in Babylon. There is no exact correspondence, but that is to be expected since it is a travesty on Babel. Gressmann thought the story came from Babylon to the Assyrians and was brought to the Israelites by the Arameans, but that is unlikely (Gressmann, *The Tower of Babel*, p. 5). There were stories of the glories of Babylon with all the towers and cult mountains even in Palestine (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John Marks [London: SCM Press, 1972], p. 146). Later it would be recorded by the classical writers: Diodorus 2.7; Herodotus 1.178; Strabo 16.1.5; and Pliny 6.121.

31 Vos, *Genesis and Archaeology*, p. 47.


33 Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, pp. 229-30. Cassuto has attempted to reconstruct the type of satirical material behind the passage by relating the passage to the time when Babylon was sacked by the Hittites. The idea of the message as a polemic (against what the Israelites would have known Babylon claimed for herself as opposed to the truth) is an accurate presentation of the message, but Cassuto does not treat the text with precision. In the first place, Genesis presents it as a universal judgment on the race collected in Shinar and not one group of people scattered by the Hittites. True, Cassuto is looking for some occasion and the Hittite invasion is a happy one for him. However, that is unwarranted. Second, there is no hint whatsoever that the city and the tower were reduced to rubble. They were just not completed. Third, the text is not saying that all the languages could be spoken there but that one was once in the beginning and God confounded it. Cassuto's attempt to take a naturalistic explanation to the occasion for the text weakens it.


35 Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 111.

36 Ryle observed that "we are led to suspect that the mystery of the origin of distinct languages belongs to the dim obscurity of the infancy of the human race, an infinitely remote and prehistoric age" (Herbert E. Ryle, *The Book of Genesis* [Cambridge: University Press, 1914], p. 144).

37 Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 143.


39 John A. Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 224. Skinner was quick to add that the inconsistency is not such that would hinder the collector of traditions from putting the two in historical sequence.


43 This is suggested by Driver who follows Sayce in the suggestion (S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* [London: Methuen & Co., 1913], p. 130).

44 Josephus referred the dispersion to the time of Peleg and related the whole story to the efforts of Nimrod (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.146, and *Apion* 1.19). Most traditional scholars have followed this line.

45 According to Genesis 11:10, 12, 14, and 16 Peleg was in the fifth generation after the Flood. At this time, according to Keil, there could have been 30,000 people on the earth. That may be a bit generous, but even a conservative estima-

46 For example, Genesis 37 records the sale of Joseph into Egypt. The story line of Genesis 38 traces the family of Judah into further generations. Chapter 39, however, traces the account of Joseph from his sale into Egypt. The same could be posited for chapter 1 (the total survey of creation) and chapter 2 (the selective discussion of the main elements of the creation, viz., man and woman). The princes of Edom (chap. 36) are also discussed in some development before the narration returns to the story.


48 The concept of dispersion or scattering of peoples was an ancient one. Kitchen deals with the idea of exile and scattering in the ancient literature to show that the concept was real (fearfully real) for Israel (Kenneth A. Kitchen, "Ancient Orient, 'Deuteronomism,' and the Old Testament," in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne [Waco, TX: Word Books, 1970], pp. 1-24).

49 Cassuto entitles the first half of the narrative, "Many Are the Plans in the Mind of Man" (Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, p. 238).

50 Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, p. 79.

51 Isaiah 19:18 describes those who speak the language of Canaan; Isaiah 33:19 portrays the foreigners with deep speech and stammering tongue; Ezekiel 3:5 describes the people as deep of lip (= strange speech) and heavy of tongue (= hard language). The lip, mouth, or tongue were frequently employed in metonomy to represent the speech or the language.


53 Making bricks to replace the unavailable stones would further feed the pride of the people who would rise above their difficulties. These bricks (libittu) are mud bricks (*Chicago Assyrian Dictionary*, s.v. "libittu").

54 Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, p. 77.

55 Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 146. Several examples of this are seen in Judges 8:9; 9:46; 2 Chronicles 14:6; and Isaiah 2:15.


58 Cassuto called this section, "It Is the Purpose of the Lord That Will Be Established" (*From Noah to Abraham*, p. 244).

59 Midrash Pirke of R. Eliezer (c. 14) records ten comings down of the Lord: Paradise, Babel, Sodom, the Bush, Sinai, twice at the Rock, twice at the Tabernacle, and once in the last day. The coming down was viewed as Yahweh's revealing of Himself. It is seen in Scripture as the divine intervention breaking through the course of events (Exod. 19:20; 34:5; Num. 11:25; 12:5); however, one should also see Exodus 3:8 and Numbers 11:7 (for deliverance and blessing).


61 Consequently, this writer takes the waw antithetically: "But Yahweh came down" - in contrast to their efforts to ascend.

62 Throughout these verses the divine mood is not anger for depravity but rather laughter at foolishness (Jacob, *The First Book of the Bible*, p. 79). Kidner observed that the note of foreboding marks a father's concern and not a rival's. He shows that it is like Christ's words in Luke 23:31, "If they do these things in a green tree . . . " (Kidner, *Genesis*, p. 110). It is better to have division than to have collective apostasy in unity and peace.

63 Compare Nimrod's beginning with kingdoms and Noah's beginning with viniculture.
64 The two-recension theory bypasses the issue. It still remains a surprise that a "redactor" would leave such an incongruity unrevised (Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham, p. 246).

65 Dillmann, Genesis, p. 393.

66 He offers as examples for this construction Genesis 26:22 ("thinking, for the LORD now...") and Exodus 2:10 ("she named...reflecting." (Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham, p. 246).


68 Bush, Notes on the Book of Genesis, p. 179.

69 See Exodus 1:12 and 1:10 for a similar situation. The Egyptians were afraid Israel would multiply, but the more they attempted to stop it, the more they multiplied.


71 The name in the Achaemenid literature came to mean "the gate of God" (Bab-ill), or perhaps "the gate of the gods." In Persian it is Babirus. In Sumerian it is KA.DINGIR.K(A). The idea that Babylon was one of the oldest cities (Gen. 10:10) was current in Babylon itself, for the name is believed to have been proto-Euphratian and part of the heritage of the earliest pre-Sumerian or Semitic etymology.

The Encyclopedia Judaica (s.v. "Babylon," p. 31) mentions this as the view of B. Landsberger and refers the reader to Die Serie ana ittisu (1937) for the discussion. The first mention of Babylon in cuneiform texts is from the period of the Third Dynasty of Ur when it was a provincial government.

Bush illustrated how the connotative meaning carried by saying that there can be no doubt that the Latin words balbus ("stammerer") and balbutio ("stammering") derive their origin from Hebrew יֵבֶשׁ, or, by the doubling of the first radical, balbel, bilbel, from which latter form of the word comes -n, closely related to the English and German babble. The Greek (3aQ(3aQ6g (by commutation of liquids for balbalos), "barbarian," primarily signifying a person of rude or outlandish pronunciation, is doubtlessly referring to the same root (Bush, Notes on Genesis, 1:178). The Oxford English Dictionary (s.v. "babble"), however, says of babble that "in none [of these languages] can its history be carried far back; as yet it is known in English as early as anywhere else.... No direct connexion with Babel can be traced; though association with that may have affected the senses." 72 Figart suggests that this point would be the logical place for the development of races to begin. The text of Genesis 11:6 makes a point of the unity of the race ("one people"), but according to Genesis 10 they are dispersed according to families, nations, tongues, and lands. He says, "Again, if God intervened and miraculously changed man's looks, as well as his language, then there is no need to account for these changes through isolation, environment, or culture. This is not to dismiss the known effects of these three factors; we have already shown some possible changes. Yet, if God did the initial changing of genetic structure, then those other factors were only modifying means within the limits set by God. As a matter of fact, this is all they could be in any interpretation" (Thomas O. Figart, A Biblical Perspective on the Race Problem [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973], p. 45). Figart then proceeds to mention places in Scripture where God does intervene and change the structure of mankind (the Fall and the Rapture). He concludes that the silence of the Table concerning Negroid and Mongoloid peoples is to be related to the purpose of the Table, that is, the relationship of Israel to her neighbors (p. 49).
Studies in the Book of Genesis

Part 3:

The Table of Nations in
Genesis 10--Its Content

Allen P. Ross

The previous article in this series dealt with the structure of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10.¹ The deliberate design in its construction, symmetry, and unity were examined in an effort to understand its purpose as a דִּבְרֵי. But in addition to the evidence from its structure, there is a wealth of information about the nations of the world that is important for the complete understanding of this chapter within the message of Genesis.

The Analysis of the Passage

The heading of the chapter (Gen. 10:1) declares that this is the record of the particulars of what became of Shem, Ham, and Japheth after the Flood. The verse serves not only as a heading for the Table, but also as a literary connection back to Genesis 9:18 and 28. It is to be read with the oracle of Noah in mind!

THE SONS OF JAPHETH (10:2-5)

In the listing of Noah's sons, Japheth usually comes last. But here he is first because the tribes descended from Japheth were spread across the remote lands of the north and therefore were less involved in Israel's history.

The connection of Japheth and Ἰαπέτος of the Greek tradition is striking.² In both Greek and Hebrew traditions, then, Ἰαπέτος was the ancestor of the Greeks. Genesis, however, shows him to be fully human.³ He is simply the ancestor of many north-
ern tribes who were non-Semitic in physiognomy, language, and custom.\textsuperscript{4}

The sons of Japheth are seven. Gomer, mentioned also in Ezekiel 38:6, represents the Cimmerians, thought to be of the same stock as the Scythians.\textsuperscript{5} Magog is also mentioned in Ezekiel (38:2 and 39:6) as the land of Gog, the region between Armenia and Cappadocia; the name seems to represent the Scythian hordes southeast of the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{6} Madia (\textit{\textsuperscript{y}dA}) is the normal Hebrew word for the Medes (Isa. 13:17) or Media (2 Kings 17:6), east of Assyria and southwest of the Caspian Sea. Even though the Median Empire was not formed until the seventh century, this does not mean that such a people were not known earlier as a group in the Lake Van area. The text of Shalmaneser III refers to them in a way that implies they were older inhabitants.

Javan is the general word for the Hellenic race, used throughout the Old Testament for the Ionians who dwelt in western Asia Minor.\textsuperscript{7}

Tubal and Meshech are always found together in the Bible; they represent northern military states (Ezek. 27:13; 32:26; 38:2; 39:1; and Isa. 66:19). Tubal is equivalent to Tibareni in Pontus; and Meshech is located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia.\textsuperscript{8} Their range was from eastern Asia Minor to the Black Sea.

Tiras has been identified in classical writings as the Thracians living in the area of the river Tiras.\textsuperscript{9} It is now popular to identify them as the Pelasgian pirates of the Aegean coasts mentioned in Merneptah's list of seafaring peoples.\textsuperscript{10}

From these seven, seven more were derived. From Gomer came Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. Ashkenaz appears to represent a northern branch of Indo-Germanic tribes related to the Scythians.\textsuperscript{11} Riphath may bear a remote resemblance to the name of the river Rhebas near the Bosphorous, or the Riphaean mountains to the west. Josephus suggested these were the Paphlagonians.\textsuperscript{12} Togarmah seems to represent the extreme north in Ezekiel 27:14 and 38:6.\textsuperscript{13}

From Javan came four "sons"--two geographical names and two tribal names--all of which are kin to the Greeks. Elishah is to be identified with the place Alashiyah on the island of Cyprus.\textsuperscript{14} Tarshish is the name of a distant coast reached only by sea (Isa. 66:19; Jer. 10:9; Ezek. 27:12). It has been identified with several places on the southern coasts of Asia Minor, places founded by Phoenician shippers.\textsuperscript{15} Kittim is preserved in the
name of Kition (or Kettion), also on the island of Cyprus,\textsuperscript{16} this plural noun refers to the people who inhabited that island, as well as other islands east of Rhodes.

Dodanim, the last of the four from Javan, is difficult to identify because of a textual problem. The word, spelled "Rodanim" in 1 Chronicles 1:7, would represent the inhabitants of Rhodes. But the Qere at that passage suggests the spelling "Dodanim." Moreover, Ezekiel lists a Dedan among northern merchants (27:15). Neiman suggests they are the Dodanoi, the people of Dodona, the most ancient oracle in Greece.\textsuperscript{17}

These descendants of Japheth may be broadly summarized as Cimmerians, Scythians, Medes, Hellenes, and Thracians. From the fourteen names given, the text adds that from these the isles of the nations were divided in lands, by tongues, after families, in nations. They dwell in remote lands and distant isles.

It should be noted in passing that these names occur frequently in prophetic writings. In Genesis the great military hordes and western merchants are rather remote. They do not come into play, so far as the destiny of Israel in the land is concerned, until much later. Genesis knows something about them, but they are far beyond the movements of the patriarchs. They too will eventually subjugate the inhabitants of the land.

THE SONS OF HAM (10:6-20)

More attention is given to the line of Ham than to that of Japheth or Shem. Ham's line has four branches: Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. All four are probably place names for Nubia-Egypt, Upper and Lower Egypt, Libya, and Phoenicia-Palestine respectively. In addition, the descendants of these four are both places and tribes.

Ham is the ancestor of all these people from Phoenicia to Africa. The etymology of the word Ham is disputed,\textsuperscript{18} but it is used to depict countries in close proximity to Egypt.

Cush is the "eldest son" according to the plan of the Table. In antiquity this was an independent kingdom on the southern flank of Egypt; and especially during the reign of Kamose it served as the backbone of the Egyptian army, helping to expel the Asiatics (Hyksos).\textsuperscript{19} So the list begins in the far south with the African tribes known to the Greeks as Ethiopians.

Mizraim lies to the north of Cush. The word occurs almost ninety times in the Old Testament for Egypt.
Put is used six times in the Bible, usually representing a warlike people used as mercenaries in the Egyptian armies (e.g., Ezek. 27:10). Some connect Put with Somaliland, known as Punt (pwn.t).\textsuperscript{20} But the identification of Put with Punt is phonetically problematic.\textsuperscript{21} Thus the identification with Libya seems to have more support although not by similarity of names.\textsuperscript{22}

The last of the four is Canaan, which normally represents the land of Palestine and Phoenicia with its kaleidoscopic mixture of races, a natural result for a country which is the "bridge" of continents.\textsuperscript{23} The name Canaan has been connected with various etymologies including the Hurrian \textit{kinahhu}, a reddish-purple shellfish dye.\textsuperscript{24} References from antiquity show the name is geographical. Possibly it may have been used of the merchant class in early commercial activities.\textsuperscript{26} Exclusive to the Old Testament is the use of the term for inhabitants of the area in a general sense. It later came to mean the pre-Israelite population without distinction of race or social status. These many tribes are in some way related to Canaan, and thus are called Canaanites.

The lines of three of these are now carried further in the expanding list. First are listed five sons of Cush, all of whom show expansion in Arabia.\textsuperscript{27} Seba is usually identified with Upper Egypt on the Nile, with the ancient city of Meroe between Berber and Khartoum. Havilah, which means "sand-land," could fit several areas according to its usage: Ishmaelite Arab territory (Gen. 25:18), eastern Arabia on the Persian Gulf (Gen. 10:29), the Ethiopian coast (Gen. 10:7), or even India as an extension of the east (Gen. 2:11). The fact that Havilah is mentioned under both Shem and Ham shows mixing of the races: both Shemites and Hamites lived there.

Sabtah is near the western shore of the Persian Gulf. It has to been identified as Shabwat, ancient Hadhramaut.\textsuperscript{28} Raamah appears to have been in southwest Arabia; Sabteca is possibly to be identified with Samudake, east toward the Persian Gulf.

So these five tribal regions in the lower sections of Arabia were populated with descendants from Ham. Of them, Raamah produced two other tribes: Sheba and Dedan. Sheba is the name of the ancient kingdom in southwest Arabia whose metropolis is Marib, forty-five miles east of Sen'a of Yemen.\textsuperscript{29} Dedan is associated with modern 'Ula in northern Arabia, an important trading center from antiquity, bordering on Edom (Ezek. 25:13; 27:20).

Some of the people of Sheba and Dedan traced their ancestry
back through the Cushite Raamah; others traced their ancestry to Joktan in the line of Shem (10:29).

Inserted in the Table is the story of Nimrod (Gen. 10:8-12). This is the first "begot" section and forms a major stylistic break from the tribal and territory names preceding it. The verse need not be interpreted to say that Nimrod was the actual son of Cush, but that is possible. Many attempts have been made to identify him, but the most plausible is the reflection of the name in Ninurta, the god of hunting and war.30

Because his name has been connected with the root רבל ("to rebel"), and because of the statements made about him, he seems to represent tyrannical power. Genesis 10:9 describes him as a mighty hunter,31 a term often used for the hunting of men, and the founder of the colossal powers of the east, which suggests he is not just someone known for his derring-do.

Genesis 10:10 lists these cities as the "beginning" of his kingdom: Babel, Erech, and Accad (and Calneh in the land of Shinar). Since Babel, the well-known city of Babylon, is listed first, it is not surprising to see it as the subject of the next narrative (11:1-9), where it is described as the first gathering point of the race.

Erech is the Akkadian Uruk, to be identified with ancient Warka, the city of heroes like Gilgamesh.32 It is one hundred miles southeast of Babylon. Accad is another ancient city, the Agade of Sargon, north of Babylon on the Euphrates. It declined sharply in importance about 2000 B.C.

Calneh is nowhere attested in cuneiform. While some have tried to find a city so named in the great Shinar region, many have followed Albright and translated it "and all of them."33

The second part of the Nimrod digression lists the cities he colonized (Gen. 10:11-12). Nimrod went out to Assyria34 and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, Calah, and Resen. Nineveh is the most famous city of Assyria (just as Babel was for the other region). Rehoboth-Ir could be explaining Nineveh, but probably is the suburb of Rebit Nina. Calah is Kalhu, modern Nimrud situated twenty miles south. Resen may be Risnu, between the other cities. It seems that all these cities were close enough together to be one great metropolis.

Nimrod's exploits extended over two geographical areas, Shinar and Assyria, and included seven cities. All these are part of the Hamitic line.35
After this מָצָא section, another follows: Mizraim developed into tribes. From the Egyptians sprang the Ludim, a group of African tribes west of the Delta; the Anamim, in the vicinity of Cyrene; the Lehabin, the Libyans on the north African shore (Nah. 3:9 and Dan. 11:43); the Naphtuhim, the people of the Delta (Lower Egypt); the Pathrusim, the people of Upper Egypt; the Casluhim, the people who dwelt east of the Delta between Egypt and Canaan; and the Caphtorim, the Cretans.

The clause "from whence come the Philistines" is problematic because of its position in the text. Scripture connects the origin of the Philistines with Caphtor (Amos 9:7; Deut. 2:23; Jer. 47:4), but the Caphtorim, the Cretans, come after this clause. While some have suggested rearranging the clauses, it may not be necessary. The clause in the Table suggests migration and not lineage. Amos has the Philistines from Caphtor in the same sense that Israel was from Egypt—migration and not origination. The difficulty may be solved by looking at their origin and their migration from the Aegean bases through Caphtor into the Delta and finally into Palestine.

But part of the problem is the general assumption that this name is anachronistic since all sources so far attest that the Philistines in the strict sense date from around 1200 B.C. But the Philistines of Genesis are quite different from those of later periods. Grintz concluded that they were different enough to posit successive migrations of different tribes. He concluded there were three migrations: the first was the migration of Pelasgo-Philistine tribes from Casluhim (Genesis and Exodus), the second was the movement of the Philistines from Caphtor to Gaza, and the third was the further movement of the Pelasgo-Philistines in the period of Rameses III. Therefore the tribes from Mizraim are seven, and out of one come the Philistines. If this be so, then the powerful Egyptian influence carried far north into the Aegean.

The final Hamite line to be traced is that of the sons of Canaan (Gen. 10:15-19). This line focuses on the peoples living in the land promised to Israel. In fact, the section closes with the territorial boundaries specifically given.

Once again a מָצָא section is inserted to introduce the cities and tribes. The first-begotten is Sidon, the predominant Phoenician city. This suggests that the founder gave his name to the city. Heth, the Hittites in the Old Testament, is problematic here under Canaan. The text is listing a mixed population in Canaan,
and so the term is justified if it describes Hittites who swept south in vast ethnic movements. A series of tribes are mentioned beginning with the Jebusites. The Jebusites dwelt in Jebus (Jerusalem) and were part of the early stock of Canaanite tribes. The Amorites pose another problem. The term can refer to a mixed population in the land in general. It does not fit the description of the western Semites whose center was in Mari. These are smaller ethnic groups that inhabited the mountains around Jordan.

Very little is known about the Girgashites and the Hivites. They are mentioned only in the cliche lists for Canaanites in Edom, Shechem, and Gibeon. Possibly terms like "Hivite" and "Hittite" are used pejoratively and ideologically, but as North says, "we cannot see that all organic link of origin with those foreign populaces is excluded."

The rest of the list includes the Arkites, those living in Lebanon north of Sidon; the Sinites near 'Arqa; the Arvadites, the most northerly of Phoenician cities north of the river El Kebir; the Zemarites, those living in the town of Sumra (modern) north of 'Arqa; and the Hamathites, the inhabitants of Hamath on the Orontes. Hamath, it may be noted, is the central point of the northern boundary of the land.

It is clear that the writer wished to emphasize the names of the Canaanites who dwelt in the land promised to Israel because he mentions the familiar boundary notices in all directions, from the cities of the plain to Gerar to the northern extremities. Such an emphasis coming after the account of the curse of Canaan and written for a people who were to dispossess these Canaanites would have great impact.

THE SONS OF SHEM (10:21-31)

A new heading lists the relationship of Shem to Japheth (the brother) and Eber (the descendant)--the former speaking of an alliance based on Genesis 9 and the latter speaking of the connection in the line to the Hebrews.

The first name in the list is Elam. Descendants of Shem early penetrated the highlands east of Babylon even though they were later not the dominant racial or linguistic group. Assyur, Shem's second son, is the name for the region and people of Assyria. Arpachshad, the third name, is the ancestor of the Hebrews. Arpachshad's meaning and location have caused considerable speculation, but he can only be generally listed as resid-
ing northeast of Nineveh. Lud is probably the Ludbu of the Assyrians, situated on the Tigris. Aram is the name of the Aramean tribes of antiquity living in the steppes of Mesopotamia. The descendants from Aram--Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash--are not well known. They seem to be located in the north between Armenia and Mesopotamia.

The passage then refers to the developing line from Arpachshad, using the הַלֵּא form through Shelah to Eber. One of Eber's sons is Peleg, in whose days the earth was divided (probably referring to the division of nations at Babel). Once the Table mentions Peleg, it traces his line no further. Rather, it lists the many tribes from Joktan, using the הַלֵּא formula again.

The first tribe was Almodad, referring to a South Arabian people. The second is Sheleph, another tribe of the southern Arabian peninsula. Hazarmaveth, the third, is identified with the exporter of myrrh known as Hadramaut in Southern Arabia. Jerah and Hadoram are difficult, but are assumed to be in the same vicinity. Uzal is the designation of San'a, the old capital of Yemen. Diklah, the Arabic name for "date-palm," may refer to an oasis. Obal seems to be 'Abil, a term used for several localities in Yemen. Abimael is taken to be a genuine Sabaean formation, with the ma being emphatic ("my father, verily, he is God").

Sheba was also listed under Ham; the name here attests to the fact that Joktanites lived there as well. Ophir and Havilah, also listed under Ham, were southern Arabian territories rich in gold. Jobab is assumed to be identical to Yuhaybib in South Arabia.

These thirteen descendants of Joktan represent settled Arabian tribes in the peninsula. Israel would find ancient blood ties with the Joktanites of the desert of Arabia, as well as her relatives to the east.

The final verse of the chapter forms the colophon-type ending of the Table. All families came from the sons of Noah, but these families listed here have significant developments (הַלֵּא) as far as Israel's interests are concerned.

**The Meaning of the Passage**

Most commentators observe that the Table demonstrates the unity of the human race. Coming from the sons of Noah, the survivors of the Flood were fruitful and multiplied.
But the passage is far more complex than that. The Table is a select list of names, and that selection must serve a purpose. The names are names of individuals, cities, tribes, and nations arranged according to the genealogical connections of the ancestors or founders. The pattern of the Table is segmented rather than linear; it is designed to show blood ties, treaties, alliances and other connections between existing peoples.

That the promised land is central to the Table can be seen from the arrangement of the descendants. The Japhethites are spread from east to west across the northern frontier; the Hamites surround the land from south to west; and the Shemites are traced from the eastern to the southern borders of the land. Moreover, the preoccupation with the Canaanites in the land of promise shows the concern of the writer to fit the Table to the message of the book: the fulfillment of God's promise to bless Israel as a nation in that land, and to bless those nations that bless her, and curse those who are antagonistic to her.

The Table then deliberately selected these tribes and traced their development. This was done by expanding (in the "begot" sections) important elements found in the basic genealogy (the "sons of" structure). From the heading ("particulars") it is clear that the passage was designed to do just this. The purpose of this in Genesis is to trace what became of Noah's descendants, but the particular items included in this genealogy were selected because of their significance for Israel.

The of the moves in four directions (in each of the "begot" sections). Through these four sections the genealogy focuses on the dominant kingdoms of Assyria and Shinar, the powerful Egyptian tribes, the Canaanite tribes in their lands, and the Arabian tribes of the line of Shem. These are peoples with whom the new nation of Israel would have dealings in accord with the oracle of Noah in Genesis 9.

According to Genesis, the new nation of Israel was to be blessed as God's people in the land of Canaan. God's plan to bless Israel involved the movement, displacement, and subjugation of other peoples. The oracle of Noah in Genesis 9 anticipated the blessing for Shem, along with Japheth, and the cursing of Canaan, a son of Ham. This Table in Genesis 10 gives direction to that oracle. It presents the lines of Shem and Japheth as pure tribal groups around the promised land; it also presents the old block of Hamites, especially the mixed races in the land of Canaan, as the predominant powers on the earth. The "begot" sections
identify these tribes for Israel and signify their relationship to the blessing or cursing.

Notes
5 They are listed in Assyrian as *Gimirraya*, and in Greek as *Kimmerioi* (*Odyssey* 11. 14 and *Herodotus* 1. 15, 103; 4. 1-142). Speiser identifies them with Cymry as in the Welsh (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964], p. 63).
7 They are called *Yamanai* in Sargon's texts, *Ym'n* in the fourteenth century Ras Shamra tablets, and *Y*-u'-n-(n)a in Egyptian referring to the Sea Peoples. For a discussion of the identification of Javan with the twelve settlements in western Asia Minor, see Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1953), p. 190.
8 Wiseman says they are the same as the Hittite *Tipal* and *Tibar* district which Naram Sin traversed around 2200 B.C. (Wiseman, "Genesis 10: Some Archaeological Considerations," *Syria* 13 (1932):28-49; 1 Chronicles 1:6 has a'1 for the '1. Since so little is known of the name, it is impossible to argue the case.
9 *Thucydides* 4. 109; *Herodotus* 1. 57, 59.
10 The connection with the Etruscans, suggested by Dhorme, is supported by Wiseman. It would be comparable to the classical Turks.
12 A textual problem makes the identification difficult; 1 Chronicles 1:6 has a'1 for the '1. Since so little is known of the name, it is impossible to argue the case.
13 Hittite writings of Marsilius II (fourteenth century B. C.) list a district known as Tagarma north of the road from Haran to Carchemish (Cassuto, *From Noah to Abraham*, p. 192).
14 The name is listed on Amarna and Hittite lists. Excavations show these people supplied purple to Tyre before being displaced by the Philistines around 1200 B.C. (Y. Lynn Holmes, "The Location of Alashiya," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 91 [1971]:426-29).
History of Phoenician Colonization, Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 83 (1941:14-22). Herodotus had identified it with Spain's Tartassos (Herodotus 1. 163; 4. 152; see also Strabo 3. 151).

16 It is still a designation of the Greeks in later literature (1 Mace. 1:1; 8:5; Babylonian Talmud Ta'anih 5b).


18 Neiman thinks it is related to the Egyptian term for "Black Land," for that title of their land in Bohairic is Khemi; but the Hieroglyphic Egyptian begins with K (Neiman, "The Two Genealogies of Japheth," p. 122).


21 The connection between the two is phonetically problematic, not only because of the "n" in Punt, but also because of the "t" as against the "t" of Punt which is only a feminine termination (J. Simons, "The 'Table of Nations' [Gen. 10] Its General Structure and Meaning," Oudtestamentische Studien 10 [1954]:179).

22 The Greek and Latin versions refer to it as Libya. Josephus says Libya was founded by Phoutes (Antiquities of the Jews 1. 132). Jubilees 9:1 takes it as Libya, and Libyan mercenaries are well known from extra-biblical literature (but Puntians are not) (Simons, "The 'Table of Nations'," p. 180).


26 The Memphis Stele of Amenophis II mentions 640 Canaanites in a social standing (not ethnic); and the Tell El Amarna letters (EA 9, 19) mention ki-na-ha-a-a-u. See Gibson, "Observations on Some Important Ethnic Terms," p. 217.


28 Ibid., p. 42.

29 Cassuto, among others, believed that it had first been northern on the peninsula, and then moved south around the eighth century B.C. (Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham, p. 199).


31 The Septuagint renders Τάγγος τοῦ Ψηλού as "the hunting giant," the Arabic as "the terrible tyrant," and the Syriac as "the warlike giant." Midrash Rabbah 37:2 says he snared people (see also Yoma 10a, and Josephus Antiquities of the Jews 1. 113-14).

32 Wiseman suggests that since Erech is written Uruk or Unuk in Sumerian, it might be the city named after Enoch. Enoch's son was Irad, and he may have founded Eridu (Wiseman, "Genesis 10: Some Archaeological Considerations," p. 20).


34 It is possible to translate it "Asshur went out," but it is probably better to take it the other way since the story is about Nimrod's exploits, and the preceding was only the beginning.

35 Wiseman points out that archaeology shows that the earliest inhabitant
and languages of the region were not Semitic. Before 2600 the civilization is "Sumerian." Moreover there is a direct cultural link between Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt (Wiseman, "Genesis 10: Some Archaeological Considerations," p. 21).

36 Cassuto, From Noah to Abraham, p. 200. Los connects them to Lydian (Asia Minor) mercenaries (F. J. Los, "The Table of Peoples of the Tenth Chapter of Genesis," The Mankind Quarterly 7 [1967]:148).


38 See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, who define it as "southland" and connect it with the Akkadian Paturisi and the Egyptian P-to-rest (A Hebrew and English Lexicon, p. 837). See also "Pathros" in Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 44:1.

39 Leuhold thinks they may have come from Crete, earlier than the Philistines, as part of the swarms of nations mixing with Egyptians (H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953], p. 370).

40 They are identified with Keftiu ("the region beyond"), referring to the Mediterranean in the Egyptian language (Skinner, Genesis, p. 214).


44 Wiseman points out that the Table must go back before the thirteenth century due to the omission of Tyre (Wiseman, "Genesis 10: Some Archaeological Considerations," p. 21).


47 North said the Hivites must represent the Horites or Hurrian element ("The Hivites," p. 44).

48 Ibid., p. 61.


50 Several have tried to connect Arpachshad with the Kasdim, or Chaldeans (e.g., Los, The Table of Peoples of the Tenth Chapter of Genesis," p. 158).


53 Most take this to be a combination of the article הָעַת plus יִד ("friend").

54 Silph is a district of Yemen, and Salph a Yemenite tribe (G. R. Driver, "Notes

55 Phillips notes that even today tribesmen of Hadramaut proudly state they are descendants of Joktan, supposed by them to be Qahtan, great-great-great-grandson of Shem, son of Noah, and legendary ancestor of all South Arabians (Phillips, *Qataban and Sheba*, pp. 28-29).

56 Gus W. Van Beck, "Prolegomenon," in Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible*, pp. xiii-xv. He suggests that there were commercial and ethnic affinities across the sea, the African Saba owing allegiance to the Arabian.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX  75204
www.dts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at:  thildebrandt@gordon.edu
Blessing In the Old Testament:
A Study of Genesis 12:3
Paul Rotenberry

The Problem Stated
Since the appearance of the RSV of the OT, there has been much discussion of the section dealing with the blessing of Abraham, Gen. 12:1-3. The Hebrew text is rendered by the ASV: "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." The RSV renders the same text: "and by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves." Many seem to fear that the rendering of the RSV destroys the messianic idea in the verse, and so they oppose the rendering.

Interpreting the Verse

Messianic. According to the messianic interpretation of the verse, "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed . . . (ASV)" is understood to refer to the blessing received through Jesus the Messiah who came of the seed of Abraham, so that truly all families of the earth were blessed through Abraham. The new translation is just as susceptible of a messianic interpretation as the older translation, though with reflexive action. "By you all the families of the earth will bless themselves . . . (RSV)" is thus understood to mean that in the Messiah of the seed of Abraham, all the families of the earth would avail themselves of the blessings. Thus far, the new translation has really lost nothing of the reference to Christ seen in the verse by Christians from the early days of the church.

Non-messianic. The non-messianic interpretation of both translations would see in the verse only that the name of Abraham (or his descendants, Gen. 22:18) would be used in pronouncing a blessing. Notice the usage in Gen. 48:20 with the same Hebrew preposition "by thee" or "in thee" taken as instrumental. ASV "In thee will Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." RSV "by you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh . . ." In this sense, Gen. 12:3 would be understood to mean that when one "blessed himself" "in" or "by" Abraham, he would simply say, "God make me as Abraham" or one would be blessed by having someone say, "God make me as Abraham." The force of the words and the context of Gen. 12:3 alone would not determine the interpretation. Both are equally possible in the context.

The Early Christian Interpretation-Messianic
In the early church the messianic interpretation was given by inspired men, thus Peter (Acts 3:25f) and Paul (Gal. 3:8). This we accept without question. But this acceptance does not depend upon the passive translation of Gen. 12:3. The messianic idea is just as
clear whether the Hebrew be taken as reflexive or as passive: whether it be read "And . . . shall bless themselves . . ." or "and . . . shall be blessed . . ."

Some may wonder how one could accept the messianic interpretation of the New Testament quotations and yet admit the possibility of the difference of translation. Why did the RSV translators use the expression "bless themselves" in Gen. 12:3 and the expression "be blessed" in the NT quotations of this verse, whereas the word occurring in the Greek NT is the same form of the same word that occurs in the Greek translation (Septuagint) of Gen. 12:3? The solution to this problem is found in the text with which the translators worked in each instance. In the NT they worked with the Greek NT text; in the OT they worked with the Hebrew text, and presumably our Hebrew text of Gen. 12:3 is the same as that used by the translators who produced the Septuagint.

One may well doubt that the grammatical construction of a translation is to be regarded as inspired merely because it is quoted in the New Testament when the writer or speaker is simply giving the Septuagint rendering.¹ Now, if one should choose to make this an argument that God inspired the translation of the Niphal form as passive, the discussion must end there, for we accept Peter and Paul as inspired men. (However, one is then faced with more serious problems of text and canon, if this is taken as putting a divine seal on all selections of words, texts, and constructions in the Septuagint translation.) If, on the other hand, one understands that Peter and Paul were simply quoting the translation commonly used by their hearers and readers, then we may investigate the disposition of the Niphal form made by the Septuagint translators.²

**The Hebrew Verb, Niphal Conjugation**

In the Hebrew language, verbs are used in different forms to express person, number, voice, mode, tense, and extension of the root idea. The extension of the root idea of a verb is expressed by conju-

---

¹ Editor's Note: Compare, for example, McGarvey's comment on Acts 7:14 where he explains the apparent contradiction between the figures 70 and 75 there and in Gen. 46:27 by saying that the difference is a difference between the Hebrew text of Gen. 46:27 and the Septuagint which Stephen was quoting and which was known by his hearers. New Commentary on Acts of Apostles, p. 120.

² The translation of T. J. Meek in The Bible, An American Translation, published by the University of Chicago Press, represents the Niphal of Gen. 12:3 as reciprocal: "... through you shall all the families of the earth invoke blessings on one another." This is a force perfectly proper to the Niphal conjugation, but it is a highly specialized force. This translation would limit the meaning of the passage to the use of the name of Abraham in pronouncing blessings and would, in the judgment of this writer, unduly restrict the action of the verb. New Testament usage of this verse could not be justified if the force of the Niphal in Gen. 12:3 be understood as reciprocal.
ations; thus, the Qal conjugation is the simple active or stative form, the Niphal is the reflexive or passive of the simple active, the Piel is factitive or intensive or denominative, the Pual is passive of the Piel, the Hiphil is causative, the Hophal is passive of the Hiphil, and the Hithpael is reflexive. These are the basic meanings of the conjugations. With reference to the word "b-r-k" (translated "bless"), the problem of translation in the RSV centers in the Niphal conjugation which form occurs in Gen. 12:3. The earliest force of the Niphal conjugation in Hebrew was reflexive. Though in later Hebrew the Niphal came to be used more as a passive of Qal, the reflexive force was still common. Thus, Gen. 12:3 would in its earliest force be rendered "and they shall bless themselves" (the perfect tense occurring here with waw consecutive). But with many Hebrew verbs, the Niphal is used to express the passive voice only; and in many other verbs, the Niphal is used to express both passive and reflexive voices. So the use of the conjugation alone is not decisive. The Septuagint gives no help in this consideration for a Niphal is translated into Greek middle or passive voice as the translator understood the usage in the particular context. In the present and imperfect tenses of the indicative mode in Greek, the middle and passive voices are not distinguished in form, whereas the future middle is in a different verb system from the future passive. In Gen. 12:3, there is no possible confusion as to how the translator understood the Niphal. The Greek translated clearly the Niphal as future passive, which translation was cited by Peter and Paul in the NT.

The Niphal form of the verb b-r-k occurs only three times in the OT: Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 28:14. The Niphal is used often as a reflexive or passive of the Qal conjugation; however, the Qal (with the exception of the passive participle) occurs only twice in the OT and has the meaning "bend the knee" or "kneel" (2 Chron. 6:13; Psa. 95:6). The Qal passive participle does occur c. 72 times with the meaning "be praised" or "be blessed." The Piel form is the regular active form used in the sense "to bless"; the Pual form occurs as the passive of Piel "to be blessed." The Hiphil is the causative form of the root idea, "to cause to kneel" or "to cause to bend the knee." The Hithpael is properly reflexive "to bless oneself," but may bear the passive force "to be blessed." The Hithpael occurs only six times in the OT; in each passage, the RSV translates as a reflexive whereas the ASV translates three occurrences as passive (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; Psa. 72:17) and three occurrences as reflexive (Deut. 29:19; Isa. 65:16; Jer. 4:2). It should be noted that in each instance in which the text of the ASV translates the Hithpael as passive, the marginal reading is reflexive: "bless oneself." Also, one should note that the marginal reading of the RSV of Gen. 22:18 is passive: "be blessed."

The root idea of the verb b-r-k is "bend the knee," and the root is found throughout the Semitic family of languages with this meaning. In Hebrew, the Piel conjugation became specialized in the usage
"to bless." The Niphal and Hithpael conjugations are associated in meaning with the Piel; and the Qal passive participle is associated with the Piel and not at all with the active voice of the Qal. There are other Hebrew verbs in which this phenomenon is found, e.g. b-s-r "cut off." The Piel and Qal passive participle signify "fortify," the Niphal means "be restrained," the Qal active means "cut off." Of course, the Piel meaning is an extension of the root idea. (cf. also the root n-t-q). Furthermore, the root b-s-r also presents the Niphal in closer relationship (reflexive or passive) with the Piel than with the Qal. This shows a usage similar to that noted in the verb b-r-k. Thus, the Niphal on perfectly good linguistic grounds may rather be taken as a reflexive or passive of Piel than of Qal. That the Niphal need not be understood as passive can be readily seen in the verb d-b-r "speak" in which the Qal is active, the Niphal is middle-active, the Piel is active, and the Pual is passive.

B-R-K; Bless

The root meaning of the Hebrew verb b-r-k as already noticed is "bend the knee." As this was done in worship, it acquired the meaning "praise" or "bless" (give adoration to the deity). Since a "blessing" was spoken, the Greek translators uniformly render the verb by "eulogeo" with the force "praise" or "bless" (lit., to "speak well of," or to "speak good things"). The blessing to the Hebrew mind, however, does not correspond exactly to the English word "bless" as shown in that l-s-r (lit., "go straight") "to be happy" is translated in Psa. 1:1 "Blessed is the man . . ." Even the English word "bless" has acquired many connotations far removed from the root idea "to consecrate with blood." In the Hebrew idea of blessing, there was always the "pronouncement" of blessing. The blessing was "something said." The word (blessing) spoken then began its work to effect that which was desired; thus, "God blessed them (sea creatures), saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas . . ." (Gen. 1:22). The "blessing" was what God "said," then the word of God produced its effect. (This shows also something of the meaning of the curse by Jehovah in Zech. 3:2.) We may see further this idea of blessing in Gen. 48:20 as Jacob says concerning Ephraim and Manasseh, "In thee will Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh . . ." Here again, the blessing was something spoken, and the spoken word was to effect that which was desired. We may work our way in each occurrence of the word throughout the entire Bible with this idea. There was something of the force of the whole personality involved in the blessing, and once given, it could not be recalled. So Isaac, having blessed Jacob, cannot recall the blessing and can give only a lesser blessing to Esau (Gen. 27:18-40; esp. vv. 37-40). A modern scholar expressed the idea quite well: "In the Bible blessing means primarily
the active outgoing of the divine goodwill or grace which results in prosperity and happiness amongst men."3 Another said that ultimately all blessing must spring from God.4 For those to whom the work is available, the psychological interpretation of the blessing from the Hebrew viewpoint is well expressed by Johs. Pedersen.5

**Conclusion**

It appears more likely, therefore, that Gen. 12:3 has immediate reference to the use of Abraham's name in pronouncing blessings, but that this interpretation must include a tacit recognition that through this Hero of Faith the Messiah also would come to pronounce new blessings of His own upon His people, Acts 3:25f; Gal. 3:8.

Abilene Christian College.

Abbreviations-

- RSV-Revised Standard Version of the Holy Bible
- ASV-American Standard Version of the Holy Bible
- OT- Old Testament
- NT- New Testament

4 *Theologisches Woerterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, G. Kittel, Zweiter Band, ss. 751-763.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:

- Restoration Quarterly Corporation
- P. O. Box 28227
- Abilene, TX 79699-8227
- www.restorationquarterly.org

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
EXEGETICAL NOTES

GENESIS 1:1-2:4a

JOHN SAILHAMER
TRINITY EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Introduction

These Exegetical Notes do not aim at a detailed verse-by-verse explanation. Their purpose rather is to look at the first chapter of Genesis from a wider perspective the perspective of the whole of the Pentateuch. A secondary purpose of these Notes is to explore in a general way the broader question of the meaning of biblical narrative texts. How do we go about finding what the biblical writers were teaching in their carefully wrought narratives? In light of this second purpose, the Notes will be presented in the form of a general description of biblical narrative and the comments on Gen 1:1-2:4a will serve as examples. It will be assumed that what is said may be applied generally to all biblical narratives in the same way that it is here applied to Genesis one.

Historical narrative is the re-presentation of past events for the purpose of instruction. Two dimensions are always at work in shaping such narrative: 1) the course of the historical event itself and 2) the viewpoint of the author who recounts the event. This dual aspect of historical narrative means that one must not only look at the course of the event in its historical setting but one must also look for the purpose and intention of the author in recounting the event.

The idea of looking beyond the historical event to the author's version of it does not imply that the author's version is different than the event as it actually happened. Rather, in historical narrative what is given is the inspired author's evaluation of the meaning and significance of the event. In historical narrative we may be told less than all that happened; but we are also told much more than simply that the event happened--although we are always being told at least that. We are also being told the purpose and significance of the event within the broader context of God's revelation in his word.

In what follows, we will outline briefly some general principles on how to go about the task of finding the author's intent and purpose in recounting the events in historical narrative.
Assessing the Structure of the Narrative Account

The most influential yet subtle feature of an author's work in relating historical events is the overall framework within which he arranges his account. Some would call this the literary context. Perhaps a more usable term would be the structure of the passage. What this means is that there is always an internal relationship of each segment of a narrative to the other segments of the narrative and to the narrative viewed as a whole. When we speak of structure, then, we are speaking of "the total set of relationships within a given narrative unit."

General structural elements to look for in every historical narrative are simple, but nonetheless important. They include an introduction, a conclusion, sequence, disjuncture, repetition, deletion, description and dialogue. These elements combine to form the building blocks or segments of the larger narrative units.

For example, Gen 1:1-2:4a is clearly recognizable as a unit of historical narrative. It has an introduction (1:1), a body (1:2-2:3) and a conclusion (2:4a). With these three segments a unit is formed. Within this unit several structural elements combine to tie this passage (Gen 1:1-2:4a) together and give it a specific meaning. One of the more obvious elements is the repetition of the phrase "evening and morning" which divides the passage into a 7-day scheme. Creation forms a period of one work week concluding with a rest day. Already in this simple structural framework there is the tilting of the account that betrays the interests of the author: creation is viewed in terms of man's own work week.

Another, more subtle, structural element tying the passage together is the tight sentence pattern (or sequence) within which the events of creation are recorded. This is apparent in the almost monotonous string of "ands" in the English Versions of chapter one. In contrast to this smooth sequence, however, there is an abrupt disjuncture at 1:2, in effect, shoving this verse outside the regular sequence of the chapter. A study of the author's style in Genesis shows that when he wants to begin a specific topic much narrower than the preceding subject matter, he uses such a technique of disjuncture (see Gen 3:1). Here, then, at the beginning of the account the structure reveals the aim of the author: to narrow the scope of his narrative from the universe (1:1) to that of the land (1:2ff.). This is quite a remarkable turning point in the account of creation and should not be overlooked by anyone attempting to follow the author's intent in this chapter.

Structure, then, implies purpose and that in turn suggests a central concern or integration point which gives a passage its meaning and direction. In the two examples just cited, the central concern of Gen 1 focuses on man and the land. Certainly we need more than these two examples to be convinced that this is the central concern, but the cumulative effect of further observations confirms that this is the direction or purpose behind the framework of the account.

When we have observed the internal structure of a passage, as we have briefly done with Gen 1:1-2:4a, we have not completed the task of assessing the total structural relationship of the passage to the broader...
context within which it is found. There may indeed be a whole series of further structural ties between the passage and its literary environment.

Here we are faced with the problem of where to fix the outside limits to a passage within an historical narrative. It is very often the case in the Old Testament narrative sections that the division of the narrative into "books" cuts across very tightly constructed units (e.g. Gen 1-Exod 1:7 is a structurally complete unit not recognized by those who divided the Pentateuch into five parts). Beyond these literary units there lie, as well, the larger borders of the Old Testament canon and the subsequent canon of the Old and New Testaments. These borders must be respected as well if we desire to go beyond exegesis to biblical theology.

In working with Gen 1:1-2:4a, we can safely set our perimeters around the Pentateuch (Gen--Deut) as the largest meaningful unit (literarily). Since it comes first, it also seems safe to say that Gen 1:1-2:4a is to be considered an introduction to the Pentateuch.

Once the largest unit of historical narrative has been drawn, a two-fold task remains: 1) to determine the central concern of this unit and 2) to develop the contribution of the smaller unit (Gen 1:1-2:4a) to the concern of the whole.

The central concern of the large narrative unit is not always immediately apparent but usually becomes clearer with a trial and error effort to relate the parts to the whole. This amounts, in practice, to reading through the entire unit and formulating a general statement of the overall theme. This theme is then checked against further readings of the text. Each reading should produce a clearer idea of the whole, which in turn should cast more light on the parts or segments.

Since we have drawn the Pentateuch as the largest unit with a meaningful structural relationship to Gen 1:1-2:4a, the question we should now ask is whether there is a center to the Pentateuch. From our study we would suggest that the central concern of the Pentateuch should be described in the following way.

First, it should be pointed out that the most prominent event and the most far-reaching theme in the Pentateuch, viewed entirely 'on its own, is the covenant between Yahweh and Israel established at Mount Sinai. The meaning of this event as it is described in the Pentateuch can be summarized in the following cluster of themes:

1) God comes to dwell with Israel
2) Israel is a chosen people
3) God gives Israel the land
4) Israel must obey God's will
5) Salvation or judgment is contingent on Israel's obedience

If we leave these ideas in their original dress, we find that they are clothed in the metaphor of the ancient Near Eastern monarch: God, the Great King, grants to his obedient vassal-prince the right to dwell in his land and promises protection from their enemies. Somewhat more generally, this cluster of ideas goes by the name theocracy or the kingdom of God. However we may state it, this rule of God among his people Israel is the central concern of the Pentateuch.
There is, however, more to be said about the intention of the author of the Pentateuch. We need to say, secondly, something about what the author of the Pentateuch is telling his readers about the covenant at Sinai. This can be summarized in the following three points:

1) The author of the Pentateuch wants to draw a connecting link between God's original plan of blessing for mankind and his establishment of the covenant with Israel at Sinai. Put simply, the author sees the covenant at Sinai as God's plan to restore his blessing to mankind through the descendants of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3; Exod 2:24).

2) The author of the Pentateuch wants to show that the Covenant at Sinai failed to restore God's blessing to mankind because Israel failed to trust God and obey his will.

3) The author of the Pentateuch wants to show that God's promise to restore the blessing would ultimately succeed because God himself would one day give to Israel a heart to trust and obey God (Deut 30:1-10).

The outlook of the Pentateuch, then, might be described as "eschatological," in that it looks to the future as the time when God's faithful promise (blessing) will be fulfilled. The past, Mount Sinai, has ended in failure from the author's (Moses') perspective. The message of the Pentateuch, however, is hope: God's people should trust and obey God and, like Abraham, have faith in his promises.

The primary subject matter of the Pentateuch, then, is the Sinai Covenant. The author sees God's election of Israel and the establishment of a covenant at Sinai as a central religious and theological problem. The Pentateuch is his answer to the problem raised by the covenant in the same way that Gal is the Apostle Paul's answer to the same problem. It is his explanation of the place Sinai occupies in God's plan and his explication of the lessons to be drawn from the experience.

It is of great importance to see that while the Pentateuch is about the Sinai Covenant, it is not the document of that covenant. The Pentateuch contains documents of the Sinai Covenant, e.g., the ten commandments, the covenant code, tabernacle instruction and laws of sacrifice, but the Pentateuch, as a literary document, is fundamentally different from a document of the Sinai covenant. What this means is that the Pentateuch is a document that looks at the Sinai covenant as an object under investigation. It is attempting to evaluate the Sinai covenant from a perspective that is not the same as that of the covenant itself. Like the other historical books of the Old Testament, the Prophets and the New Testament, the Pentateuch represents a look back at the failure of Sinai and a look forward to a time of fulfillment (Deut 30).

It now remains to develop the contribution of the smaller narrative unit (Gen 1:1-2:4a) to the central concern of the whole (Pentateuch). In other words, if we are right in saying Genesis 1 is an introduction to the Pentateuch, then we should ask what it introduces about the central concern of the Pentateuch: the covenant at Sinai.

The following principles are intended to show how a segment of historical narrative can contribute to the central concern of the larger narrative of which it is a part.
The Principle of Selectivity

No historical narrative is a complete account of all that occurred in a given event or series of events. The author must select those events that most effectively relate not only what happened but also the meaning and significance of what happened.

We can formulate a working description of this principle of selection in this way: The author selects and arranges those features of an historical event that most characteristically portray the meaning of the event as conceived by the author.

A close study of Gen 1:1-2:4a shows that a careful and purposeful selection has been made in the composition of the creation account and that the features selected do, in fact, provide an introduction to the Sinai covenant—that is, the creation account tells the reader information that makes the author's view of the Sinai covenant understandable.

One way to ferret out this selection is to ask: What general features of creation (the subject matter) would I expect to find in Gen 1:1-2:4a, but which I don't find? Where, for example, is the account of the creation of the angels? Where, for that matter, is the account of the creation of the stars and the galaxies? Certainly the creation of these bodies is stated as a brute fact in v 1 and is editorially alluded to in v 16; but relative to the detail of the rest of the account in chap. 1, we could almost say the author has passed them by. He has chosen rather to concentrate on the creation and preparation of the land. If we judge from the topics selected in Gen 1:1-2:4a, we can say the author has only three preferred subjects in his account of creation: God, man and the land.

Having said there is little mention of the creation of the rest of the universe, we should note that the creation of the sun and moon is given considerable attention. But we should be quick to note, as well, that neither of these celestial bodies is mentioned in its own right. Rather, their creation is recounted in terms of the role they play in the affairs of men on the land: "to divide the day and night and be for signs for the seasons and for days and years." (1:14ff.).

At this point we need to show how the two principles of Structure and selectivity work together to give a narrative passage its meaning.

First, we have already noted that an internal structural element has defined the scope of the Gen 1:1-2:4a creation account. That is, the disjuncture at v 2 is employed by the author to focus his creation account upon the land. This is consistent with what our analysis of the selection showed: one of the author's three preferential topics is the land.

Now we can turn to the external structural relationship of Gen 1:1-2:4a to the Pentateuch and ask: What does the land as a subject have to do with the Sinai covenant? Or, more precisely stated: How does what Gen 1:1-2:4a records about the land serve as an introduction to the author's view of the covenant at Sinai? When Gen 1:1-2:4a speaks of God's creation and preparation of the land we are, in fact, introduced to one of the central elements of the Sinai Covenant: the promise of God to give the land to Israel: "If you harken to my voice
and keep my covenant you will be to me a prize possession among all the nations because all the land is mine" (Exod 19:5; cf. Jer 27:5).

What, then, does Gen 1:1-2:4a tell us about the land? It tells us that God is its owner. He created it and prepared it, and he can give it to whomever he chooses (Jer 27:5). In the ancient world, and our own, the right to own land and grant it to others formed the basis of an ordered society. The author of the Pentateuch, then, is quick to point out that the promise of the land to Israel, made effective in the Sinai covenant, was in every way a right justly belonging to God.

Another example of the interrelationship between structure and selection can be seen in the view of God in Gen 1:1-2:4a. When viewed as an introduction (structure) to the covenant at Sinai, we can see that Gen 1 presents a very important view of the covenant God: he is the Creator of the universe (Gen 1:1) Because Israel had come to know God through the covenant in a close and personal way, a certain theological pressure existed which, if left unchecked could, and at times did, erode a proper view of God. This pressure was the tendency to localize and nationalize God as the God of Israel alone (Mic 3:11)--a God who exists solely for Israel and for their blessing. Over against this lesser view of God, however, stands the message of Gen 1 with its clear introduction to the God who created the universe and who has blessed all mankind. From the point of view of the author of the Pentateuch, the God of the Covenant is the Creator of the universe; and he has a plan of blessing for all men. Here lies the theological foundation of all subsequent missionary statements in the Bible.

We can conclude this section with a summary of Gen 1:1-2:4a. The author of the Pentateuch intends his creation account to relate to his readers that God, the Creator of the universe, has prepared the land as a home for his special creature, man, and has a plan of blessing for all his creatures.

**The Discourse Principles of Theme and Rheme**

An historical narrative is a form of discourse between the author and his audience. The author must always write with his audience in view and he must assume certain common knowledge and shared experiences with this audience. On its most basic level this means that the author has to use a language that his audience will understand. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew not simply because that was the writer's language but more importantly because that was the language of those to whom the books were written.

At a level of interpretation, however, this idea of an audience means the author can and must assume that he can use certain terms which are already known on the basis of his common experience with his audience. It also means, in the case of literature, that the author can use terms which will take on specific sense in the course of the literary work itself. We should expect, then, to come across two different kinds of terms in any given narrative unit: those terms which the author assumes his reader will already know or will subsequently come to more fully understand in the work itself (theme) and those terms which the author must elaborate himself in the passage at hand (rheme).
Since the author will develop the meaning of rheme terms in the passage at hand, there is little difficulty in dealing with them in narrative. All that is really necessary is a sensitivity to the author's help in developing the meaning of these terms for his reader.

When the author assumes that his readers already have an understanding of a term he uses (theme) the question at once faces the modern reader: Where does one look for the meaning of a term that is not explained by the ancient writer? We may have to go outside the text altogether for a general understanding of the term and then attempt to fit this within the specific text at hand. Usually, however, there is a safer approach.

As a working guide we might suggest that in searching for the meaning of a term not explained in a given passage (theme), we follow the external structural relationships back to a passage where the term in question is in fact developed (if such a passage does exist). An example from Gen 1:1-2:4a may help to clarify this point.

The author of Gen. 1:1-2:4a uses several terms with the full expectation that his audience will comprehend them without explanation: "the deep," "the expanse," "tohu wahohu" ("formless and void"), "signs," "seasons," "the great sea monsters," and so on. How do we find the meaning intended by the author for these terms? If we follow the structural ties already delineated above, being careful to remain within the boundaries of the Pentateuch (structure), the meaning of these terms, as used by the author, is close at hand.

The term "signs," for example, calls to mind many things to a modern reader; most recently, to many, the terms may recall the signs of the zodiac. Could this have been the meaning intended by the author when he recounted that the sun and moon are put in the heavens as "signs"? If we look at the use of this term in the broader structural context (Pentateuch), we can readily see that such a meaning would have been completely inappropriate to the author and his original audience. The term "signs" has been given special attention by the author elsewhere in the Pentateuch. For example, the so-called "plagues" of Egypt are, in fact, called "signs" by the author of the Pentateuch (e.g., Deut 29:2-3). The meaning given this term in the Exod account (here the term is rheme, not theme) is that the acts of God in the bringing of disorder upon the Egyptians were "signs" that God was more powerful and majestic than the Egyptians' gods. This sense of the term "signs" fits well in Gen 1:14. The author says that not only are the sun and moon to give light upon the land but they are to be visual reminders of the power and majesty of God. They are "signs" of who the God of the covenant is. They are "telling of the glory of God," as the psalmist puts it (Ps 19:1). Not only does the term "signs" serve as a reminder of the greatness and glory of God for the author of the Pentateuch, "signs" are also a frequent reminder in the Pentateuch of his grace and mercy (Gen 4, 9, 17).

Another example of a theme term in Gen 1:1-2:4a is the term "seasons." Here our English word "season" suggests something like "winter, fall, etc.," but again, the broader context of the Pentateuch gives a
In Gen 1:1--2:4a there is also the development of new terms (*rheme*) in the narrative. In fact, the concept of man's creation in the "image" of God finds its only explanation in this narrative. The explanation of the term comes from the way in which the author selects two features in man's creation: the deliberation of God before creating man and God's blessing of man after his creation. Both features have an important bearing on the author's view of the Sinai covenant.

First, God's deliberation shows that he has decided to create man differently from any of the other creatures--in his image and likeness. God and man share a likeness that is not shared by other creatures. This apparently means that a relationship of close fellowship can exist between God and man that is unlike the relationship of God with the rest of his creation. What more important fact about God and man would be necessary if the covenant at Sinai were, in fact, to be a real relationship? Remove this and the covenant is unthinkable.

Secondly, in Gen 1, man, the image bearer, is the object of God's blessing. According to the account of creation in Gen 1, the chief purpose of God in creating man is to bless him. The impact of this point on the remainder of the Pentateuch and the author's view of Sinai is clear: through Abraham, Israel and the covenant this blessing is to be restored to all mankind.

The Principle of Contemporization

Often in the writing of historical narrative, events of the past find new meaning and significance in relation to certain issues and ideas present in the author's own day. Thus the author views past events with a certain eye to the present, and he would assume his narrative would be read in that way. From this fact a principle emerges: look for thematic development of ideas and issues current during the author's own time. This presupposes that we have some indication of when the narrative was written and that we know something of the historical-cultural setting of the narrative's composition. If we do not know when or to whom a book is written, it may mean that the book has been intentionally generalized as well as contemporized so that it may speak to many succeeding audiences in many different contexts.

This principle can be detected in Gen 1 by the way in which the author of the Pentateuch uses terms in unusual contexts. For example,
he calls the global ocean (the "deep") in 1:2 a "desert." This is not apparent in the English translation "formless," but the NASB notes it in the margin as a "wasteland." If we again use the notion of theme terms and search for the meaning of this word within the Pentateuch itself, we can see its typological significance. Moses uses this term (Deut 32:10) to describe the desert wasteland where Israel wandered for forty years. Why call an ocean a desert? What better way to teach the people that the God who will lead them out of the wilderness and give them the promised land is the same God who once prepared the land for them by dividing the waters and producing the "dry land"? The God of the Pentateuch is One who leads his people from the wasteland to the promised land.

Summary

We close with one further example of the role of structure and selection in determining the meaning of a unit of historical narrative like Gen 1:1-2:4a. This example should serve also as a summary of the approach taken in this paper.

We have already seen that the overall purpose of the author of the Pentateuch seems to be to show that the Sinai covenant failed for lack of an obedient heart on the part of God's people Israel. We have also seen that his intention in writing the Pentateuch is not to look back in despair at the failure of man but to point in hope to the faithfulness of God. The hope of the writer of the Pentateuch is clearly focused on what God will do to bring his covenant promises to fulfillment. Nowhere is he more clear on this than at the (structural) conclusion to his work: Deut 30:1-10, where Moses tells the people of Israel that they will fail and that they will be cursed, but God's work with them will not end there. The Lord will again bring them into the land, gathering them from all the lands where they have been exiled. But this time, things will be different. Israel is going to obey God. God is going to give them a heart that will obey, a heart that will love the Lord and keep his commandments. It is on this high note that the Pentateuch finally draws to a close.

If we go beyond the Pentateuch to the other historical books, the Prophets and finally to the New Testament, the fulfillment of Moses' hope is made certain. It is also clear in these later books how God is going to give his people a new heart: "I will give you a new heart, a new Spirit I will put within you; I will turn away the heart of stone from your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. My Spirit I will put within you and I will make you walk in my statutes and my judgments you will keep" (Ezek 36:26, 27). It is by means of God's Spirit that his people are able to do his will. No one is clearer on this point than the apostle Paul (Rom 8:4). What is often overlooked, however, is that we needn't go beyond the Pentateuch itself for exactly the same conclusion. The author of the Pentateuch has as one of his central purposes to show that God's work must always be done in God's way: by means of the Spirit of God. To show the centrality of this idea in the Pentateuch we need only compare the author's description of God's own
carrying out of his will (Gen 1:2b) with that of man's obedience to God's will (Exod 31:1-5).

Viewed on its own, the description of the Spirit of God in Gen 1:2 has often been only remotely related to the rest of the chapter. Some interpreters have even chosen to eliminate this reference to God's Spirit altogether and render the passage simply as "a mighty wind was blowing over the surface of the waters." When viewed as structurally related to Exod 31, however, this brief notice regarding the Spirit of God takes on a whole new importance for the meaning of the Pentateuch.

In Exod 31:1-5, God has chosen Bezalel to do the work of building the tabernacle. What God has commanded Moses, Bezalel is to perform. In order to insure his accomplishment of the work, the author of the Pentateuch tells us, the Lord filled Bezalel with the Spirit of God "to do all of the work . . . which I have commanded you." For the author of the Pentateuch, to do the work of God successfully (with wisdom), one must be filled with the Spirit of God. We may recall what Moses says to Joshua when he complains that someone "unofficial" may have received the Spirit of the Lord: "Would that the Lord would put his Spirit upon all of them [his people]" (Nurn 11:29).

If this is one point that the author of the Pentateuch is intending to make throughout this major biblical book, then his comment at the beginning (Gen 1:2b) makes perfectly good sense. Even God the Creator, when he does his work of creating, does so by means of the Spirit of God. How much more then should his people do his will by means of his Spirit.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Trinity Journal
2065 Half Day Rd.
Deerfield, IL  60015
www.tiu.edu/trinityjournal/index.html
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at:  thildebrandt@gordon.edu
THE DATE OF THE TOWER OF BABEL
AND SOME THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

PAUL H. SEELY

If we assume that the story in Gen 11:1-9 is accurately describing an actual historical event, that the account is what we might call "VCR history," the narrative gives us five facts which enable us to date the event. One, the event took place in Shinar, at Babylon in particular (vv. 2, 9). Two, the event involved the building of a city with a tower (vv. 4, 5). Three, the tower was constructed of baked brick (v. 3). Four, the mortar used was asphalt (v. 3). Five, the tower was very probably a ziggurat (v. 4; see discussion below).

When we employ these five facts to date the building of the tower of Babel, we discover from archaeological data that the event occurs too late in history to be the origin of all languages on earth. Scientifically enlightened concordism has attempted to solve this problem through a reinterpretation of the biblical data, and creation science through a reinterpretation of the scientific data; but, these reinterpretations are merely plausible and are able to endure only by setting aside the weighty evidence which supports consensual scholarship. A better solution can be derived from Calvin's understanding of divine accommodation.

I. The Location of Shinar and Its Relevance for Dating the Tower of Babel

Although there is a question whether or not the word Shinar is related to the word Sumer, there is no question that the land of Shinar is distinguished from the land of Assyria, that is, northern Mesopotamia (Isa 11:11). Further, it is evident that the land of Shinar covers the southern half of Mesopotamia (Gen 10:10). The land of Shinar is the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates that lies south of modern Baghdad.

Archaeological excavations in the land of Shinar indicate that although prior to the sixth millennium B.C. there may have been small villages equivalent to those of modern-day Marsh Arabs in the southernmost reaches of the land, Shinar was fundamentally uninhabited before about 6000 B.C. In the southern

Paul H. Seely is an independent scholar specializing in biblical history and the relationship of science to Scripture.

area of Shinar, the cities of Ur, Eridu, and Oueili "seem to be uninhabited before about 5600 to 5000 B.C."4

In the northern part of the land of Shinar, which is more relevant to our study because Babylon is located there,5 the cities seem to have been founded later than those in the southern part.6 Ras al-Amiya, c. 12 miles northeast of Babylon, dates from c. 4750 B.C.7 Tell Uqair, about 25 miles from Babylon, rests on virgin soil carbon-dated to about 4500.8 At Jemdet Nasr, about 25 miles northeast of Babylon, occupation begins around 4000 B.C.9 Kish, c. 9 miles east of Babylon, also has no remains earlier than 4000 B.C. The lowest levels of Babylon lie below the water table, but its origins have been variously estimated as being from 4000 to 3000 B.C.

For reasons we will discuss below, it is doubtful that any archaeologist would date the tower of Babel before c. 3500 B.C.; but since northern Shinar, where Babel is located, was not settled before c. 5000 B.C., one certainly cannot push the events of Gen 11:1-9 back into history earlier than that if one takes the mention of the land of Shinar and of the city of Babylon seriously.

II. Urbanism and Monumental Architecture Date the Tower

Prior to c. 3500 B.C., before the end of the Ubaid culture and the beginning of the Uruk culture, the "cities" in Mesopotamia were just scattered settlements with no monumental architecture. In a few places there is development toward urbanism in the fifth millennium, but the clear rise of urban civilizations with monumental buildings occurs c. 3500 B.C.10

The tenor of the story in Gen 11:1 with its social determination to make a name, its strong desire for security, its building of a city, its use of baked bricks,11 and especially its building of a ziggurat (discussed in more depth below) all point to urbanism with monumental architecture as opposed to a mere settlement. This suggests that these events do not significantly antedate 3500 B.C.

---

5 The word Babylon is used nearly 300 times in the OT and usually refers to the city of Babylon, although the country of Babylonia is sometimes the referent. In Gen 11:8, 9 it is clearly identified as a city (in the land of Shinar); and there is no archaeological doubt about the location of this city.
III. The Use of Baked Brick with Bitumen for Mortar Dates the Tower of Babel

We can derive a more sure indication of the earliest date for the building of the tower of Babel from the fact that the builders used baked bricks extensively (v. 3 almost implies exclusively) as a building material. Baked bricks were very expensive in Mesopotamia because fuel was so scarce, and their use shows how committed the builders were to making a luxurious and impressive building. This points to the age of urbanism; but the testimony of the baked bricks is even more specific. For we know when baked bricks first appear in the archaeological record of the ancient Near East as building materials.

Nor are we arguing from silence. There are hundreds of archaeological sites in the ancient Near East which have architectural remains. A number of them display layer after layer of architectural remains covering many centuries or even millennia. These architectural remains date from the beginnings of architecture in the ninth millennium down through the entire OT period and even later. Further, baked brick is virtually indestructible; so it would almost certainly be found if it were present.12

The ancient Near Eastern archaeological data regarding building materials used in the ancient Near East is so abundant and clear that every modern scholar writing about the history of architecture in the Near East comes to the same conclusion: although unbaked brick was extensively used for architecture from c. 8500 B.C. to Christian times, baked brick, though used occasionally for such things as drains or walkways, did not make an architectural appearance until c. 3500 B.C. and it was rarely used in architecture until c. 3100 B.C.13

Whether viewed in terms of breadth as at Chatal Huyuk with its dozens of unearthed buildings14 or in terms of depth as at Eridu with its eighteen successive building levels from c. 5000 to c. 2100 B.C., the archaeological data from the Near East universally testify that prior to c. 3100 B.C. the bricks used in architecture were unbaked. Indeed, Jacquetta Hawkes indicates in her archaeological survey that baked brick was not used for architecture anywhere in the entire world until c. 3000 B.C.15 The use of baked brick in the tower of Babel indicates very clearly, therefore, that it was not built before c. 3500 to 3000 B.C.

The use of bitumen (asphalt) for mortar also gives clear evidence of the earliest date to which we can ascribe the events of Gen 11:1-9. Since there are extensive remains of brick buildings in the sites of the ancient Near East and

14 James Mellaart estimates that Chatal Huyuk had more than 1000 houses. There are also fourteen continuous successive building levels at Chatal Huyuk dating between 7100 and 6300 B.C. (James Mellaart, The Archaeology of Ancient Turkey [Totowa, NJ.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1978], 13, 140).
bituminous mortar is nearly as indestructible as baked brick,\textsuperscript{16} it is easy to ascertain when bitumen began to be used as mortar for bricks. The evidence from thousands of bricks shows that bitumen was not used as a mortar for brick until baked brick appeared. Until c. 3500 to 3000 B.C., if mortar was used, it was gypsum or just mud. It is quite clear that bitumen was not used as mortar for brick buildings until the proto-historical period, that is c. 3500 to 3000 B.C.\textsuperscript{17}

IV. The Tower of Babel as a Ziggurat and Its Implications for Dating the Tower

Gen 11:4 tells us that the settlers in Sumer decided to build "a city and a tower." The word used for tower is מגל (migdal). Since this word is often used in the OT for a watchtower or a defensive tower (e.g., Judg 9:45, 51; 2 Kgs 9:17; 17:9; Isa 5:2) and nowhere else refers to a ziggurat, what reason is there to believe that in Gen 11:4 it refers to a ziggurat? The first reason is that the setting is in Babylonia where the ziggurat was the most prominent structure in a city—both visually and ideologically.\textsuperscript{18} Secondly, the tower in our text was designed to bring fame and glory to the builders ("so that we may make a name for ourselves"). Mesopotamian kings often took pride in building ziggurats, but no such pride was taken in defensive towers which were simply parts of the city wall. The use of baked brick and bitumen also tells us that the migdal in our text was a ziggurat rather than a defensive tower, for baked brick and bitumen were very expensive in Mesopotamia and hence were saved for luxurious architecture like palaces, temples, and ziggurats.\textsuperscript{19}

It is also telling that in our text the making of the baked bricks is specifically mentioned first (v. 3) and after that the building of the city and tower (v. 4). This is exactly the way the building of the temple and ziggurat of Babylon are described in Enuma Elish (6.50-70) as well as in the account of Nabopolassar in Neo-Babylonian times.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, Nabopolassar is told to make the foundation of Babylon's ziggurat "secure in the bosom of the nether world, and make its summit like the heavens" just as our text describes the tower as having "its head in the heavens." Indeed it is typical of the descriptions of Mesopotamian ziggurats that they have their heads in the heavens. Thus King Samsuiluna is said to have made "the head of his ziggurat ... as high as the heavens." The top of Hammurabi's ziggurat was said to be "lofty in the heavens." And Esarhaddon, speaking of the ziggurat he built, says, "to the heavens I raised its head."\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{16} Forbes, Studies, 1:69.
\textsuperscript{18} Elizabeth C. Stone, "The Development of Cities in Ancient Mesopotamia," CANE 1:236, 238.
\textsuperscript{19} Singer, A History of Technology, 1:254-55; Forbes, Studies, 1:68.
\textsuperscript{20} So strong is the parallel with Enuma Elish that E. A. Speiser thought Gen 11:1-9 was a response to Enuma Elish. Andre Parrot, The Tower of Babel (London: SCM, 1955), 19.
As for the use of the word *migdal*, one wonders what other choice the Hebrews had for a word to refer to a ziggurat? Since they had no ziggurats in their culture, they would either have to borrow a word or use the closest word they could find in their own language. As Walton has pointed out, the word *migdal* is not inaccurate and has a similar etymology to *ziggurat*, being derived from *gedal* (to be large), while *ziggurat* is derived from the Akkadian word *zaqaru* (to be high).\(^{22}\) It is also noteworthy that when Herodotus (1:181-183) needed a word to describe the eight levels of the *ziggurat* he saw in Babylon, he chose \(\pi\upsilon\rho\gamma\omicron\omicron\zeta\), which is the Greek word most commonly used for defensive towers.

There is very good reason then to believe that the tower in our text refers to a ziggurat and not just to a defensive tower. The vast majority of scholars agree that a ziggurat is intended. We need to ask, therefore, when did ziggurats first appear in Babylonia? The answer is, during the period of Uruk 5 and 4, that is, the protohistoric period, 3500 to 3000 B.C.\(^{23}\)

We see then that the archaeological facts coalesce around the dates 3500 to 3000 B.C. The building of a city not just a settlement, the use of baked brick, the use of bitumen for mortar and the fact that a ziggurat is being built all dovetail in date. This remarkable agreement makes it highly probable that the earliest date to which we can ascribe the tower of Babel as described in Gen 11:1-9 is c. 3500 to 3000 B.C. But, what is the latest date to which we can ascribe its building? There is a text saying that Sharkalisharri restored the temple-tower at Babylon c. 2250 B.C., and another text indicates that Sargon I destroyed Babylon c. 2350 B.C.\(^{24}\) This suggests that there was a city established at Babylon before 2350 B.C.; so, allowing a modest 50 years of city history, we can set 2400 B.C. as the *terminus ante quem* for the first ziggurat built in Babylon.\(^{25}\) We can thus date the building of the tower of Babel sometime between 3500 and 2400 B.C.

V. The Meaning of Gen 11:1

In Gen 11:1 we read `All the earth had one language and common words." The Hebrew literally says they had one "lip" and one "words." Parallel passages show that this simply means that everyone on earth spoke and could understand the grammar (Isa 19:18) and words (Ezek 3:5, 6) of everyone else. That is, all the earth spoke one and the same language.

The church, both Jewish and Christian, has historically understood this to mean that everyone on the entire earth spoke the same language. *Gen. Rab.* says,


\(^{25}\) Ziggurats began as elevated temples and did not become "true ziggurats" until c. 2100 B.C., after which they continued to be built or at least rebuilt until the fall of Babylon in the sixth century B.C.
"all the nations of the world." Sib. Or. 3:105 says, "the whole earth of humans." Chrysostom said, "all mankind." Augustine said, "the whole human race." Calvin said, "the human race." Luther, "the entire earth ... all the people." John Gill, "the inhabitants of the whole earth." Adam Clarke, “All mankind.” Even after scientific data made such a history of language doubtful, nearly all commentators both liberal and conservative have continued to recognize that, nevertheless, this is what the biblical text says. Westermann says, "humankind ... the whole world." Sarna, "mankind." Cassuto says, "all the inhabitants of the earth." Keil and Delitzsch, "the whole human race." Mathews, "mankind." Wenham says, "all the inhabitants of the world ... mankind." Leupold says, "the whole human race.

Although some commentators thought that mankind had already begun to disperse or that those building the tower of Babel were just Nimrod and his followers or just the descendants of Ham, there has been universal agreement from the beginning right up to the present that Gen 11:1 means that every human being on earth was speaking the same language until God "confused the language" at the tower of Babel.

A handful of evangelical scholars, however, have apparently felt pressured by the fact that taken at face value the story conflicts, as we shall see more clearly later, with the archaeological evidence that not every human being on earth was speaking the same language at the time of the building of the tower of Babel. They have accordingly sought to adjust the story by suggesting that Gen 11:1 only refers to a small part of mankind speaking the same language, probably the Sumerians speaking Sumerian. They construe the words "all the earth" in 11:1 as a reference simply to Mesopotamia or even just southern Mesopotamia.

27 Augustine, City of God, 16. 10. 11 (NPNF' 2:316-17).
31 Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments... with a commentary and critical notes ... (New York: Abingdon, c. 1860), 1:88.
32 Claus Westermann, Genesis 1-11 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 542.
34 Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 2:239.
Kidner and Kline suggest this "local" interpretation as an alternative possibility but give few supporting details. Reimer, Payne, and DeWitt each give supporting details and suggest that the event being described in Gen 11:7-9 is reflecting a cultural upheaval. Reimer sees the story of Gen 11:1-9 as reflecting the fall of the Uruk culture c. 3000 B.C.; and, the confusion of language is just a way of saying that diverse ethnic groups took over after the fall of the Uruk culture. Payne suggests that the upheaval was due to the influx of the Akkadians with their Semitic language into Sumer sometime around 3000 to 2500 B.C. The Akkadian language confused the Sumerian language and eventually displaced it. DeWitt suggests that the upheaval was due to the invading Elamites and Subarians in 1960 B.C. who put an end to the Sumerian civilization.

These are interesting suggestions, but before we can accept a "local" interpretation of Gen 11:1-9, compelling exegetical reasons should be given for rejecting the historical interpretation of the church, especially since it appears that apart from this handful of concordists, all modern scholars agree with the historic interpretation. But, neither Kline nor Reimer offers any exegetical reasons for suggesting this new interpretation; and Kidner only notes that v. 4b suggests the builders were fearful of attack, thus lending some support to the idea that they were a limited particular people. Verse 4b, however, only mentions a fear of being scattered. There is nothing implying a fear of attack unless the tower is interpreted as a defensive tower, and Kidner does not attempt to interpret the tower as a defensive tower rather than a ziggurat. Kidner's interpretation on the whole, in fact, leans toward the church's historic interpretation. He sees the act of God at the end of the story as a "fit discipline of an unruly race."

Payne's only exegetical defense for the "local" interpretation is that the word נָחַת (the earth) can mean either land or the world; and he says, "it need not be doubted that the author of this story was concerned with just his own immediate surroundings, southern Mesopotamia." But, Payne gives no reasons for interpreting נָחַת as land rather than the world. His argument is a bare assertion. DeWitt is the only one of the five who gives more than a one-sentence defense of this new interpretation. He gives three reasons for understanding נָחַת in 11:1 as referring just to Mesopotamia. His first reason is that Gen 10:5, 20, and 31 indicate "the natural development of diverse languages and dialects." Genesis 11:1 would not, therefore, speak of a total worldwide singleness of language because "the narrator would surely have caught so obvious a contradiction to the immediate context." If DeWitt meant the various languages of the world developed over time as a natural course of events, this is not in contradiction to a miraculous judgment, as described in Gen 11:7-9, being the event which began the process. If DeWitt meant the events of Gen 10 preceded those of 11:1-9, he is adopting a position.

---

40 Payne, "Babel," 382.
41 DeWitt, "Historical Background," 17.
contrary to the vast majority of exegetes. Historically, commentators have recognized that the events of Gen 10 chronologically follow the events of 11:1-9, and no one has thought this makes an "obvious contradiction" between the meaning of Gen 10:5, 20 and 31 and understanding "all the earth" in Gen 11:1 as meaning the entire world.

Although the events in Gen 10 are chronologically later than the events in Gen 11:1-9, there are good contextual reasons why the church has not seen Gen 11:1-9 as a contradiction of Gen 10. The biblical account of the flood makes it abundantly clear that no human being was left alive on the earth after the flood except Noah and his sons (and their wives). Since everyone living on the earth after that would be descendants of this one family (9:19; 10:32), it was obvious that everyone on earth would be speaking the same language for some time after the flood. Since the flood and the sons of Noah are mentioned in Gen 10:32, it is natural to understand the next verse, Gen 11:1, as referring to a time shortly after the flood when everyone was speaking the same language. It is not surprising that exegetes throughout church history have identified "all the earth" in Gen 11:1 as the recent descendants of Noah, all still speaking the same language that he spoke.42

In addition to setting forth the background of the flood, Gen 10:32 (and its parallel in 9:19) speaks of a dispersion of the descendants of the sons of Noah over the whole world after the flood, a dispersion which involves a variety of languages (10:5, 20, 31). Since the very next thing one reads about is the dispersion of the builders at Babel into conflicting language groups (11:4, 8, 9), it is almost impossible not to make the connection between the two accounts. The reader naturally sees the judgment of Gen 11:7-9 as being the event which began the process of dispersion and language differentiation, with Gen 11:1 being a description of all the earth before the judgment at Babel.

DeWitt's second argument begins with the fact that כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם can mean either land or whole world. He then says, there is a sequence of local concepts beginning with "the whole Tigris-Euphrates basin [apparently in v. 1], a plain within the basin (v. 2), a city within the plain (v. 4), and a tower within the city (v. 4)." But this argument just begs the question for there is no reason why this sequence cannot begin with the whole world and work down to the tower.43

DeWitt's third argument is that the whole paragraph is "full of local expressions." His illustrations of these expressions are simply "a plain in the land of Shinar" and "let us build a city, and a tower whose top is unto heaven, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth." As a sub-argument, DeWitt adds that the unity of the language and the builders is "so localized that they look out upon their world with fear and are concerned for their security lest they be scattered through the whole earth." He concludes that the tower and city must be

42 Until the nineteenth century there was nearly unanimous opinion that the one language being spoken in Gen 11:1 was Hebrew.

43 In Jer 26:6 there is a reverse sequence from the local temple to the city to the whole earth, and the earth is clearly universal.
local. The tower and city, of course, are local as are the expressions he mentions; but these facts in no way prove or even imply that the word אֱלֹהִים in Gen 11:1 is local any more than the address on an envelope with its local name, street, and city implies that the country to which it is sent is local.

DeWitt's sub-argument, which is the same as the one argument offered by Kidner, is also not compelling. It is true that the builders felt a certain fear of being scattered; but the flood which their recent forefathers had survived was an epochal traumatic event. The survivors would be like the only eight people who survived a worldwide nuclear holocaust. An event like that would leave following generations with an undefined anxiety and fear which felt open to destruction just by virtue of being separated from the community. There is no need to suppose they feared attack from other groups of people; and there is no clear evidence in the text which indicates that an attack from other groups of people was the basis of their fear.

The concordists are largely just begging the question. Their arguments are insufficient for rejecting the historical interpretation of the church. There are very good contextual reasons supporting the historically accepted interpretation of "all the earth" in Gen 11:1 as referring to all mankind, the whole world; and these reasons were not even addressed by the concordists. A review of those reasons is, therefore, in order.

First of all the phrase כֹּל הָאָרֶץ, "all the earth," in Gen 11:1 occurs right after a statement mentioning the anthropologically universal flood. It is the anthropological universality of the flood which is the contextual backdrop that defines the meaning of Gen 11:1.

Secondly, the statement that "all the earth" had the "same words and the same grammar" is emphatic. An emphatic statement like this does not fit a reference to one country out of many, each of which has the same words and the same grammar. Similarly, Gen 11:6a, "And Jehovah said, Behold, they are one people, and they all have one language," makes little if any sense when interpreted locally. Since the world delineated in Gen 10 is about as wide and diverse as Europe, Gen 11:1 interpreted locally would be like saying emphatically, "All of Italy spoke the same language (Italian);" and 11:6a would be like saying "Behold, the Italians are one people and they all have the same language." Why should this be emphatic or draw any attention? All of France also spoke the same language (French). All of Spain spoke the same language (Spanish). Every country spoke the same language. So what if the Italians did? But, if the statement is saying, "All the world spoke the same language," that is startling in light of the fact that they certainly do not all speak the same language now. It would be appropriate to make emphatic statements about the whole world speaking the same language because it would be so unusual compared to the present.

Thirdly, the terminology in Gen 11:5 ill fits a merely local interpretation. It calls the builders the "sons of men" בֵּנוֹי הַאָדָם, literally "sons of the man."44

44 Not "sons of Adam" since an article is not used with personal names.
If the account had been merely local, it probably would have spoken of particular sons like the "sons of Heth" (Hittites, Gen 23:3) or the "sons of Midian" (l'vlidianites, Gen 25:4). The phrase "the sons of the man" refers to mankind in general.\textsuperscript{45} Finally, the climax of the story in v. 9 is telling. If you interpret it locally, it says, "there the Lord confused the language of the whole land of Shinar." If people all over the world were already speaking different languages, this conclusion to the story seems rather insignificant and anti-climactic. But, if all of mankind was speaking one language until this event, v. 9 makes a fitting and resounding climax not only to the story but also to the universal history begun in Gen 1. Closing out that universal history with a story of mankind attempting to make a name for itself in a way that threatens to bring a curse upon mankind makes a great introduction to the next chapter of Genesis, wherein God promises to make a name for a man he chose, Abraham, and through him to bring a blessing upon all mankind (Gen 12:2, 3).

In summary, the concordist reinterpretation of Gen 11:1-9 has a very weak exegetical foundation and contrasts with the contextually rooted foundation which supports the historical interpretation of the church. The fact that no one until modern times interpreted "all the earth" in Gen 11:1-9 in a local way indicates that this interpretation does not arise naturally from Scripture.\textsuperscript{46} Just as concordists take Gen 1 out of context in order to make it harmonize with modern geography, geology, and astronomy\textsuperscript{47} so they take Gen 11:1-9 out of context in order to make it harmonize with modern geography and anthropology. In addition, although it might appear at first glance that the various "local" reinterpretations of Gen 11:1-9 are bringing the biblical text into harmony with its ancient Near Eastern context, the truth is they leave the biblical text at serious odds with ancient Near Eastern archaeology.

In the biblical text (11:7-9), the confusion of the builders' language is so sudden and definitive that the builders are no longer able to "understand one another's speech" and are thereby forced to give up completing the building of the city and tower. In Reimer's reconstruction of the event, although other languages may have come into the area c. 3000 B.C., the Sumerian language went right on being spoken and understood until at least the fall of Ur III, a thousand years later. So Reimer's reconstruction of the event actually contradicts Gen 11:7 and 9.

Payne's reconstruction of the event with its invasion of the Akkadians in 3000 to 2500 B.C. likewise contradicts Gen 11:7 and 9, since it leaves the Sumerian language intact for at least another 500 years, allowing plenty of time to finish building the city and tower. In addition, Payne's reconstruction of the event was built upon an archaeological theory popular at the time which hypothesized that the Akkadian language did not enter the area which the Bible

\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Gen 1:27; 6:1; 8:21; and 9:6 where the same phrase is used.

\textsuperscript{46} Several of the concordists themselves comment that the story looks like it is about mankind.

calls Shinar until the invasion of the Akkadians c. 3000 to 2500 B.C. Today a number of leading archaeologists believe that Akkadian was spoken alongside of Sumerian from the very beginning.  

DeWitt's reconstruction is a better archaeological fit to Gen 11:7 and 9, since the fall of Ur III in 1960 B.C. initiates the end of Sumerian as a spoken language; but it still leaves a generation or two before the language would have been understood only by scribes. DeWitt's reconstruction contradicts the biblical text in any event, however, because 1960 B.C. is too late for the first building of the city and tower of Babel as the biblical text demands. In addition, the biblical text demands that just one language be spoken in Shinar before the tower was begun; but, on DeWitt's reconstruction two languages were spoken in Shinar for four hundred years before the tower of Babel was begun, for we know that Akkadian was spoken in Shinar from the middle of the third millennium B.C.

The "local" interpretations of Gen 11:1-9 which have been offered, therefore, violate the biblical text both contextually and archaeologically. They drive us back to the historical interpretation as the only contextually valid one. The more detailed concordist reinterpretations do, however, make a positive contribution in that they all fundamentally agree in dating the tower of Babel between c. 3000 and 2000 B.C.

VI. Scientific Evidence for Diverse Languages Prior to the Tower of Babel

As we have seen, if Gen 11:1-9 is accepted as historically accurate, the building of the tower of Babel can be dated approximately between 3500 and 2400 B.C. The problem which arises is that when Gen 11:1-9 is interpreted in context it is saying that until the building of the tower of Babel, that is, until 3500 B.C. at the earliest, all people on earth spoke the same language. It is quite evident from archaeology, however, that this is not the case.

When we step outside the world known to the biblical writer, it becomes immediately obvious that diverse languages were in existence prior to and during the building of the tower of Babel. We should perhaps stop, however, to note just how large the earth was understood to be by the biblical writer. The extent of the earth in the understanding of the biblical writer is given in Gen

---

49 Even if the city and tower are moved to Ur as DeWitt suggests, it is still too late for the first building of the city and tower.
50 CAH3 1:1, 134; Gene B. Gragg, "Semitic Languages," OEANE 4:517.
51 There may still be a tie to ancient Near Eastern literature including a possible Sumerian parallel. See Wenham, Genesis 1-15, 236-38.
52 John Walton, though not offering a concordistic interpretation, dates the tower "perhaps during the late Uruk period, or perhaps as late as the Jemdet Nasr period ..." (3500 to 3000 B.C.) in "The Mesopotamian Background ...," 173. All four of these evangelical scholars, therefore, confirm that the tower of Babel should be dated between 3000 and 2000 B.C., with 3500 B.C. as the earliest date.
10. The northern boundary is marked by the peoples around the Black Sea (Gen 10:2; Ezek 38:6). The southern boundary is marked by peoples living in the extreme south of the Arabian peninsula (Gen 10:7; cf. Matt 12:42). The eastern boundary is marked by Elam (Gen 10:22). The western boundary is at Tarshish (Gen 10:4), but its location is not certain. Although elsewhere in Scripture Tarshish may refer to Tartessos in Spain, in Gen 10 it probably refers to a location c. latitude ten degrees east, perhaps Sardinia, Tunis, or Carthage. "All the earth" in Gen 11:1 is then a circle or ellipse around 2400 miles in width and 1200 in height. Everyone in the ancient Near East understood this circular area to be the entire extent of the earth and that this earth was surrounded by a great ocean.

Genesis 10 thus indicates (and history makes certain) that the writer of Gen 11 was oblivious to the existence of the Far East, Australia, and the Americas. Yet an awareness of these lands and the peoples living there is critically important to the history of language. For although samples of written languages do not appear in the Far East, Australia, or the West before 3500 B.C., archaeologically stratified sites and carbon-14 dating show that people certainly lived in these areas both before 3500 B.C. and during the building of the tower of Babel. In addition, the isolation of the Far East, Australia, and the Western peoples from the Near East and from each other, as well as the structures of the many languages in existence today that descended from them, virtually guarantee that they were not speaking Sumerian or any other ancient Near Eastern language.

Spirit Cave in Thailand, for example, is a stratified site showing human occupation from before 5000 B.C. down to 250 B.C. We do not know what language they were speaking in Thailand from 5000 to 2000 B.C.; but, we can be sure it was not Sumerian.

Pan-p’o in China was continuously occupied by farmers of distinctly Mongoloid type for at least five hundred years before the earliest date for the tower of Babel. In addition, 113 potsherds were found at Pan-p’o incised with proto-Sinitic logographs. These logographs are archetypal to the Chinese language

55 We know from ancient history that no one in the ancient world envisioned the inhabited world to be significantly larger than the extent delineated in Gen 10. It did not extend to the Far East, Australia, or the Americas.
57 Joyce C. White, 'A Lost Bronze Age," Natural History (November 1984): 82; Ronald Schiller, "Where was the ‘Cradle of Civilization’?" Readers Digest (August 1980): 67-71. sa Ping-ti Ho, The Cradle of the East (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 16-18. It should be noted here that 3500 B.C. (the earliest date for the tower of Babel) would also have to
and testify clearly that a form of Chinese, unrelated to any language in the ancient Near East, was spoken before the tower of Babel was built, perhaps even thousands of years before it was built.59

In Japan, the Jomon culture, which is evidenced at 25 different sites in Japan, seems to run in a continuous sequence from c. 10,000 B.C. to A.D. 1000. There are more than enough stratified sites and carbon-14 dates from 5000 to 2000 B.C. to show that the Ainu inhabited Japan well before the time that the tower of Babel began to be built and all during its building. The language which they spoke is not related even to Chinese, much less to Sumerian.60

At Keniff Cave, Rocky Cave South, and numerous other sites in Australia, there are well-stratified stone and bone remains dating from c. 20,000 B.C. to A.D. 1500.61 Most relevant to our discussion are the dozen sites which are radiocarbon-dated from c. 5000 to 4000 B.C., i.e., before the tower of Babel began to be built.62 The people who left tools at these sites must have had a language; and the language they spoke may be related to other languages of Oceania, but certainly not to Sumerian, Chinese, or Japanese.63

At numerous sites in North America, such as Danger Cave in Utah, stratified remains of Indian cultures are radiocarbon-dated from 9000 to 3000 B.C.64 At Sierra Madre Oriental and other sites in Mexico, human and cultural remains are carbon-dated from 7000 to 1400 B.C.65 Since these Indians apparently came from Asia originally, we would expect their languages around 5000 B.C. to relate to Asian languages, but not to ancient Near Eastern languages. In any case, whatever languages they may have spoken, they were in America speaking them before the tower of Babel began to be built and, all during the time from 3500 to 2000 B.C.

We can say then that there is firm archaeological ground based both on radiocarbon dates and stratified sites to support the conclusion that long before the tower of Babel began to be built and all during the fourth millennium B.C., men were scattered over the entire globe speaking a multitude of different languages. This conclusion is clearly opposed to the assumptions underlying Gen 11:1-9 and opposite to the statements in 11:1 and 6 in particular. At this point someone might suggest that perhaps the tower of Babel should be dated earlier. But, on what basis would anyone suppose that it should be dated earlier than c. 3500 B.C.? One might be tempted to refer to the fact that a predate the origin of the Mongoloid, Negroid, and Australoid peoples, an idea which no anthropologist would accept.

59 Ho, Cradle, 34, 366-67; Diakonof, Early Antiquity, 388.
62 Mulvaney, Prehistory, 180.
stone tower was built in Jericho c. 8500 B.C. But this really has no bearing on the
tower of Babel because, as noted earlier, southern Mesopotamia where Baby-
lon is located did not even have permanent settlements until c. 5500 B.C. and
had no cities with architecture comparable to that of Jericho until c. 3500 B.C. at
the very earliest. Hence, no one familiar with ancient Near Eastern archaeol-
ogy has been willing to date the tower of Babel any earlier than c. 3500 B.C.
Also, the further back the date of the tower is pushed, the less it fits the archaeo-
logical data and the more improbable the date becomes. Nor are the archaeo-
logical architectural data the only problem.

The flood account in Scripture reflects a relationship with second millennial
Mesopotamian accounts. Even granting a common ancestor to the biblical and
Mesopotamian accounts, every year that you move the date of the tower of
Babel (and the flood with it) earlier than 3500 B.C., the more improbable it
becomes that the two flood accounts would be so similar to each other since
they only would have been handed down orally.

The fact is, in order for the tower of Babel to have been the starting point
for the division of one human family into varying races and language groups as
Gen 11:1-9 demands, even a very conservative interpretation of the archaeo-
logical and anthropological evidence indicates that the tower would have to
have been built long before 10,000 B.C. But the chances of a monumental tower
and city being built in Babylon out of baked brick and bitumen before even the
Neolithic age is so improbable from an archaeological point of view as to be
virtually impossible.

One cannot date the tower of Babel early enough to fit all of the archaeo-
logical and anthropological data without implicitly espousing a methodology
which favors bare possibility over probability; and, such a methodology is anti-
thetical to serious scholarship.

VII. Creation Science, Carbon-14 Dating, and the Tower of Babel

In order to maintain the historical interpretation of the flood and the tower
of Babel, creation science simply denies the validity of the trustworthiness of
carbon-14 dating. The validity of carbon-14 dating sounds the death knell for
creation science; so, many papers have been written by creation scientists
attempting to throw doubt on its validity. In the early decades of its use many
of the dates that carbon-14 dating produced were erroneous for one reason or
another; so, questioning was justified and non-Christians raised just as many

---

67 Although there are important differences between the two accounts, no other flood account is
so close to the biblical account as the Mesopotamian. Virtually every scholar agrees they are
related to each other.
68 Creationist papers on radiocarbon-dating written between 1950 and 1990 are reviewed in
questions as Christians did. But there has been a significant refinement of the
method in the last two decades and most importantly, its essential validity has
been confirmed objectively by comparison with dendrochronology and with
annually produced varves.

By comparing carbon-14 dates with known dates from counting tree rings
in trees linked together stretching back from the present to 9300 B.C., the essential
validity of carbon-14 dating has been proven. This validation of carbon-14
dating through comparison with the ages given by counting tree rings rests
upon two long sequences of tree rings linked together. These sequences were
independently produced by different scientists in different parts of the world
using different species of trees.

The major objection from creation science to the validity of the tree ring
sequences is that due to varying weather conditions a tree might produce more
than one ring in one year. A very meticulous study, however, showed that the
bristlecone pine, upon which the first long dendrochronology was based, does
not normally produce more than one ring per year. The oak trees, upon
which the other major long dendrochronology is based, so rarely grow extra
rings that one can almost say they never grow them. Further, in order to be
sure that no extra (or missing) ring has slipped into a sequence, each section of
the sequence is based upon numerous trees growing over the same period of
time, eliminating by comparison any trees that might have idiosyncratic rings.
In addition, densities, which are independent of tree-ring widths, are compared
as well. Because of this cross-checking, errors from extra or missing rings are
eliminated.

69 Alasdair Whittle, Problems in Neolithic Archaeology (Cambridge: Cambridge University
Press, 1988), 19 n. 78.
70 I say "essential validity" because contaminated samples and other problems can cause
individual carbon-14 dates to be invalid, and with dates prior to c. 750 B.C. there is a systematic
deivation of carbon-14 dates from accurate dates with the result that the earlier dates must be
calibrated, and even then there is room for slippage; but, in spite of problems with some particular
dates, no one today doubts on scientific grounds that carbon-14 dating gives a valid overall guide
to chronological sequencing.
71 Minze Stuiver et al., "Radiocarbon Age Calibration Back to 13,300 Years BP and the 14 C
Age Matching of the German Oak and US Bristlecone Pine Chronologies," Radiocarbon 28
(1986): 969-79; Bernd Becker, "An 11,000-Year German Oak and Pine Dendrochronology for
scholars who are aware of C-14's early problems: Fekri A. Hassan and Steven W. Robinson,
"High Precision Radiocarbon Chronometry of Ancient Egypt, and Comparisons with Nubia,
72 V C. LaMarche, Jr., and T. P Harlan, "Accuracy of Tree Ring Dating of Bristlecone Pine for
58 n. 79.
73 M. G. L. Baillie, Tree-Ring Dating and Archaeology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1982), 52 n. 81.
74 Jeffrey S. Dean, "Dendrochronology" in Chronometric Dating in Archaeology (ed. R. E.
Taylor and Martin J. Aitken; New York: Plenum, 1997), 34-38; Baillie, Tree-Ring Dating and
Archaeology, 52-53.
The patterns of tree rings which link the trees together in a sequence are kept from error by similar replication. Since thousands of annual rings occur in each bristlecone pine (up to 6000 in the oldest tree), one only has to find the overlapping patterns of rings a few times in order to make a long sequence. In the oak series where the rings are only available in hundreds, the examination and comparison of numerous trees from the same period eliminates anomalies and establishes the valid unique patterns which are used to link the overlapping trees. In addition to unique patterns of ring widths and densities, unique rings due to fire, flood, frost, or insect damage verify and validate the sequences. Carbon-14 dating, as it is applied to these dendrochronological sequences, is validated by the fact that the carbon-14 dates essentially agree with the treering dates, systematically growing older as the older tree rings are tested. Also, although beginning around 750 B.C. the carbon-14 dates curve away from the tree ring dates, the curve of the dates obtained from dating the long European dendrochronological sequence matches the curve from dating the independent, long American tree-ring sequence. In addition, because the production of carbon-14 in the atmosphere varies slightly over time, the carbon-14 dates oscillate along the length of the calibration curve, forming small peaks and valleys, popularly called "wiggles." In the independently produced European and American tree sequences, even these "wiggles" match up. The fact that not only the long-term but even the short-term patterns in the carbon-14 dates match each other in two independently arrived at dendrochronological sequences is proof positive that the carbon-14 dating is valid.

So clear and irrefutable is this validation of carbon-14 dating that Dr. Gerald Aardsma, a nuclear physicist, a specialist in carbon-14 dating and a teacher at the Institute for Creation Research for five years, came to the conclusion that since carbon-14 dating according to creation science theory could be valid only after the flood, the flood must have occurred prior to 9300 B.C. Indeed, Aardsma calculates the date of the flood as close to 12,000 B.C., partly because it would take time after the flood for carbon-14 to stabilize in the ocean, which is necessary before carbon-14 dating can be accurate.

Aardsma set forth the evidence and his conclusions about the date of the flood in a paper published in 1990 and then in 1993 wrote a second paper

76 There is one section of the European oak chronology which is weak; but, even if it were shown to be inaccurate, the difference would be relatively insignificant.
79 Taylor, Long, and Kra, Radiocarbon, 20, 24-25, 37, 43; Goksu, Oberhofer; and Regulla, Scientific Dating Methods, 201-6.
answering objections which had been made to his reliance on dendrochronology in his 1990 paper. He received two immediate replies to his 1993 paper. One still objected that the dendrochronological data was just tentative and a Christian should hold to the biblical chronology regardless. Aardsma replied that the biblical chronology was not certain.

The tree ring/radiocarbon data are not tentative; the tree rings really exist (in excess of 10,000 of them, one after the other), and the concentrations of radiocarbon in these rings will not be different tomorrow than it was measured to be yesterday. These data will not vanish.

The other reply to his paper was from a Christian paleobotanist who said, As one who was raised with a belief in the accuracy of Ussher's chronology as modified by Edwin R. Thiele (1965), I have been led independently to the same conclusions with respect to the accuracy of dendrochronology as those reached by Gerald E. Aardsma.

We must say then that there is objective empirical proof of the validity of carbon-14 dating back to at least 9300 B.C.; and this is in addition to the fact that carbon-14 dating has also been objectively validated by comparison with the 10,000 years of annual varves found at the Lake of the Clouds in Minnesota. With carbon-14 dating objectively proven to be essentially valid back to 9300 B.C., one would have every reason to expect it to continue to give valid dates even further back in history; and its correlations with varves and annual deposits in ice cores going back even further in history demonstrate its validity before 9300 B.C., but its proven validity back to 9300 B.C. is all that is necessary to sustain the dates we have given above for the tower of Babel and for the archaeological finds prior to it.

Creation science, therefore, has no scientifically sound basis for rejecting the dating of the tower of Babel sometime in the third millennium B.C. (or 3500 B.C. at the earliest) or for rejecting the dating of numerous sites around the world during the third millennium and earlier which indicate that mankind was speaking numerous languages before and while the tower of Babel was being built. This means that neither concordism nor creation science has any viable solution to the conflict which exists between Gen 11:1-9 and the archaeological data which show that many peoples were speaking different languages during

---

80 Gerald Aardsma, "Radiocarbon, Dendrochronology and the Date of the Flood," in Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Creationism (ed. Robert E. Walsh and Chris L. Brooks; Pittsburgh, PA: The Fellowship, 1990), 1-10; and "Tree Ring Dating and Multiple Ring Growth Per Year," 184-89.
83 Minze Stuiver, "Evidence for the Variation of Atmospheric C 14 Content in the Late Quaternary," in Karl K. Turekian, ed., The Late Cenozoic Glacial Ages (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), 61. Creation science attempts to show that varves are not annual, but they ignore the fact that since the pollen and diatoms vary annually, on those rare occasions when additional layers/year occur, they can be identified and discounted.
and prior to the building of the tower of Babel. A more biblical approach is needed, and Reformed theology has pioneered just such an approach.

VIII. Gracious Divine Accommodation to Limited Scientific Knowledge

Whenever the word "earth" is used in the OT in a universal sense, such as in Gen 1:10, it is defined historico-grammatically as a flat disc floating on a very deep ocean. This description of the earth reflects, in the words of Warfield, "an ordinary opinion of the writer's day". The divine revelation of God as Creator and Ruler of all the earth is accommodated in Gen 1 and elsewhere in the OT to the writer's limited understanding of geography.

In Gen 11:1-9 the revelation of God as Sovereign over the affairs of men was also accommodated to the writer's limited understanding of geography. That is, the writer was able to speak of "all the earth" having just one language because he had no knowledge of the lands and peoples of the Americas, Australia, the Far East, or even of all of Africa or Europe. As far as he was concerned, the earth extended only from Sardinia to Afghanistan, and from the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula to the northern boundaries of the Black and Caspian Seas (Gen 10); and the descendants of Noah had not yet spread out over even this limited earth (Gen 11:4). The divine revelation of God was accommodated to the writer's limited understanding of geography and anthropology.

We see another example of such divine accommodation to the limited geographical knowledge of the times in the NT. In NT times educated people were aware that the earth was a globe, but believed that the extent of the land area which mankind inhabited was only slightly greater in longitude than the extent of the earth in Gen 10 and not significantly greater in latitude. This limited area of land was also believed, as in OT times, to be encircled by a great impassable ocean. So in NT times just as in OT times, the southern coast of the Arabian Peninsula was understood to be the southern limit of the entire land continent including Africa, the place where the land inhabited by man literally came to an end.

When then we read Jesus' statement in Matt 12:42/Luke 11:41 that the Queen of Sheba came "from the ends of the earth," we may make the mistake

---

84 Seely, "The geographical meaning," 231-55.
86 Historical evidence shows that this was the entire extent of the earth as far as the writer and his hearers were concerned. Kings in both Egypt and Mesopotamia often spoke of ruling the entire earth; but when you inquire as to the extent of this earth, it is no bigger than as described in Gen 10. For example, Naram Sin (2254-2218 B.C.) called himself "king of the four quarters, king of the universe," but his kingdom extended only from Cyprus to the Gulf of Oman. Cf. Strabo, Geogr. 1.1.6-8, 13; 1.3.22; Pliny, Nat. 2.166-67, 170, 242; 6.1, 36-37, 56-58; Seneca, Nat. 3.29.7; 4A.2.24; 5.18.10; 6.23.3.
87 Strabo, Pliny, and Seneca as in note 86; Tacitus, Germ. 45; Hist. Rech. 2.7; Josephus, AM. 1.31.
88 See the map of Strabo's world on left hand page opposite title page in volume 1 of The Geography of Strabo (LCL; 1917; repr., Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969).
of removing the statement from its historical context and understanding it in terms of our modern geographical knowledge as a merely figurative way of saying "a long distance." But the hearers of Jesus understood the statement literally. The "ends of the earth" referred to the boundary between the inhabited earth (essentially a single land mass) and the ocean that was believed to surround it. To the south the earth was believed to end in the area of Sheba which is at the southwestern tip of the Arabian peninsula opposite Ethiopia. Thus Pliny speaks of "the coast of the Ethiopic Ocean where habitation just begins." To the hearers of Jesus there was no land south of that for there was no land beyond "the ends of the earth." Hence, the hearers of Jesus would have understood Jesus' statement literally; and if they had thought that his inspired statement necessarily reflected God's omniscient knowledge of geography, it would have misled them into believing that God agreed there was no inhabited land south of the land of Sheba.

But Jesus did not mislead his hearers. He had no intention of revealing God's knowledge of geography or of correcting the science of the times. His statement was an accommodation pure and simple to the limited geographical understanding of the times. Thus, the inspired statements of Matt 12:42, Gen 1:14, and Gen 11:1 all reflect an understanding of the extent of the earth which did not include the Americas, Australia, the Far East, or even all of Africa or Europe. They are all accommodations to the geography of the times. The idea that God has thus accommodated his revelation to the knowledge of the times is not a new idea to Reformed theology. Warfield and others at "Old Princeton" allowed for such an understanding and Calvin fostered it.

Calvin, for example, understood Ps 72:8 to be describing the extent of the Messiah's kingdom as covering only the promised land. He commented, "David obviously accommodates his language to his own time, the amplitude of the kingdom of Christ not having been, as yet, fully unfolded." Calvin saw the description of the extent of the kingdom as being an accommodation to proximate knowledge available at the time. Although he saw the description as being limited by the revelation available at the time, the principle would be no different if he had seen it as being limited by the geographical knowledge available at the time. In the light of ancient Near Eastern literature not available to Calvin, the description of the earth in Ps 72:8, though very limited geographically, is a description of the entire earth in the mind of the writer. If Calvin had realized this he might well have said, "David obviously accommodates his language

---

89 Liddell & Scott define "end" (περάς) as "end, limit., boundary." Since περάς; and ἐσχατος are synonyms [Tob 13:13 LXX (S)], see E. Earle Ellis, "The End of the Earth' (Acts 1:8)," BBR 1 (1991): 126.
90 Nat. 2.245.
91 Thus Rom 10:18 speaks of "all the earth" as synonymous with "the ends of the inhabited world." So also Philo, Legal. 18.173. Cf. Ign. Rom. 6:1; Ps 66:8 LXX (H 67:7); Ps 71:8 LXX (H 72:8).
93 Tarshish and Sheba (v. 10) were the western and southern ends of the known earth (cf. Ps 2:8). Seely, "Geographical Meaning," 249.
to the limited geographical knowledge of his own time, the full extent of the
earth not having been, as yet, discovered."

Calvin gives us another example in his discussion of the geography of Eden
in Gen 2:8-14. It had been suggested in Calvin's time that the reason two of the
four rivers which are mentioned in that passage cannot be identified is that the
flood had changed the face of the earth so that the topography of the earth in
the time of Adam was different than it was in the time of Moses, and it is that
earlier, different topography that is being described in Gen 2:8-14. Calvin re-
jected this idea and said, "Moses (in my opinion) accommodated his topogra-
phy to the capacity of his age." Calvin believed that for the sake of being
easily understood the description of the garden of Eden would be accommo-
dated to the topographical knowledge available in the time of Moses. This is a
reflection of Calvin's strong belief that Scripture was written in terms which
any common Israelite could understand.

Similarly, when Gen 1 was criticized in Calvin's day for speaking of the sun
and the moon as "two great lights" and the stars as small in comparison even
though astronomers had proven that one of those stars, Saturn, was larger than
the moon, Calvin acknowledged the validity of the scientific facts, but said,

Certainly in the first chapter he did not treat scientifically of the stars, as a
philosopher would do; but he called them [the sun and moon] in a popular
manner, according to their appearance to the uneducated, rather than according to
truth, "two great lights." Calvin did not expect the Scriptures to reflect modern scientific knowledge.

In the quote above he even goes so far as to contrast the biblical description of
nature given in Genesis with modern scientific knowledge. He refers to the bib-
lical description as one of true appearance, but the modern scientific descrip-
tion as one of objective "truth." In addition, he presses this difference between
the biblical description and the facts of modern science, saying, "The Holy
Spirit had no intention to teach astronomy." He also invites those of his readers
who might be interested in learning science to come not to Gen I but "to go
elsewhere." And he clearly delineates that "elsewhere" as referring to modern
professional scientists.

Admittedly, Calvin did not say that Gen 1:16 is an accommodation to the
science of the times, but only to the appearance which nature gives. But as was the
case with Ps 72:8, Calvin did not have available the data from anthropology and
ancient history that we have today. These data show clearly that it is not merely
appearances but the prescientific conclusions drawn from those appearances
which are in view in Gen 1. In the biblical period people did not think of the
stars as merely appearing small, but as actually being as small as they appear.

---

94 John Calvin, Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis (Grand Rapids:
95 Ibid., 1:86-87,256-57.
96 John Calvin, Commentaries VI, Psalms 93-150 (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 184 (on
Ps 136); Calvin, First Book of Moses Called Genesis, 1:79.
For them the appearance was the reality. Stars could fall to the earth without destroying it (Dan 8:10). The idea that one of those stars (Saturn) was larger than the moon would have seemed incredible to them.

In NT times even many educated people still believed the stars were as small as they appear. As sophisticated a thinker as Seneca could say of the stars, “Although you pack a thousand of them together in one place they would never equal the size of our sun.” In the Sibylline Oracles both in 5:514-31 (first century A.D.) and in 7:124-25 (second century A.D.), every star in heaven falls and hits the earth; and although they cause a conflagration, both earth and man remain. In the NT, accordingly, the stars can fall and hit the earth (Rev 6:13, "into the earth," εἰς τὴν γῆν) without destroying it. This verse, incidentally, is another example of accommodation to the limited scientific knowledge of the times.

As late as the end of the fourth century, Augustine, after raising the question whether the stars were really very large but a long distance off or really as small as they appeared, concluded that they were as small as they appeared. In his commentary on Genesis, when he considered the same question in the early fifth century, he continued to believe they were as small as they appeared, and he cited Gen 1:16 as evidence that the sun and moon really were larger than the stars, saying, "We do better when we believe that these two luminaries are greater [in size] than the others, since Holy Scripture says of them, And God made the two great lights."

Given the fact that people as late and as sophisticated as Augustine understood Gen 1:16 literally, there can be no question that the original hearers of Gen 1:16 understood the words literally. The verse cannot be interpreted within its historical context as merely a reference to appearances, but rather as a reference to conclusions drawn from those appearances. To the original hearers, who believed the stars really were as small as they appear, the sun and moon really were literally "the two great lights." And if they had thought, as Augustine did, that this inspired statement in Gen 1:16 reflected God's omniscient knowledge of astronomy, it would have misled them, as it misled Augustine, into believing that God thought the sun and moon really were larger in size than the stars.

Calvin's understanding of the fact: that modern science is not being revealed in Gen 1:16 is a significant advance on Augustine's understanding. And, although Calvin's own limited knowledge prevented him from seeing that Gen 1:16 is not a reference merely to appearances but to conclusions drawn from those appearances, some of his comments on other passages show that his

97 Cf. the Babylonian Dream Book 328, CAD K:48; Ezek. Trag. 79, 80.
98 Nat. 7.1.
99 Cf. Isaiah 34:4 LXX; Sib. Or. 2.202; 5.514-31; 7.124-25; Seneca, Marc. 26.6 and Ben. 6.1.
100 I discuss Jesus' accommodation to the belief in the smallness of the stars (as well as other scientific beliefs of his day) in chapter three of my book, Inerrant Wisdom (Portland, Or.: Evangelical Reform, 1989).
101 Augustine, Letters of St. Augustine 14:3 (NPNF 1:231).
principle of accommodation can encompass false conclusions which people might draw merely from appearances. For example, in his comments on Jer 10:2 where the people are in awe of "signs" in the heavens, that is, supposed astrological omens given by the sun, moon, and stars, Calvin asks why the prophet speaks of "signs" in the sense of astrological omens when in fact there really are no such "signs." He answers that the prophet "accommodated himself to the notions which then prevailed." The accommodation is to a false conclusion drawn merely from the appearances of the sun, moon, and stars.

Calvin's comments on John 17:12 demonstrate this same understanding of accommodation. He first notes that the dignity of Judas's office gave him the appearance of being one of the elect and "no one would have formed a different opinion of him so long as he held that exalted rank." He then says that Jesus spoke of him in v. 12 as being one of the elect "in accommodation to the ordinary opinion of men." Note that the accommodation to "the ordinary opinion of men" is to an opinion about Judas which was contrary to the facts because it was a belief based only on appearances.

So although Calvin did not apply his concept of accommodation to scientific beliefs which were based only on appearances, he did provide for that possibility in principle. Further, since Calvin had a deep commitment to interpreting the Bible within its historical and cultural context, I think it is probable that if he had had the anthropological and ancient Near Eastern data available which we have today, he would have done so. He would have realized that such ideas as the solid firmament (Gen 1:6), the water above (Gen 1:7), the earth founded upon the seas (Ps 24:2), and the sun and moon as the largest lights (Gen 1:16) are prescientific beliefs based on appearances. Accordingly, instead of referring simply to appearances, I think he would have recognized they are really accommodations to the scientific "notions which then prevailed." In any case, our recognition of the fact that Scripture is accommodated to the scientific notions which then prevailed follows Calvin's understanding of accommodation in principle; and with the knowledge we have available today I do not believe we are really following Calvin if we are simply following him ad literatum. Calvin was a reformer willing to break with ecclesiastical tradition. Being true to him means that Reformed theology must ever continue to reform.

Calvin's willingness to break with ecclesiastical tradition is seen in his breaking with the Augustinian tradition that Scripture is a guide to science: where Augustine saw Gen 1:16 as a revelation of scientific truth, Calvin realized that Gen 1:16 was at best a reference simply to appearances and that the Holy Spirit

had "no intention to teach astronomy." These are clearly two different approaches to the subject of the relationship of Scripture to modern scientific knowledge; and although Calvin did not realize that Scripture is accommodated to the science of the times, he certainly was moving in that direction. As Gerrish said with regard to Calvin's geocentric understanding of Ps 19:4-6, given his doctrine of accommodation, "Would it have been so difficult for Calvin to assimilate the new ideas [of Copernicanism] and admit that the Psalmist's language was rather differently accommodated than he had imagined?"

But, given that Scripture is accommodated to the science of the times, we would like to understand why it has been accommodated in this way. I believe one reason, as Calvin's understanding of accommodation stressed, is that it facilitated communication of the theological truths being revealed. People of differing cultures (and the OT did arise in a culture quite different from ours) can find it almost impossible to accept some concepts that are common in another culture. It is not so much a question of understanding the concepts as of being able to accept them. When Anna Leorlowens tried to tell the children of Siam that in some countries rain freezes as it falls and comes down as a white substance called snow, "the whole school was indignant at what they considered an obvious effort to stretch truth out of all reason and impose a ridiculous fantasy on them." This proved to be a stumbling block to her authority as an educator until the king, who had been educated in England, assured the children that such a thing was possible. But, what if there had been no Western-educated king?

When anthropologist Paul Raffaele saw that the houses of the Indonesian Korowai Indians were built in the tops of trees, he tried to tell the Indians that in the country where he came from people live in buildings ten times taller than the trees. The Indians found this completely unbelievable. They snorted, "Humans cannot climb that high." The anthropologist tried to explain elevators, but the Indians found this just as unbelievable as the original story. Sometimes, because of a radical difference in cultural background, a modern concept simply cannot be accepted.

In our time, there has been so much emphasis upon outer space and space travel that we find it almost impossible to grasp how anyone could ever have believed the sky was solid. Yet, until the sixteenth century virtually everyone everywhere in the world believed the sky was solid and had so believed for thousands of years. The only exception to this belief before recent centuries was a philosophical school which arose in China around A.D. 200 that believed the sky was not solid. Yet, a Jesuit missionary coming upon this school of thought in the sixteenth century found this idea of a non-solid sky so impossible to accept that

105 Calvin's break with the Augustinian tradition is also seen in the contrasting ways in which he and Augustine interpreted the firmament and the water above in Gen 1.
107 Margaret Landon, Anna and the King of Siam (New York: John Day, 1943), 229.
he wrote home saying the idea that the sky is not solid is "one of the absurdities of the Chinese."\(^{108}\)

The inability to understand a concept which does not fit a current paradigm is not a matter of intelligence, but of mentality, that is, of culturally ingrained concepts. I believe then, in line with Calvin, that for the sake of facilitating as opposed to hindering communication God wisely accommodated his revelation to ancient scientific paradigms and left to mankind the task of discovering the scientific truths which would change those paradigms. And this brings us to the second basic reason why God has accommodated his revelation to ancient science. He has endowed humankind with the grace, ability, and intellectual curiosity to discover the truths of the natural world, and more importantly, has delegated to humankind the responsibility to discover those truths and thus subdue the earth (Gen 1:26-28). God accordingly has not attempted in Scripture to correct the scientific "notions which then prevailed" but rather accommodated his revelation to them. Increasing the dominion of humankind over the natural world through the advance of scientific knowledge is our divinely delegated responsibility.

In summary, in order to avoid obstacles to communication which might become stumbling blocks, and to respect the divine decision to delegate to humankind the responsibility for the discovery of natural knowledge, Scripture is accommodated in Gen 11:1-9 (as well as in Gen 1 and Matt 12:42) to the limited geographical and anthropological knowledge available at the time. This is in accord with Calvin's understanding of accommodation for he showed in his expositions of Ps 72:8-10 and Gen 2:8-14 that he believed God accommodated his revelation to the limited knowledge available at the time. In addition, in his exposition of Gen 1:16 he broke with the old Augustinian belief that Scripture reveals modern scientific knowledge. He believed Scripture was accommodated in the realm of natural science to mere phenomenal appearances. But he also showed in his expositions of Jer 10:2 and John 17:12 that he believed Scripture could be accommodated to false conclusions which might be drawn from mere phenomenal appearances. It is thus in accord with the principles of Calvin's doctrine of accommodation to believe that Scripture is accommodated not just to phenomenal appearances, but to the limited scientific knowledge of the times, to the scientific "notions which then prevailed."

I would only add that this divine accommodation which we find in Scripture to the scientific "notions which then prevailed" does not reflect negatively upon God's character as Truth. It is logically invalid to equate accommodation with making an error or lying. Temporarily allowing a prescientific people to hold onto their ingrained beliefs about the natural world is not at all the same thing as lying to them. Rather, it is following the principle of becoming "all things to all men." It is a manifestation of amazing grace.

THE GEOGRAPHICAL MEANING OF "EARTH" AND "SEAS" IN GENESIS 1:10

PAUL H. SEELY

When a biblical text is interpreted outside of its historical context, it is often unconsciously interpreted in terms of the reader's own culture, time and beliefs. This has happened more than once to Genesis 1: To avoid distorting Genesis 1 in this way, the serious exegete will insist upon placing this chapter within its own historical context. When we do this, the meaning of "earth" and "seas" in Gen 1:10 is found to be quite different from the modern western notions.

We will look closely at the immediate context of Gen 1:10 and at all the biblical data bearing upon its meaning; but, we must begin by looking at it first within its historical context beginning with what might be called the outer circle of that context, namely, the conception of the "earth" which human beings in general automatically have until they are informed otherwise by modern science.

I. The Scientifically Naive View of the Earth in Tribal Societies

Levy-Bruhl, commenting on the beliefs of scientifically naive tribal peoples, wrote [italics mine], "Their cosmography as far as we know anything about it was practically of one type up til the time of the white man's arrival upon the scene. That of the Borneo Dayaks may furnish us with some idea of it. 'They consider the earth to be a flat surface, whilst the heavens are a dome, a kind of glass shade which covers the earth and comes in contact with it at the horizon.' Alexander similarly spoke of "The usual primitive conception of the world's form" as "flat and round below and surmounted above by a solid firmament in the shape of an inverted bowl."

It is to be noted that in the usual scientifically naive conception of the universe not only is the earth flat, but the sky is understood as an inverted bowl that literally touches the earth at the horizon. Thus for the Thonga, "Heaven is for them an immense solid vault which rests upon the earth. The place where heaven touches the earth is called bugimamusi ... the place

where women can lean their [cooking] pestles against the vault." For the Yakuts "the outer edge of the earth is said to touch the rim of a hemispherical sky."²

Since the sky is usually thought by pre-scientific peoples to be a solid hemisphere literally touching the earth (or sea) at the horizon, the earth must necessarily be thought of as flat. It is impossible to conceive of the sky as a hemisphere touching the earth at the horizon, and yet conceive of the earth as a globe. If the earth were a globe but the sky just a hemisphere touching the earth, half of the earth would have no sky. The shape of the earth is accordingly explicitly or implicitly described by all pre-scientific peoples as being flat, and usually circular--a single disc-shaped continent. Thus, to give just a few examples, the earth of the Bavenda and Bathonga (African tribes) "is thought to be a large flat disk floating in water, roofed by the dome of the sky, makholi, which meets the circumference of the disk at the horizon..." Among the Australian aboriginals "there seems to be a universal belief... that the earth is a flat surface, surmounted by the solid vault of the sky." The earth of the South American Yanomamo is described as "an inverted platter: gently curved, thin, circular, rigid..." Indians both in Mexico and North America conceive of the earth "as a large wheel or disk ..."³

Scientifically naive peoples everywhere regularly conceive of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. There are rare exceptions; but, in no case have they thought of the earth as a planetary globe. The human mind, as clearly evidenced by prescientific peoples, just naturally defines the earth as flat-until informed otherwise by modern science. Even pre-adolescent children in modern Western societies think of the earth as flat until informed otherwise by modern science.⁴

1. The Ancient Far Eastern View of the Earth

Early Japanese writings do not describe the shape of the earth, but like the Ainu, it was conceived of as floating on water and hence by implication not our planetary globe.⁵

The ancient Chinese described the sky as an "inverted bowl" and the earth as flat or a truncated four-sided pyramid. In this view "Earth is still and square, while the round sky (with 'stars fixed to the surface') revolves:

² Levy-Bruhl, Primitive, 354; Uno Holmberg, The Mythology of All Races 4: Finno-Ugric, 308.
⁵ C. Etter, Ainu Folklore (Chicago: Wilcox & Follet, 1949) 18, 19, note 37.
the *yang* sky contrasts with the *yin* earth.6 Later, more mundane Chinese maps represent the ocean flowing around the earth in a circle and the earth as more or less disc-shaped.7 So although the earth in earliest Chinese thought was considered square-apparently for philosophical reasons, the concept of a circular earth was also held by many. In both cases, the earth was considered a single continent that was fundamentally flat, and never a planetary globe.

The Rig Veda shows the earliest Indian conceptions of the earth. The earth and sky are compared to two wheels at the ends of an axle, but also to two bowls and to two leather bags. The concept of the earth as a wheel is the usual concept of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. The Indian concept of two bowls or leather bags represents the earth as a right-side-up bowl covered at its rim by the inverted bowl of the sky, the two halves composing the whole universe. Gombrich concluded from this that the earth was conceived of as concave.8 It is entirely possible, however, that the concavity of the earth-half of the universe is reflecting either the earth bulging below to contain the realm of the dead (a common conception) or perhaps, as was enunciated in later Vedic thought, part of the bulge is really a subterranean ocean. I think, therefore, that in all Indian conceptions of the earth the surface of the earth was conceived of as a single continent that was flat and circular, and in any case never a planetary globe. Later Indian thought favored the concept of the earth as a flat disc; and classical Hindu, Buddhist and Jain cosmologies are all in agreement that "our level is a vast disc...."9

2. The Ancient Near Eastern View of the Earth

The noted Egyptologist, John Wilson, tells us that in Egyptian thought the earth was conceived of as a flat platter with a corrugated rim. The inside bottom of the platter was the flat alluvial plain of Egypt, and the corrugated rim was the rim of mountains which were the foreign lands.10

H. Schafer, although agreeing the earth was conceived of as flat, doubted there was any sure evidence for the circularity of the earth in Egyptian

---

thought. Keel, however, noting that the ocean around the earth was long
conceived of by the Egyptians as circular, concluded "This fact suggests
that in Egypt, visualization of the earth as a circular disc was from very
ancient times at least an option." Keel noted that the concept of earth as
a circular disc is supported by Egyptian evidence as early as the fourteenth
century B.C., wherein the figure of Osiris or Geb [the earth god] is repre-
sented as circular.\textsuperscript{11} In addition, contrary to Schafer, there is evidence for
belief in the circularity of the earth from the time of Ramses II (1304-1237)
and III in inscriptions which speak of "...the Circle of the Earth."\textsuperscript{12}
There is good reason, then, for believing that the ancient Egyptians con-
ceived of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc;
and, in any case certainly not as a planetary globe.

In ancient Sumer, according to both Kramer and Lambert, the earth
was conceived of as a "flat disc." Both scholars are aware that the Baby-
lonian view of the universe, which thought of the earth as a disc, was
probably inherited from Sumer.\textsuperscript{13} Heidel noted that in an early version of
creation in the An Antum list of gods (which are Sumerian) "Sky and earth
are apparently to be viewed as two enormous discs..."\textsuperscript{14}

In Babylonia one of the clearest indications that the earth was conceived
of as flat is found in Tablet V of Enuma elish, where half the body of Tiamat,
having been split in two by Marduk, is laid out as a base for mountains
(lines 53, 57). Tiamat's half-body is laid out over the deep from whence the
Tigris and Euphrates flow out from her eyes (lines 54, 55). Livingstone
translates line 62 "Half of her [Tiamat] he made flat and firm, the
earth."\textsuperscript{15}

The circularity of the earth in Babylonian thought is seen directly in a
sixth century B.C. clay map of the world, which most scholars believe is
derived from much earlier models. Clifford noted that the world in this
map is conceived of "as a disk."\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Heinrich Schafer, \textit{Agyptische und heutige Kunst and Weltgebdeude der alien Agypter} (Berlin:
Walter de Gruyter, 1928) 85; Othmar Keel, \textit{The Symbolism of the Biblical World} (New York:
\textsuperscript{12} Adolph Erman, \textit{Literature of the Ancient Egyptians} (London: Methuen, 1927) 259; James
64.
\textsuperscript{13} S. N. Kramer, \textit{The Sumerians} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963) 113; W G. Lambert,
"The Cosmology of Sumer and Babylon" in Ancient Cosmologies, 47.
\textsuperscript{14} Alexander Heidel, \textit{The Babylonian Genesis} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951)
172, 180.
\textsuperscript{15} AJVET 3d ed., 501-2; Alasdair Livingstone, \textit{Mystical and Mythological Explanatory Works
\textsuperscript{16} See a photograph of the Mappa Mundi in \textit{The Illustrated Bible Dictionary} I, ed. N. Hillyer,
(Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1980) 168; The two best discussions of the Mappa Mundi that I have
seen are in Lambert, "The Cosmology," 59-60 (although I think the two lines in the center
of the map mark only the Euphrates, not the Tigris and the Euphrates) and B. Meissner,
"Babylonische un.d griechische Landkarten," \textit{Klio} 19 (1925) 97-100; Richard J. Clifford, \textit{The
Lambert, noting that the Babylonians were "without any understanding of a round [spherical] earth," went on to describe the Babylonian universe as several levels of discs. Heidel also describes heaven and earth in the *Enuma elish* as "two great discs. . . ."\(^{17}\)

There is no question that the Babylonians thought of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. Even later when the Neo-Babylonians developed a highly sophisticated mathematical astronomy, they did not develop the concept of a spherical earth.\(^{18}\)

We see, then, that in ancient Near Eastern thought the earth was always conceived of as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc, never as a planetary globe.

3. *The Ancient Western View of the Earth*

Homer's view of the universe, as well as Hesiod's, is the usual scientifically naive view: "The sky is a solid hemisphere like a bowl (I.17,425 ... 5,504, Od.3,2 ... 15,329 and 17,565.) . . . It covers the flat round earth."

The earth is clearly a disc.\(^{19}\) Thales (c. 600 B.C.) and Anaximander (c. 575 B.C.) both conceived of the earth as a disc. Anaximenes (c. 550 B.C.) thought it was flat, but shaped "like a table." Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 525 B.C.) believed the earth was flat.\(^{20}\)

In the beginning of the fifth century B.C., however, the idea of the earth as a planetary globe apparently began to emerge. Both the Pythagoreans (c. 500 B.C.) and Parmenides (c. 475 B.C.) are usually credited with accepting the view of the earth as a planetary globe.\(^{21}\) Anaxagoras, Empedocles and Leucippus, however, (all c. 450 B.C.) supposed the earth to be flat as did Democritus (c. 425 B.C.).\(^{22}\)

In addition, the majority of Greeks down to 400 B.C. still thought of the earth as disc-shaped, as is clearly evidenced by the fact that map makers in the time of Herodotus (c. 400 B.C.) uniformly rendered the earth as a disc


\(^{21}\) Thomson, *History*, 111, 112.

(Herodotus 4:36). As for Herodotus, Thomson says "Nowhere does Herodotus betray a suspicion that the earth may not be flat."23

It is in Plato (c. 375 B.C.) that one first finds a sure clear description of the earth as a globe. Plato's Phaedo describes the earth as "round" (108E) "like a ball" (110B) and as his Timaeus (38C,D) shows this is within the context of a geocentric universe. Thomson says, "Certainly it was Plato's adoption that gave the globe a wider currency." From Plato on, nearly all philosophers thought of the earth as spherical. However, nonscientific writers and common people went on believing the earth was flat.24

The ancient western view of the earth's shape from Homer to Plato (or possibly the fifth century B.C.) was then most commonly that of a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. Further, even into New Testament times most common people continued to believe the earth was a flat single continent.

In summary we have seen that all scientifically naive tribal peoples and both eastern and western thinkers until the fifth century B.C. (at the earliest) conceived of the earth as a flat single continent, usually in the shape of a flat circular disc. No one until the fifth century B.C. conceived of the earth as a planetary globe, and even then most people went on believing the earth was a flat single continent.

II. The Historico-Grammatical Meaning of "Earth" in Gen 1:10

This brings us to the meaning of "earth" in Gen 1 and 1:10 in particular. Gen 1, regardless of when it may have been last edited, belongs conceptually to the second millennium B.C.--long before Plato's time and the rise of the concept of a planetary globe. Within its historical context, therefore, the conception of the "earth" in Gen 1 is most probably that of a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc. In addition the Hebrews were influenced via the patriarchs by Mesopotamian concepts and via Moses and their time in Egypt by Egyptian concepts.25 It is, therefore, all the more historically probable that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 thought of the earth as a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

23 Thomson, History, 98.
There is also archaeological and biblical evidence that the early Hebrews were technologically and hence by implication generally scientifically inferior to the peoples surrounding them. So with all the peoples around them thinking of the earth as a flat circular disc, it is highly improbable that the Hebrews were thinking of the earth in modern scientific terms as a planetary globe. Unless then we remove Gen 1 from its historical context, we must say that the historical meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10 is very probably a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

We must now examine the grammatical meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10. The Hebrew word for earth (אֶֽרֶץ, 'eres) in Gen 1 has several meanings in the OT, delineated in KB as (1) ground, piece of ground (2) territory, country (3) the whole of the land, the earth. In light of the universality of Gen 1:1, the meaning of 'eres in that verse is clearly the third listed meaning. If isolated from its historical context, 'eres in Gen 1:1 could conceivably be a reference to the earth as a planetary globe. The word 'eres in Gen 1:10 could then be a reference simply to the continents on that planetary globe especially since it is the "dry land" (נָבֶשָׁה, yabbasa) in contrast to the wet sea (cf. Exod 4:9; 14:16, 22, 29) which God in Gen 1:10 names 'eres, "Earth."

But, interpreting Gen 1:10 as a reference to continents on a planetary globe, although seeming quite reasonable to the modern western reader, is completely contrary to its historical context. This is bad enough to make such an interpretation improbable; in addition, there is nothing whatsoever in the biblical context--either immediate or remote--which defines 'eres in Gen 1:1 as a planetary globe. This latter meaning is derived purely from our knowledge of modern Western science and simply read into the text. Interpreting 'eres in Gen 1:1 as a planetary globe is eisegetical, not exegetical.

The 'eres in Gen 1:1 is indeed the entire earth; and since the 'eres in Gen 1:2 refers back to the 'eres mentioned in Gen 1:1, the 'eres in Gen 1:2, is also a reference to the entire earth. So, when the 'eres which had been buried in water and was barren (1:2) is separated from the water and made to sprout vegetation in Gen 1:9-12, it too is the entire earth. The dry land of Gen 1:10 is the entire earth. This fits the historical context like a hand to a glove. The writer is speaking of the entire 'eres as (flat) dry land, not as a globe.

The writer of Gen 1 also makes it clear in verses six through eight that he is not defining 'eres as a globe, even in Gen 1:1 and 2. That is, in Gen 1:6-8 the entire sky is created in the form of a rock-solid firmament. This firmament was understood by all peoples in OT times to be in the

---


shape of a hemispherical dome (or a disc) which literally touched the earth (or the sea around the earth) at the horizon. Either way, whether the sky was conceived as a hemi-spherical dome touching the earth at the horizon or a flat unbending disc above the earth, the earth below cannot be a sphere because if it were, half of the earth would have no sky. The biblical context, therefore, not only provides no basis for defining 'eres in Gen 1:1 as a globe (and in Gen 1:10 as the continents on that globe), it excludes this interpretation by giving us a concept of the sky which coheres perfectly with the ancient Near Eastern concept of the earth as a flat circular disc but cannot be harmonized with the modern concept of the earth as a globe.

It is worth noting also that interpreting 'eres in Gen 1:10 as the dry land on a globe does not fit the context of modern science any better than it fits the context of Gen 1. For according to modern science the dry land on the globe preceded the formation of the sea by millions of years; but, according to Gen 1:1-10, the sea (ทะเล, tehom) preceded the formation of the dry land. This fact again tells us that the universe of Gen 1 is the universe as understood by all ancient Near Eastern peoples at that time and not as understood in our time. The earth of Gen 1:1, 2 and 10 is not a globe but a single flat continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

Someone may ask, what about Isa 40:22 which speaks of "the circle of the earth"? The answer is there is nothing either in the underlying Hebrew word (הנה, hug) or in the context which necessarily implies anything more than the circularity of the flat earth-disc which the historical context and Gen 1 have given us as the meaning of "earth." If Isaiah had intended to speak of the earth as a globe, he would probably have used the word he used in 22:18 (דָּבָר, dur), meaning "ball." One may recall that the phrase, "circle of the earth," was also used in Egypt with reference to the earth as a flat circular disc.

In later biblical writings we also see that the earth was conceived of as flat. In Dan 4:10,11 (MT 7,8) repeated in 4:20 (MT 17), it is said of a tree seen in a dream that it was of "enormous height and its top touched the sky; it was visible to the end of all the earth" ("visible to all the earth," 4:20). Daniel interprets the tree as a reference to King Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom: "your greatness grew until it reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth" (4:22[MT 19]). Nebuchadnezzar of course did not really rule the entire earth even as known at that time, but this does not mean that the phrase "to the end of the earth" should be interpreted as limited to an area less than the entire earth-continent.

Ancient Near Eastern kings, regardless of the real size of their empire, were throughout the first millennium B.C. (and earlier) regularly described as rulers of the entire earth. Thus the kings Tiglath-Pileser I (1114-1076), Shalmaneser III (858-824) and Esarhaddon (680-669) were all described

29 See note 12.
GEOGRAPHICAL MEANING OF "EARTH" AND "SEAS"

in inscriptions as "king of the world ... king of (all) the four rims (of the earth)." Xerxes (485-465) says, "I am Xerxes ... the king of this (entire) big and far(-reaching) earth." Nebuchadnezzar II himself says, ". . . (from) the Upper Sea (to) the Lower Sea [which means the whole earth continent]" and adds, "I have made ... the city of Babylon to the foremost among all the countries and every human habitation." As will be seen below ancient Egyptian kings also regularly claimed to rule over the entire earth. In all of these inscriptions it is the literal entire earth, that is, the entire flat earth-disc which is described as the extent of the king's dominion. Interpreted within their historical context, therefore, the words, "all the earth," in Dan 4:11 and 20 (being a description of the extent of Nebuchadnezzar's empire) refer literally to the entire earth.

The statement in Dan 4:11 that the tree was "visible to the end of all the earth" means, therefore, that the tree was so tall it was able to be seen by everyone living on earth. Yet the fact is, no matter how tall a tree might become it will not be able to be seen by everyone living on a globe (and many people were living south of the equator in the time of Nebuchadnezzar). Nor does the fact that this tree was seen in a dream give us any reason for obviating the implication of the text that the entire earth was conceived of as flat, for the universal visibility of the tree is predicated upon its height, not upon its being seen in a dream. The statement only makes sense if the earth is defined as a flat continent. Dan 4, therefore, adds confirmation that "earth" in Gen 1 is properly defined as flat, not spherical.

Job 37:3 similarly implies that when God makes lightning, it is seen to the corners of the earth, that is, to the extent of the earth in all directions. The universality of these same terms in Isa 11:11,12 show that Job is speaking of the entire earth, not just a part of it. But lightning, no more than a tall tree, could be seen to the extent of a globe. Regardless of the hyperbole the most natural way of understanding Job 37:3 is that the author was thinking of the earth as flat.

A final verse of Scripture which testifies that the "earth" was conceived in the OT as a single flat continent is Job 38:13. In a clearly cosmological context, not just local, this verse speaks of dawn grasping the earth by its "extremity or hem" (קָנָא, kanap; cf. Num 15:38; I Sam 15:27) and shaking the wicked out of it. The verse is comparing the earth to a blanket or garment picked up at one end and shaken. A globe is not really comparable to a blanket or garment in this way. You cannot pick up a globe at one end. It does not even have an end. The picture fits in a natural way the concept of the earth as a single flat continent.

A final OT concept which implies the earth is a flat continent, not a globe, is the belief that it was spread out over the sea. (See the next section). In summary, there is no OT verse which implies the sphericity of the earth. Rather, all OT references which imply the shape of the earth confirm the historico-grammatical definition of "earth" in Gen 1:10: the earth is a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc.

III. The Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth-Disc

As with the meaning of "earth" in Gen 1:10, one cannot expect to have a valid interpretation of the word, "sea(s)" in that verse if one removes it from its historical context. We begin, therefore, with the outermost circle of that historical context, the normal conceptions of pre-scientific minds, as seen in the thinking of tribal peoples around the world. Many of these peoples have no reported concept of the sea; but, all of those who do seem to agree that the sea surrounds the earth-disc, both around its circumference and below it.

Speaking of the nomadic Altaic peoples of inner Asia (Turkic, Mongols, Tungus), for example, Dupre writes, "The earth is thought to be a circular disc surrounded by an immense ocean." Holmberg says all Asiatic peoples have this concept of an ocean around the earth; and then relates creation stories which show that these Asiatic peoples believed the earth floated on the sea that surrounded it. These stories all mention "the little earth-disc just formed upon the surface of the water," "on the surface in the middle of the ocean."31

Edward Seler, speaking of ancient Mexican beliefs, said, "In the manner of other peoples, the earth was conceived by Mexicans as a large wheel or disc completely surrounded by water." The creation myths of the Chorti, Mayas of Guatamala, speak of "four seas that are surrounding and beneath the world."32

Similarly, "according to the cosmology of the Finno-Ugrians, a stream encircles the world. . . ." This stream is called by some of them "a vast ocean." In their creation story the earth is "spread out over the primal sea."33

The west African Dan tribe say heaven (an enclosing dome) "ends all around in the sea." Another African tribe (unidentified) says, "At the beginning everything was water." Then a god came to create the dry land, bringing some pieces of iron and earth with him. He "placed the iron on the water" and "spread the earth over it." The Bavenda and the Bathonga say the earth is "a large flat disk floating on water."34

In North America both the Navaho and the Zuni believed the earth was encircled by an ocean; and, the "earth-diver" myths which are often found among American Indians describe the earth as an island that "floats upon

the primeval waters." The earth is explicitly described as an island floating on the surrounding sea by the Huron, the Cherokee, the Bilquala, the Winebago and the Athapascans.35

Island peoples naturally think of the earth as surrounded by and floating on the sea. This is documented in the reports of tribal peoples in New Guinea, New Zealand, Micronesia, Polynesia and Japan.36

In every pre-scientific cosmology which I have seen that mentions the sea, the earth is described as circular, floating in a circular sea. The concept of a circular earth set in a circular sea is, of course, the natural result of a scientifically naive person observing the circular horizon of both earth and sea. Since the prescientific mind naturally concludes that the earth is a flat disc, it also just naturally concludes that since this disc is surrounded by a flat circular sea, it must be floating upon that sea. Thus it is that all over the world we find the belief in the earth as a flat circular disc floating in the middle of a single circular sea.

1. The Ancient Far Eastern Belief in a Floating Earth

Early Japanese writings perceived the earth as an island in a surrounding ocean. The oldest Japanese sources also say, "of old when the land was young, it floated about as [if] it were floating oil."37

The oldest Chinese view of the universe clearly involved a "rim ocean" surrounding a square earth, with the sea circular at the far edge to meet the inverted bowl-like firmament that touches down on all sides. Thai cosmology also has a clearly circular ocean surrounding the earth.38

There is no explicit statement in early Chinese literature which says the earth is floating, but since being surrounded by sea made the earth a large island, and since we know the Chinese thought of islands as floating on the sea, it is a fair presumption that they thought of the earth as floating. This is implied in the relatively early Tao Te Ching which speaks of the importance of the power of "the One" without which the "settled earth might

sink." In later Chinese cosmological systems we are specifically told "the earth floats on the water;" and we might add that this water is the sea that surrounds the earth.  

With regard to Indian thought the Rig Veda seems to refer to a surrounding ocean in texts like 1:116:5, "that ocean that has no beginning" (circular) and 5:85:6 which mentions "the one single ocean." Sproul says the word Rasa in Rig Veda 10:121 is a reference to the "earth-encircling stream." Later Vedic texts state explicitly that the earth is surrounded by water. Buddhist and Hindu cosmologies have a circular ocean around the earth.  

Gombrich says the concept of waters under the earth is not found in the Rig Veda though "alluded to several times in later Vedic literature, and we shall meet them in the earliest Buddhist texts." Kuiper, in contrast, believes the Rig Veda refers to the earth floating on the primeval waters. Kuiper's view seems to be confirmed by other scholars who interpret the word Rasa in the Rig Veda to mean a river that goes around the earth and surrounds the earth from below. The earth thus floats on the sea that surrounds it. I conclude that the concept of water under the earth is envisioned in the Rig Veda but only clearly enunciated in later Vedic texts such as the one which says the earth "while still floating on the surface of the water began to grow."  

The concept of a floating earth was incorporated into early Buddhism. The Maha-Parinibbana-Sutra (c. 300 B.C.) says, "This great earth, Ananda, is established on water. . . ." Another Buddhist sutra says, "On what rests the earth?"--"On the circle of water." Later Hindu thought also conceived of the earth as a floating island.  

We conclude that although early texts are not always explicit, people in the Far East believed the earth was both surrounded by and floating on an ocean. This concept is clearly spelled out in later texts.

2. The Ancient Near Eastern Belief in a Sea that Surrounds and Supports the Earth-Disc

In ancient Egypt the primeval ocean was thought to surround the earth and was called the "the great ring" or "great circuit or circle." This

---

39 Christie, Chinese Mythology, 57, 69, 70; Sproul, Primal, 203; Needham, "The Cosmology of Early China," 89.
40 Sproul, Primal, 177; Satapatha-Brahman, 301; "Cosmogony and Cosmology (Buddhist)" in ERE 4:131; "Cosmology: Hindu and Jain Cosmologies," 109.
GEOGRAPHICAL MEANING OF "EARTH" AND "SEAS" 243

earth-encircling sea has been directly compared by Egyptologists to the earth-encircling Greek Okeanos. An Victory Hymn for Thutmose III (1490-1436) speaks of him trampling down "the ends of the lands; that which the Ocean encircles...." Similarly a stela of Amenhotep II (1439-1406) in the context of world dominion ("His borders reach the rim of heaven") says, "His portion is that on which Re shines; To him belongs what Ocean encircles." An inscription for Queen Hatshepsut (1486-1469) likewise lays claim to universal dominion saying "the lands were hers, the countries were hers, all that the heavens cover, all that the sea encircles." Finally in the most explicit terms a hymn praising Ptah in the time of Rameses III (1195-1164) says, "who founded the earth ... who surrounded it with Nun, and the sea." 44

In addition, Morenz tells us that in the ancient Egyptian cosmology, "The earth rests on or in the primeval ocean." The Egyptologist, John Wilson says, "This platter [the earth] floated in water. There were the abysmal waters below on which the platter rested, called by the Egyptians 'Nun'." Frankfort says Nun, the primeval ocean, "became Okeanos, surrounding the earth and supporting it.... the earth floats upon Nun." 45 There does not seem to be any question that the Egyptians believed the earth floated on the ocean that surrounds it.

The idea of the earth floating upon Nun is related to the Egyptian concept of a hillock being the first earth to arise out of the primeval ocean: "The huge mound which emerged from Nun at the very beginning. . . ." This primeval hillock was understood to be an island which floated (CT 714). 46

That the earth was thought to rest on the primeval waters (Nun) is also seen in the Egyptian belief that Nun is the source of the Nile (and all other


44 ANET 3rd ed., 374; M. Lichtheim, Ancient Egyptian Literature (Berkeley: University of California, 1976) 2:41; Breasted, Ancient Records 2:89 no. 220; 137 no. 325; Breasted, Ancient Records 4:163 no. 308; there are also various pictures from ancient Egypt which illustrate the belief in an earth-encircling ocean: see Keel, The Symbolism, 38 (fig. 33), 40 (fig. 34), 42 (fig. 38).

45 Morenz, Egyptian Religion, 8; Frankfort, et al., Before Philosophy, 54; Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, 155-56.

earthly waters). One Egyptian text describing the Nile as it gushes forth at its source interchanges the words "Nun" and "Nile": "... the Nile which comes out of both mountains, the Nun, which comes out of the cavern...." Gray displays an Egyptian drawing that shows Nun "emitting the two or four sources of all waters from his mouth."47

Kramer tells us that the Sumerians conceived of the earth as being surrounded by water. We also know that Babylonian cosmology was heavily indebted to Sumerian concepts, and Babylonian cosmology clearly has a sea around the earth, as mentioned in the epic of Gilgamesh which certainly goes back to Sumerian sources.48 So, it seems probable that the Sumerians did believe in an earth-surrounding sea.

As to the earth floating on the sea, Lambert tells us that the Sumerians conceived of the earth as a flat disc which overlaid the Apsu [Sumerian, abzu]. Deimel says the Abzu is "the sweet-water abyss in which the earth swims." Jacobsen says the Sumerians imagined the underground waters as a vast subterranean freshwater sea, which they called Abzu or Engur.49 Albright defines the home of Enki (Ea), that is the Abzu, as "the subterranean fresh-water ocean whence the rivers flow"; and he gives a Sumerian text which he translated in part: "Water which down the pure Euphrates he (Ea) had guided, the product of the apsu ... [Sumerian text, abzu]."50

The Sumerians then believed that the earth rested on an ocean, a freshwater ocean that was the source of all pools, fountains, marshes and rivers, including the great Euphrates. But being fresh water does not mean that this ocean was not a part of the sea around the earth. As Tsumura pointed out, the Sumerians did not sharply distinguish their concept of water under the earth from their concept of the surrounding sea. The two concepts overlapped so that in Sumerian cosmology, as Pope said, "The sea was conceived as a single body of water."51 Thus the earth was thought to float on the sea that surrounds it.


50 Albright, "Mouth of the Rivers," 165, 177-78.

As to Babylonian cosmology, there is evidence that the Babylonians believed in an earth-encircling sea. In a neo-Assyrian version of the Etana Legend, an eagle carries Etana (a king of Kish) up to heaven. As Etana looks down, he comments on how the land and sea appear. He says, "The wide sea is just like a tub," thus indicating that the sea was conceived of as circular in shape or at least encircling the earth.52

The Babylonian map of the world called the *Mappa Mundi* clearly shows the flat circular earth surrounded by water called the "Bitter River." All scholars I have seen who discuss this map understand the "Bitter River" to be the earth-encircling ocean.53

Since the Babylonians inherited the concepts of the Sumerians, they also believed that the earth floated on an ocean. This is documented in a creation text apparently from Eridu which begins with a primeval sea. To create the earth Marduk constructs a reed raft "on the surface of the waters," then creates dirt and piles it up on the raft.54 This same picture of the earth spread out over the waters in found in *Enuma elish* where Marduk uses half of the body of Tiamat to construct the earth. Then he opens "the deep" which is obviously below her body and "caused to flow from her eyes the Euphrates (and) Tigris" (5:54,55). (Cf. the Sumerian text cited above where the Euphrates is "the product of the *Apsu.*") That Tiamat has water below her is also evidenced by *Enuma elish* 5:56 where Marduk "closed up her nostrils, reserved the water" and in 5:58 where he "drilled fountains in her."55

Other Babylonian texts also make reference to rivers coming up from the deep below. The Code of Hammurabi and several sections of the Atrahasis epic mention "floods [rising] from the abyss."56 In Babylonian thought then, the earth floated on an Ocean, a Deep, an Abyss (*Apsu*). This ocean was spoken of as being as deep under the earth as the sky was high over the earth.57 Accordingly, it was an inexhaustible source of water for all springs and lakes as well as for mighty rivers like the Tigris and the Euphrates. In addition, this *Apsu* upon which the earth floated was thought of as the same sea that encircled the earth.58

---

54 R. Labat, "Les Origines et La Formation de la Terre dans Le Poeme Babylonien de la Creation," *An Bib* 12 (1959) 213; cf. the African story above where iron is placed on the water and earth is spread over it; Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, 62.
In summary it is clear that ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians believed that the earth, a flat circular disc, was surrounded by a single circular sea. In addition they believed that the earth floated on this sea and that it was this underlying sea which supplied the water in springs, wells and all rivers including the mighty Nile and Euphrates.

3. The Ancient Western Belief in a Surrounding and Supporting Sea

In Homer (Il 14:200-1; 18:483-607; Od 11:21) the earth-disc is surrounded by Ocean. Bunbury, like other classical scholars, concluded,

There can be no doubt that Homer in common with all his successors down to the time of Hecataeus [c. 500 B.C.], believed the earth to be a plane, of circular form, surrounded on all sides by the Ocean ....59

There are also hints in Homer (Il 9:183) that the sea was thought of as upholding the earth. And, just as Babylonians and Egyptians thought of the sea below as the source of springs and rivers, Homer (Il 21:195-7) speaks of the ocean being the source of all seas, rivers, springs and wells.

In summary, we see that all scientifically naive tribal peoples (who bring an ocean into their cosmology), all Eastern peoples and Western thinkers down to the fifth century B.C. believed that the sea was a single circular body of water that surrounded the flat earth. In addition (except for later Western thinkers) all of these peoples believed that the flat earth floated on the sea that surrounded it, and that the underlying sea upon which the earth floated was the source of all springs, wells, and rivers on earth including the great Nile and Euphrates.

IV. The Historico-Grammatical Meaning of "Sea (s)" in Gen 1:10

Being a scientifically naive people, it is probable that like other scientifically naive tribal peoples the Hebrews thought of the earth as being surrounded by a circular sea and floating upon that single surrounding sea. The writer and first readers of Gen 1 also inherited Mesopotamian concepts about the natural world from the patriarchs and no doubt were influenced by Egyptian concepts during their stay in Egypt. Moses, in fact, was "educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22; Exod 2:10). It is highly probable, therefore, that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 defined the sea in the same way that all people in the ancient Near East did, namely, as a single circular body of water in the middle of which the flat earth-disc floated and from which all wells, springs and rivers derived their water.60

59 Bunbury, A History, 33; cf. Aeschylus (c. 450 B.C.) "Ocean who coils his energetic current all round the world" (Prometheus Bound, 148-49).

60 See notes 25 and 26 above.
It is very improbable from a historical point of view that the writer and first readers of Gen 1 defined the sea as a body of water embedded in a planetary globe; and the burden of proof lies on anyone who says they did define it that way since there is no evidence that any one in the ancient world before the fifth century B.C. defined it that way. I conclude, therefore, that only a clear statement from Scripture could overthrow the highly probable historical conclusion that the sea in Gen 1:10 was defined by the writer as a single circular body of water in the middle of which the flat earth-disc floated.

Turning to the grammatical side of our study we find that the "sea(s) (יָמִים, yammim) in Gen 1:10 is the name God gave to the "gathered waters." The "gathered waters," Gen 1:7 and 1:9 tell us are the waters which were "under the firmament" as a result of creating a firmament "in the midst of the waters" (Gen 1:6). "The waters of Gen 1:6 in turn refer back to "the waters" of 1:2, that is the Deep (תֵּהוֹם, tehom). The "Deep" (tehom) as is seen in other biblical passages (Ps 104:6; Isa 51:10) and in Semitic cognates (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Eblaite) is a sea. So, the sea of Gen 1:10 is half of the sea of Gen 1:2. That it is half of the sea is the most natural interpretation; and this is confirmed by the parallel in Enuma elish (IV: 137-8) where Tiamat is split in half.61

It seems odd, however, that although the lower sea is gathered into one place (1:9), God names it "seas," plural (1:10). T. L. Fenton was so sure this was contrary to Hebrew usage, he thought the word "one" (יָהֳד, 'ehad) was not part of the original text.62 He argued that the Israelites would not use a plural for a single body of water.

But, KB lists the same singular meaning, "sea," for the plural of yam as it does for the singular. Further there is good reason to believe that KB is correct. The city of Tyre was located only in the Mediterranean Sea, yet Ezek 27:4 and 28:2 describe the city as being located "in the heart of the seas," plural. Further, the singular yam and the plural yammim are occasionally used almost interchangeably in the OT. Compare Jer 47:7 to Judges 5:17 with regard to the Mediterranean Sea. The phrase, "sand of the sea" (Jer 33:22) also seems interchangeable with "sand of the seas" (Jer 15:8).

In any case, one sea, as Judg 5:17 and Ezek 27:4 and 28:2 in particular show, can be called "seas." Given the fact observed by GKC 124a that "The plural is by no means used in Hebrew solely to express a number of individuals or separate objects, but may also denote them collectively," it is not surprising that the overwhelming majority of Hebrew scholars have had no

---

61 This is one of the few sections in Enuma elish which we can be sure is a genuine parallel (Lambert, "A New Look," 293).
problem accepting the plural *yammim* in Gen 1:10 as perfectly good Hebrew with the singular meaning "sea."  

We conclude that the Hebrew text of Gen 1:9 is sound and means that the sea of Gen 1:2, having been divided (Gen 1:6-8) into an upper and lower half, the lower half was gathered together into "one place," which as the historical context shows, is a single circular body of water surrounding the earth-disc.

Further, there is a good reason why this one body of water surrounding the earth is called "sea(s)." It is because like the earth-surrounding Ocean in Homer's cosmology (*Il* 21:195-7) as well as in Pliny's geography (*NH* 2:68:173) and, in fact, in all ancient geography this single body of water surrounding the earth was thought of as connected to all inland seas.  

Hence, it is quite appropriate to call the whole gathered collection "Sea(s)." Indeed, given the ancient concept of one earth-encircling sea with all of the known seas as inlets off of it, it is difficult to think of a more apt name to describe this single yet many-armed sea than the collective name given to it in Gen 1:9,10--"Sea(s)."

As to the shape of this one collection of seas, various OT references show that the Hebrews conceived of it as circular. Prov 8:27b, speaking of creation, says that Wisdom was present "When he (God) inscribed a circle on the face of the Deep." Job 26:10 similarly says, "He has inscribed a circle on the face of the waters as a boundary of light and darkness." Pope, I believe rightly, regards this verse as a parallel to Prov 8:27 and says it refers to the primaeval ocean of Gen 1.

The bronze hemispherical (or cylindrical) sea which was set up in the temple courtyard in I Kgs 7:23 also seems to indicate by its shape that the earthly sea was conceived of as circular. For although a circular water container would not be unusual, this basin of water could easily have been called simply a basin or laver, as was the case with the simpler original (Exod 30:18). Instead, it was called a sea (*yam*). This name "sea" for the laver parallels the name of the laver which was set up in Babylonian temples.

---


64 Harper's Dictionary of Classical Literature and Antiquities ("Oceanus," 1119) tells us that Oceanus in Homer signified "an immense stream, which ... circulated around the terraqueous plain, and from which the different seas ran out in the manner of bays. This opinion, which is also that of Eratosthenes, was prevalent even in the time of Herodotus (iv. 360)."

65 Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 184; cf. Babylonian and Egyptian texts which relate the rising and setting of the sun to the sea that surrounds the earth: Livingstone, *Mystical and Mythological*, 77: "The upper sea of the setting sun ... the lower sea of the rising sun ..."; Egyptian Book of the Dead 5739: "I praise thee [the sun] at thy setting in the Deep; Praise to thee who rises from the Deep."
and called *apsu*, the word for the water surrounding and under the earth. Thus A. R. Johnson having mentioned that in the Hebrew cosmology the earth is supported on the cosmic sea said,

Moreover, it seems clear that the "bronze sea" which figured so prominently in the furnishings of Solomon's Temple was intended as a replica of the cosmic sea....

Prov 8:27, Job 26:10 and I Kgs 7:23, thus, testify that when the sea was gathered into one place in Gen 1:9 that one place was conceived of as circular in shape. This biblically derived definition of the "sea" as a single body of water circular in shape is in perfect agreement with its historical context.

The biblical picture of the earth surrounded by a sea seems to be reflected in several different phrases used in Scripture. Rudhardt introduces us to one of those phrases. After noting that in the cosmographies of many people waters "make up a vast expanse, in the middle of which lies the earth, like an island," he goes on to say that these surrounding waters "may be divided into two oceans, on either side of the world. . . ." The phrase which he thereby introduces is "from sea to sea" as found in Ps 72:8 and Zech 9:10b, both of which describe the geographically universal rule of the coming Messiah as being "from sea to sea and from the river to the ends of the earth."

The context of these verses which are clearly speaking of the geographically universal rule of the Messiah over all nations on earth (Ps 72:9-11; Zech 9:10b; Cf. Ps 2:8 and Mic 5:4) implies that the phrase "from sea to sea" is a reference to the "two oceans on either side of the world", which enclose within their grasp the entire earth, the two oceans "in the middle of which lies the earth like an island." The phrase "from sea to sea" refers to two specific bodies of water, but not to these bodies of water just in themselves but as representative parts of the "two oceans on either side of the world." This understanding of the phrase is strengthened by the fact that in Mesopotamia where a universal sea was understood to be surrounding the world, the phrase "from the lower sea to the upper sea" [both understood as parts of the sea surrounding the world] denotes the entire known world.

---


67 “Water,” *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 15, 354; notice that referring to the water around the earth in terms of two oceans is common.

The biblical terms "eastern sea" and "western sea," especially as used in Zech 14:8, where the context is one of apocalyptic universality, also seem to refer to the eastern and western halves of the ocean that surround the earth.69

Finally, there is reason to believe that the yam sup of Scripture is not simply a reference to the Red Sea as we understand that name nor to the more popular "Sea of Reeds." Rather, it is a reference to the yam sop, the "Sea of the End," that is the sea at the end or edge of the earth.70

The biblical data is thus in complete agreement with the historical data that "earth" and "sea(s)" in Gen 1:10 refer to a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disc lying in the middle of a circular sea.

1. The Earth as Floating on the Sea

With regard to the earth floating on the sea, we are in the happy position of having Ps 136:5, 6 and 7 refer back respectively to the events of the second, third and fourth days of creation as recorded in Gen 1. Ps 136:6 is, thus, parallel to Gen 1:10. Harris recognized this but construed Ps 136:6 as referring "to land masses above the shoreline, that surely is all."71

But Harris made no attempt to exegete Ps 136:6 either historically or grammatically. Instead he lifted the Psalm out of its ancient Near Eastern context wherein the earth does float on a sea, set the Psalm down in the context of modern western science and thereby made verse 6 refer to "land masses" when, as we have seen above, the historico-biblical meaning of "earth" is a single land mass. In addition, he ignored the verb "spread out" (נָפָר, raqa') and thereby made verse 6 say simply "the earth is above the waters."

The verb in Ps 136:6, raqa', according to KB can mean "stamp, beat out" (e.g., II Sam 22:43; Ezek 6:11) or "spread out" (e.g., Isa 42:5). The meanings of the verb are derived from working with metals which when beat out, spread out. The meaning "stamp, beat out" for the verb raqa' does not fit the context of Ps 136:6 and virtually no one has attempted to translate it that way in this verse. This leaves the meaning "spread out," which commentators and translators have regularly employed for this verse. We conclude, thus far, that Ps 136:6 should be translated, "[The Lord who] spread out the earth (נָפָר, 'al) the waters."

The exact relationship of the earth to the waters is expressed by the preposition 'al. The preposition cal usually means "upon" and that is the first meaning given for it in both KB and BDB. Further, the other meanings

69 See note 65 above.
of ‘al all flow out from the meaning "upon." Thus the first thing BDB says about the preposition ‘al is that its meaning is "upon, and hence ...

Unfortunately, the only time the verb raqa’ is used with the preposition ‘al in the OT is in Ps 136:6. But, raqa’ has a close synonym, namely (iii, radad) which also apparently means "beat" or "spread out;" and, this synonym is used with the preposition ‘al in I Kgs 6:32 where it describes overlaying the cherubim with gold plating: "he spread out the gold over or upon (‘al) the cherubim." It seems very probable, therefore, that the synonymous phraseology in Ps 136:6 (especially in the light of Isa 40:19 which uses raqa’ in the sense of "overlay") means that the earth is spread out over or upon the sea. As gold overlays the cherubim in I Kgs 6:32 so the earth overlays the sea in Ps 136:6.72

Ps 24:2 also speaks of the creation of the earth and, hence, is indirectly referring back to Gen 1:10. The Psalm says, God "founded" the earth-continent (בֵּית-כְּרִיט, esres-tebel, v.1) "upon the seas." The word, "upon," is the same Hebrew word, ‘al, as was used in Ps 136:6. Modern scholars of Hebrew regularly translate ‘al in Ps 24:2 as "upon" and so do all English translations that I have seen (KJV, ERV, ASV, NASV, RSV, NEB, Berkeley, Amplified, Moffat, Jerusalem, and NIV).73

The verb, "found," (תָּדַשׁ, yasad) which is used in Ps 24:2 means to lay down a foundational base for a building or wall (I Kgs 5:17 [31]; 7:10; 16:34; Ezra 3:10-12) or to set something upon a foundational base (Cant 5:15; Ps 104:5). With either meaning the most natural meaning of ‘al would be its primary meaning, "upon." This is confirmed by the three other times that ‘al is used in the OT with the verb "found" (yasad): Cant 5:15; Ps 104:5; Amos 9:6. In all three cases, the meaning, "upon," is demanded by the context. Ps 104:5 especially demands that ‘al be translated "upon" in Ps 24:2 because just like Ps 24:2 it is speaking of the founding of the earth. Ps 24:2 is saying, then, that God "founded," that is, firmly placed the earth upon the seas, the seas being a foundational base. The flat earth-continent is resting on the seas. The word "seas" (yammim) reminds us of

---

72 Compare the language of the Finno-Ugric and African descriptions of the earth given above (notes 33 and 34); and see the same language used in Satapatha-Brahman 7:4:1:8 in Sacred Books of the East 41, 364.

Gen 1:10b where God called the gathered waters of the tehom "Seas" (yammim); and this again tells us, as did Ps 136:6 that Gen 1:10 is saying that the flat earth-continent was founded "upon" (or on top of) the sea, fixed in place but floating on the sea, in exact accord with the historical meaning. The word, "rivers," (תֵּהוֹם, neharot) in 24:2b is known from Ugaritic to be simply a synonym of seas, and neharot is clearly used to mean seas in Ps 93:3.74

The picture given to us in Ps 24:2 and 136:6 is quite clear; but there is still more biblical evidence that the earth was thought to float on the sea. For just as the sea below the earth was thought of in the rest of the ancient Near East as an inexhaustible source of water for springs, wells and rivers, so it is in the OT. In the blessings of Joseph first by Jacob (Gen 49:25 [MT 24]) and later by Moses (Deut 33:13) there is a reference to the "deep sea (tehom) lying below" as the source of spring and/or river water for farming.

Gen 49:25(24) speaks simply of the "blessings of the heaven above; blessings of the deep sea (tehom) lying below." Deut 33:13 speaks more fully of Jehovah blessing the land of Joseph "with the precious dew of the heavens and with the deep sea (tehom) lying below." Harris tried to make Gen 49:25 refer simply to the fact that seas like the Mediterranean are lower in level than the land masses.75

The context of Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13, however, has to do with fruitfulness (Gen 49:22, 25), especially agricultural fruitfulness (Deut 33:13-16). The "dew from the heavens above" was a prime source of the water necessary to make agriculture flourish (Gen 27:28; I Kgs 17:1; Hos 14:5; Zech 8:12); so the context implies that the blessing of "the deep sea that lies below" was also to make agriculture flourish (cf. Ezek 31:4). The question is then, were seas like the Mediterranean Sea a source of water to make agriculture flourish? Being salt water, the answer is, of course, no; and even if we force the text to refer to a small fresh water sea like the sea of Galilee, the answer is still, no. Harris's interpretation of the "sea that lies below" in Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 is clearly out of context—both historical and biblical. In context both verses are clear references to a sea (tehom) below the earth. So these verses show us again that the earth was understood in the OT to be floating upon a sea, from which, as in all ancient Near Eastern thought, springs, wells and rivers derived their water.

There is yet another reason why we know Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 refer to a sea below the earth: it was customary in the ancient Near East to pair

references to fertilizing water from above with references to fertilizing water from the sea below the earth. In the Akkadian Atrahasis epic D: 4:54,55, for example, we read,

Above Adad made scarce his rain
Below was dammed up the flood,
So that it rose not from its source.\textsuperscript{76}

In the Ugaritic Aqhat C: 1: 45, 46, we read,

No dew. No rain.
No welling up of the Deep\textsuperscript{77}

In Weinfeld's instructive paper there are more examples and discussion of this ancient Near Eastern pairing of references to water from above with references to water from the deep sea below the earth.\textsuperscript{78} Since there is no question that the paired ancient Near Eastern references are references to the sea beneath the earth, it is most probable that when such pairing occurs in the OT, the references are also to the sea beneath the earth. This confirms that Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 are referring to the sea beneath the earth. Gen 49:25 and Deut 33:13 lead us to the realization that other biblical references to water below are also references to the sea beneath the earth. For example, in Gen 2:5,6 where the 'ed-water from below is contrasted with no rain from above, we believe that Tsumura rightly concluded, "Since the 'ed-water flooded out of the subterranean water in Gen 2:6, in this regard it is related to the tehom(ot)-water, the water of the subterranean ocean."\textsuperscript{79}

We see the same thing in Gen 7:11 and 8:2 where the water for Noah's flood is described as coming both from above and from "all the springs of the great deep (tehom)." The great tehom is, of course, the sea mentioned in Gen 1:10 which was half of the original tehom mentioned in Gen 1:2. It has been suggested that "the springs of the great deep" in Gen 7:11 simply refer to the springs of the visible sea, not to earthly springs from a sea below the earth.\textsuperscript{80} But, this interpretation removes the verse from its historical context wherein the phrase "springs of the great deep" would be understood as inland earthly springs. This suggestion also overlooks the fact that the pairing of this phrase with reference to the waters from above indicates biblically (Gen 49:25; Deut 33:13) as well as historically that the reference is to the earthly fresh-water springs that come up from the sea that was believed to exist below the earth. Earthly fresh-water springs were, in fact,
so closely linked in people's minds with the great to tehom below the earth (Gen 49:25: Deut 33:13) that the earthly springs were themselves sometimes called tehom (Ezek 31:4) or tehomot (Deut 8:7). In context-both historical and biblical--Gen 7:11 is speaking of the water for Noah's flood not only pouring down from above, but, as Wenham put it, "water gushing forth uncontrollably from wells and springs which draw from a great subterranean ocean ("the great deep")."81

Prov 3:20, another verse that pairs water from above (in the form of dew) with water from below, parallels Gen 7:11's reference to the water from below grammatically for it uses the same verb (יִבָּקַע, baqa') to speak of splitting open the springs as was used in Gen 7:11. In addition, the springs in Prov 3:20 are called tehomot which parallels the description of springs in Gen 7:11 where they are called "springs of the great tehom." The springs of Prov 3:20 are thus identified with the springs of Gen 7:11. Since the springs mentioned in Prov 3:20 are in a context of agricultural blessing (paired with "dew"), they must be earthly fresh-water springs. Prov 3:20 thus shows us that the springs of Gen 7:11 are also earthly fresh-water springs and reciprocally Gen 7:11 shows us that the fresh-water springs (tehomot) of Prov 3:20 were fed by the great tehom (sea) of Gen 7:11. The grammar, the historical context, and the fact that the pairing of water from above with water from below regularly refers the water from below to the sea beneath the earth, makes this interpretation sure. Scott, therefore, correctly comments on Prov 3:20: "An echo of Gen vii 11 where the water which submerged the world in the days of Noah is said to have surged up like a tide from the subterranean ocean and fallen from sluices in the sky."82

Gen 2:5, 6; 7:11; 8:2; Prov 3:20 (and II Sam 1:21 as emended by Gordis) all make reference to earthly fresh-water springs having their water supplied by a sea (tehom) beneath the earth.83 These verses all thus indicate that the earth in Gen 1:10 was understood to be resting on a sea.

In summary, according to Pss 24:2 and 136:6, the earth of Gen 1:10 was founded upon the sea, spread out upon the sea. The earth of Gen 1:10 is, thus, a flat earth-continent floating upon the sea. Gen 49:25 (MT 24) and Deut 33:13 speak of a tehom, a deep sea, lying below the earth; so, they also testify that the earth was conceived of as floating upon a sea, a subterranean sea which served as the source of water for springs, wells and rivers just as was believed by everyone in the ancient Near East. Various other OT references confirm still further that the earth in Gen 1:10 was conceived of as floating on a sea.

In conclusion, we see that when Gen 1 is interpreted within its biblical context, the "earth" and the "sea(s)" of Gen 1:10 do not refer to the

continents and oceans on a planetary globe for there is no contextual basis --either historical or biblical--to see a planetary globe in Gen 1. Rather, the historico-grammatical meaning of "earth" and "sea(s)" in Gen 1:10 is that the earth is a single continent in the shape of a flat circular disk floating in the middle of a circular sea, which sea was thought to be the source of water for earthly springs, wells and rivers.

V. Post Script

One might ask the question, does interpreting Gen 1:9, 10 as well as 49:25 (24); Deut 33:13; Pss 24:2 and 136:6 and others according to their historico-grammatical meaning impinge negatively on the biblical doctrine of inspiration? I think not. The biblical references to a flat earth-disc floating in a circular surrounding sea are simply references to the ordinary opinions of the writer's day and a fulfillment as it were of the words of B. B. Warfield, who, as he defined biblical inerrancy, said that an inspired writer could (italics ours)

share the ordinary opinions of his day in certain matters lying outside the scope of his teachings, as, for example, with reference to the form of the earth, or its relation to the sun [or, mutatis mutandis, its relation to the sea]; and, it is not inconceivable that the form of his language when incidentally adverting to such matters, might occasionally play into the hands of such a presumption.84

1544 S. E. 34th Ave
Portland, OR 97214

84 Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Real Problem of Inspiration" in The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1948) 166-67; cf. Calvin's comments on Ps 72:8 with regard to the geographical extent of the kingdom of Christ on earth being described in Scripture as of significantly less geographical size than is actually the case: "... David obviously accommodates his language to his own time. .." (Commentary on the Book of Psalms Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 3:109.
THE FIRMAMENT AND THE WATER ABOVE
Part I: The Meaning of raqia in Gen 1:6-8

PAUL H. SEELY

STANDARD Hebrew lexica and a number of modern biblical scholars have defined the raqia ( Heb. עַרְיָא, "firmament") of Gen 1:6-8 as a solid dome over the earth.1 Conservative scholars from Calvin on down to the present, however, have defined it as an atmospheric expanse.2 Some conservatives have taken special pains to reject the concept of a solid dome on the basis that the Bible also refers to the heavens as a tent or curtain and that references to windows and pillars of heaven are obviously poetic.3 The word raqia, they say, simply means "expanse." They say the understanding of raqia as a solid firmament rests on the Vulgate's translation, firmamentum; and that translation rests in turn on the LXX's translation στερέωμα, which simply reflected the Greek view of the heavens at the time the translators did their work.4 The raqia defined as an atmospheric expanse is the historical view according to modern conservatives; and the modern view of the raqia as a solid dome is simply the result of forcing biblical poetic language into agreement with a concept found in the Babylonian epic Enuma Elish.5

The historical evidence, however, which we will set forth in concrete detail, shows that the raqia was originally conceived of as being solid and not a merely atmospheric expanse. The grammatical evidence from the OT, which we shall examine later, reflects and confirms this conception of

5 Kaiser. Literary Form. 52-57.
solidity. The basic historical fact that defines the meaning of *raqia* in Genesis 1 is simply this: all peoples in the ancient world thought of the sky as solid. This concept did not begin with the Greeks.

The question, however, arises in the modern mind, schooled as it is in the almost infinite nature of sky and space: Did scientifically naive peoples really believe in a solid sky, or were they just employing a mythological or poetic concept? Or were they, perhaps, just using phenomenal language with no attending belief that the sky actually was a solid object? That is, were they referring to the mere appearance of the sky as a solid dome but able to distinguish between that appearance and the reality?

The answer to these questions, as we shall see more clearly below, is that scientifically naive peoples employed their concept of a solid sky in their mythology, but that they nevertheless thought of the solid sky as an integral part of their physical universe. And it is precisely because ancient peoples were scientifically naive that they did not distinguish between the appearance of the sky and their scientific concept of the sky. They had no reason to doubt what their eyes told them was true, namely, that the stars above them were fixed in a solid dome and that the sky literally touched the earth at the horizon. So, they equated appearance with reality and concluded that the sky must be a solid physical part of the universe just as much as the earth itself.

Levy-Bruhl, commenting on the beliefs of scientifically naive peoples and quoting from original reports, wrote,

Their cosmography as far as we know anything about it, was practically of one type up 'til the time of the white man's arrival upon the scene. That of the Borneo Dayaks may furnish us with some idea of it. "They... consider the earth to be a flat surface, whilst the heavens are a dome, a kind of glass shade which covers the earth, and comes in contact with it at the horizon. They therefore believe that, traveling straight on, always in the same direction, one comes at last, without any metaphor, to touch the sky with one's fingers." ... It is the same thing in the Mortlock Islands. "... in reply to our question as to what land lay beyond these islands, the native drew a line to the west of them and explained in a very clear and simple way that yonder, beyond the Paloas Islands, the dome of the sky was too close to the earth to permit navigation; the utmost that could be done was to crawl along the ground or swim in the sea."... Among the Melanesians of the Loyalty Group, "to the mind of the Lifuan, the horizon was a tangible object at no great distance. Many of the natives thought that if they could only reach it they would be able to climb up to the sky."

Such an impression is not peculiar to the races of the Southern Pacific. It is to be met with in South Africa. "Heaven is for them (the Thonga) an immense solid vault which rests upon the earth. The point where heaven touches the earth is called bugimamusi... the place where the women can lean their pestles against the vault."6

---

Among primitive African peoples various stories reflect their belief in a solid sky. The Ngombe say that when the two creatures who hold the sky up with poles get tired, "the sky will fall down." The Nyimang say that long ago the sky was so close to earth that the women could not stir their porridge properly with their long stirrers; so one day "one woman got angry and lifting the stirrer pierced the sky with the upper end."

The Dogon tell of an ancient ancestor who came down from heaven "standing on a square piece of heaven. . . . A thick piece? Yes, as thick as a house. It was ten cubits high with stairs on each side facing the four cardinal points."8

On the other side of the world, among American Indians, the sky was also conceived of as a solid dome. As Levy-Bruhl wrote,

In North America, in Indian belief, the earth is a circular disc usually surrounded on all sides by water and the sky is a solid concave hemisphere coming down at the horizon to the level of the earth. In Cherokee and other Indian myths the sky is continually lifting up and coming down again to the earth like the upper blade of a pair of scissors. The sun which lives outside the hemisphere slips between the earth and the sky-line in the morning when there is a momentary slit, and it returns from the Western side in the evening in the same fashion.9

This idea of the sky lifting up and down, opening and closing a space "between the rim of the sky and the earth" is widespread among North American Indians, some of them believing that this bellows-like movement of the sky caused wind. A number of Siberian tribes believe the opening of the sky allows migratory birds to fly out of this world in the winter and live "on the other side of the celestial vault" until spring. But birds which do not hurry "are caught and crushed between the rocks of the sky and the earth" when the sky closes down.10

Another common American Indian idea reflecting the solidity of the sky is the story of a hero who gained access to the sky by shooting an arrow into it and then another arrow into the first arrow and so on until he had an arrow "ladder" by which he could climb up to the sky. There are similar stories to this from all around the world. In a Chuckchee story a hero throws a needle upwards "as a dart, so that it fastens in the sky"; then he climbs up a thread hanging from the needle. In Australia it is not an arrow or a needle, but a lance that "fastens itself in the celestial vault."11

Still another element reflecting the solidity of the sky is the idea of a window or hole in the sky. This idea is so widespread that one observer

9 Levy-Bruhl, Primitive, 353-55.
11 Hatt, Asiatic, 78-79.
concluded it was "a general human trait." The Seneca, for example, told of a woman who fell through a hole in the sky bringing some soil of the sky with her which she had clenched in her hands while trying "to hold on to the edge of the hole" before she fell. The Navaho in their story of creation not only mention a hole in the sky but specifically describe the solidity of the sky:

They went in circles upward 'til they reached the sky. It was smooth. [They were told of a hole in the sky.] They entered the hole and went through it up to the surface [of the second world above]. When they reached the sky [of the second world] they found it like the sky of the first world, smooth and hard with no opening.

The Cherokee clearly state that the "sky vault . . . is of solid rock." In the far northern reaches of Europe and the Soviet Union the primitive peoples there also give evidence of belief in a solid sky. The Lapps say that the North Star is a nail which supports the sky, but in the last days when Arcturus shoots down the North Star with an arrow "the heavens will fall crushing the earth and setting fire to everything."

In Siberia the Yakuts say the outer edge of the earth touches the rim of a hemi-spherical sky and that "a certain hero rode out once to the place where earth and sky touched." In some districts the Buriats "conceive the sky to be shaped like a great overturned cauldron, rising and falling in constant motion. In rising, an opening forms between the sky and the edge of the earth. A hero who happened at such a time to place his arrow between the edge of the earth and the rim of the sky was enabled thus to penetrate outside the world."

Other stories could be cited, but it is sufficiently clear that scientifically naive peoples around the world from the Pacific Islands to North America, from Siberia to Africa, have perceived the sky as a solid inverted bowl touching the earth at the horizon. Nor is this common conception of a firmament merely myth, metaphor, or phenomenal language. It is an integral part of their scientific view of the universe. It is within the context

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
17 Hatt, *Asiatic*, 63.
of geography, astronomy, and natural science that they really believe that if they would travel far enough they could "touch the sky with one's fingers," that migrating birds live "on the other side of the celestial vault," that an arrow or lance could "fasten in the sky," that the sky can have "a hole in it," that at the horizon "the dome of the sky is too close to earth to permit navigation," that where the sky touches the earth you can "lean a pestle against it" or "climb up it," that the sky is "smooth and hard. . . of solid rock, . . . as thick as a house," that the sky can "fall down" and someday "will fall down crushing the earth."

Equally important, this perception of the firmament is not selective. It is almost completely universal. True, there are occasional variations on the solid dome conception, such as several worlds piled up on top of each other, each with its own firmament; but I know of no evidence that any scientifically naive people anywhere on earth believed that the firmament was just empty space or atmosphere. The only exception to this is the Chinese and that not until AD 200. Apart from a scientific education, it is just too natural for people to think of the sky as something solid. So true is this that it is generally regarded by scholars as "the usual primitive conception." One scholar goes so far as to call it "a general human belief."

I. The Ancient Eastern View of the Sky

Since scientifically naive peoples naturally conceive of the sky as solid, it is no surprise that the records we have from the ancient East echo the same viewpoint. Thus one observer of ancient Japan reports that the sky was thought of as "an actual place, not more ethereal than the earth. . .but a high plane situated above Japan and communicating with Japan by a bridge or ladder. . . . An arrow shot from earth could reach heaven and make a hole in it."

Joseph Needham tells us the Chinese had three cosmological views, but the most ancient one perceived the earth as an upside down bowl with the heavens over it as another upside down bowl, the sky having simply a greater diameter than the earth. The sun and moon were attached to the vault of heaven, which rotated from left to right carrying the heavenly bodies with it. Chinese stories mention heaven and earth being separated from each other, tell us that the sky was once much nearer to earth than it

---

21 Ibid., 54 n. 2.
is today, and speak of the place "where heaven and earth meet," ideas which, if interpreted within their historical context, indicate they believed in a solid sky.23

Interestingly, around AD 200 a school of thought arose in China that posited that the sky was empty space. This is to my knowledge the first and only time that anyone in the ancient Eastern world thought of the sky as not being solid. So novel was this idea even to the West that as late as the sixteenth century a Jesuit missionary to China wrote home saying the idea that the sky is not solid is "one of the absurdities of the Chinese"!24

In India the earliest cosmology is found in the Rig Veda, a document from the middle of the second millennium BC. It contains a number of passages which show that Indians of that time believed in a solid firmament. In one creation hymn an unnamed god is mentioned "by whom the dome of the sky was propped up" (10.121.5; cf. 1.154.1 and 2.12.2). Another hymn asks, "What was the wood... from which they carved the sky and the earth?" (10.81.4). Another says, "Firm is the sky and firm is the earth" (10.173.4). Several hymns mention people who "climb up to the sky" (8.14.14; 2.12.12; 1.85.7). Several hymns mention the separation of heaven and earth. One says Varuna "pushed away the dome of the sky" (7.86.1; cf. 10.82.1).25

Equally important, the hymns of the Rig Veda distinguish the firmament from the "middle realm of space," i.e., the space between the earth and the firmament (10.190.3; 8.14.7). Indeed, the "realm of space" and the "sky" were created from two different sources (10.90.14). The atmosphere is also distinguished from the solid firmament (2.12.2; 10.139).26 As W. N. Brown concluded, the universe of the Rig Veda "was considered to be composed of the earth surface, the atmospheric region, and the sky surface."27

The Sumerologist Samuel Noah Kramer described the cosmology of the Sumerians, the founders of the first civilization, in similar terms. The earth, they thought, was a flat disc; heaven, a hollow sphere enclosed at top and bottom by a solid surface in the shape of a vault.28 Sumerian literature, like the Rig Veda, distinguished between the firmament and the atmosphere. The Sumerians made this distinction by attributing to their air god, Enlil, the original act of separating heaven from earth. Hence Kramer noted the Sumerians believed that between heaven and earth was a substance called *lîl* or wind which "corresponds roughly to our 'atmosphere,' " while they

thought of the firmament as solid, possibly composed of tin since the Sumerian word for tin is literally "metal of heaven."\textsuperscript{29}

We have no description of the Hittite cosmology, but we do know they thought of the sky as solid, for a recovered text speaks of a time when they "severed the heaven from the earth with a cleaver."\textsuperscript{30}

The Egyptian Pyramid Texts (ca. 2000 BC) seem to speak of the sky as being made of metal.\textsuperscript{31} Max Muller accepted this idea and went on to say the Egyptians apparently believed the firmament was made specifically of iron. He says, "This conception of a metal dome explains some expressions of later times, such as the name of iron, be-ni-pet ('sky metal'), or the later word for 'thunder,' khru-bai (literally, 'sound of the metal') i.e., thunder was evidently explained as the beating of the giant sheets of metal which constituted the sky."\textsuperscript{32}

Whatever the case may be as to exactly what material the ancient Egyptians thought the sky was made of, they certainly believed it was solid. A number of texts speak of the time when the sky was literally separated from the earth. Pyramid Text 1208c specifically mentions the time "when the sky was separated from the earth," and, although this was a historic event of creation, Text 854c seems to imply that the sky was separated from the earth daily in order to let the sun enter (a concept reminiscent of American Indian ideas).

Text 1156c mentions that "his (Shu's) right arm supports the sky"; and 2013a says, "Thou art a god who supports the sky."\textsuperscript{33} Various of the Coffin Texts (ca. 2050 to 1800 BC) reiterate these ideas of the sky needing support, e.g., spells 160, 366, 378, and 664. Pyramid Text 1040c more prosaically points to the two mountain ranges on the east and west sides of the Nile as the "two supports of the sky." In either case the fact that the sky needed supporting clearly shows that the Egyptians thought of it as solid; and Text 299a implies that if the supporting arms of Shu were hacked off, the sky would fall. Also clearly showing that the Egyptians thought of the sky as solid is the fact that they like the Sumerians and Indians in the Rig Veda distinguished between the sky (firmament) and the atmosphere. The sky

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 70, 83. cr. S. N. Kramer, 

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{ANET}, 125.


\textsuperscript{33} Cf. \textit{ANET}; 33 n. 2. The Deir el-Bahri papyrus picture can be seen in \textit{IDB} 2.57.
was personified by one goddess, Nut, while the air which upheld the sky was personified by an entirely different deity, Shu.34

In Babylonian thought the solidity of the firmament is most clearly seen in Tablet IV of Enuma Elish, particularly in lines 137-38 where Marduk, having killed Tiamat, "split her in half like a shellfish, and from one half made and covered the heavens." Or, as Heidel translated the passage, with half of Tiamat Marduk "formed the sky as a roof."35 The solidity of the sky is also seen in Tablet V:9-11 where Marduk "opened gates on both sides" so that the sun could pass through morning and evening; and then "In her belly he placed the zenith" (i.e., the Pole star).36

This brings us to the historical meaning of raqia\(^c\) in Genesis 1. Everyone agrees that raqia\(^c\) means "sky," but modern conservatives deny the meaning "solid sky" or "literal firmament." But on what basis can it be denied that the Hebrews believed the sky was solid? Scientifically naive peoples everywhere have believed the sky was solid, and there is no reason to believe the Hebrews were any less scientifically naive than their neighbors. Since, from a cultural standpoint, the Hebrews' pre-Solomonic architecture and pottery were "vastly inferior" to that of their neighbors, one might gather that the early Hebrews were possibly more scientifically naive than their neighbors, but certainly not less so.37 Similarly, the fact that it was not the Hebrews but their neighbors who led the technological advance from the use of bronze to the use of iron (cf. Josh 17:18; Judg 1:19) suggests, if anything, that the Hebrews were more scientifically naive than their neighbors. It certainly does not suggest that they were less so. Nor do we know of any evidence from biblical times that suggests the Hebrews were ever more scientifically sophisticated than their neighbors.38 Accordingly, it seems most probable that so far as the physical nature of the sky is concerned, the Hebrews, as a typical scientifically naive people, believed the raqia\(^c\) was solid.

The voice of the past would also have had a strong influence upon the thinking of the Hebrews as it has on all peoples and especially ancient peoples for whom the voice of the past was the voice of authority. For the


Hebrews the voice of the past was the voice of the patriarchs and Abraham in particular, men who most likely held the Babylonian view of the sky as solid. The Babylonian background of Genesis 1-11 can scarcely be missed, and if one were to date that background it appears to come from the time of the patriarchs.39 Taken within its historical context, then, the probability again is that the *raqia* in Genesis 1 was understood to be solid.

At the same time Egyptian influence should not be totally disregarded.40 Not only did the Hebrews spend several centuries in Egypt, but Moses, through whom much of the higher theology came (and who wrote Genesis 1 according to conservative thought), was schooled in the thinking of the Egyptians. That schooling would certainly have included the assumption that the sky was solid, a belief that forty years of living with a primitive tribe (according to Exod 2:15) would only have strengthened. And, of course, the Hebrews had a continuing relationship with Egypt throughout their history. With this Egyptian background in mind we must again say that probably the *raqia* of Genesis 1 should be defined as solid.

It is true that Genesis 1 is free of the mythological and polytheistic religious concepts of the ancient Near East. Indeed it may well be anti-mythological. But, as Bruce Waltke noted when commenting on the higher theology of Israel as it is found in Genesis 1, the religious knowledge of Israel stands in contrast to Israel's scientific knowledge.41 In addition, the religious knowledge of Israel, though clearly superior to that of its neighbors, was expressed through the religious cultural forms of the time. Temple, priesthood, and sacrifices, for example, were common to all ancient Near Eastern religions.42 It should not surprise us then to find the religious knowledge of Israel also being expressed through the merely scientific forms of the time.43

Considering that the Hebrews were a scientifically naive people who would accordingly believe the *raqia* was solid, that both their Babylonian and their Egyptian background would influence them to believe the *raqia* was solid, and that they naturally accepted the concepts of the peoples around them so long as they were not theologically offensive, I believe we have every reason to think that both the writer and original readers of Genesis 1 believed the *raqia* was solid. The historical meaning of *raqia* in Gen 1:6-8 is, accordingly, "a solid sky."

---


Only by taking Genesis 1 out of its historical context could one say that *raqia* means merely "an atmospheric expanse" or, as the more sophisticated conservatives say, "just phenomenal language." In the ancient world the sky was not just phenomenal. The ancients did not just refer to the appearance of the sky as being solid. They concluded from the appearance that the sky really was solid, and they then employed this conclusion in their thinking about astronomy, geography, and natural science. The *raqia* was for them a literal physical part of the universe, just as solid as the earth itself. Solidity is an integral part of its historical meaning.

When the original readers of Genesis 1 read the word *raqia* they thought of a solid sky. And so did virtually everyone else up to the time of the Renaissance! After the time of Christ there were occasional dissenters, but by and large Jews and Christians, Greeks and barbarians all believed the firmament was solid.

Jews speculated as to what material the firmament was made of: clay or copper or iron (*Apoc. Bar.* 3.7). They differentiated between the firmament and the empty space or air between it and the earth (*Gen. Rab.* 4.3.a; *2 Apoc. Bar.* 21.4). They tried to figure out how thick it was by employing biblical interpretation (*Gen. Rab.* 4.5.2). Most tellingly they even tried to calculate scientifically the thickness of the firmament (*Pesab.* 49a).

Christians speculated as to whether it was made of earth, air, fire, or water (the basic elements of Greek science). Origen called the firmament "without doubt firm and solid" (*First Homily on Genesis*, FC 71). Ambrose, commenting on Gen 1:6, said, "the specific solidity of this exterior firmament is meant" (*Hexameron*, FC 42.60). Augustine said the word firmament was used "to indicate not that it is motionless but that it is solid and that it constitutes an impassable boundary between the waters above and the waters below" (*The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, ACW 41.1.61).

Greeks from Anaximenes to Aristotle set forth as scientific fact that the firmament was made of a crystalline substance to which "the stars are fixed like nails." This idea was passed on for centuries via Ptolemy's *Almagest*. The barbarians meanwhile worried about the sky falling on them if they did not keep their promises!

Astonishing as it may seem to the modern mind, with very rare exceptions the idea that the sky is not solid is a distinctly modern one. Historical evidence shows that virtually everyone in the ancient world believed in a solid firmament. Accordingly it is highly probable that the historical meaning of *raqia* in Genesis 1 is a solid firmament. Certainly anyone denying the solidity of the *raqia* in Genesis 1 bears a heavy burden of proof. It seems to me that nothing short of a clear statement to the contrary made by an OT writer could allow one in good conscience to set aside this clear historical meaning.

II. The Biblical-Grammatical Meaning of raqiaכ

Does any statement or phrase appear in the OT which clearly states or implies that the raqiaכ is not solid? Does anything in Genesis 1 state or imply the raqiaכ was not (or was) solid? The fact that it was named "heaven(s)" in Gen 1:8 and birds fly in the heaven(s) (Deut 4:17) seems to imply the raqiaכ was not solid. But the word samayim (heaven[s]) is broader in meaning than raqiaכ. It encompasses not only the raqiaכ (v. 8; Ps 19:6; 148:4) but the space above the raqiaכ (Ps 2:4; 11:4; 139:8) as well as the space below (Ps 8:8; 79:2). Hence birds fly in the heavens, but never in the raqiaכ. Rather, birds fly upon the face or in front of the raqiaכ (Gen 1:20).

This phrase upon the face (surface) or in front of the raqiaכ is important in that it implies the raqiaכ was neither space nor atmosphere. For birds do not fly upon the surface or in front of space or air, but rather in space or air. This distinction is illustrated in the case of fish, which no one would say swim upon the surface or in front of the water (Gen 7:18) but rather in the water (cr. Exod 7:18, 21).

Gen 1:17 also testifies that the raqiaכ is not air or atmosphere for it says that God placed the stars (and probably the sun and moon) "in the raqiaכ or the heavens." But the stars are not located in the air or atmosphere. So we know the raqiaכ (in which 1:17 locates them) cannot be air or atmosphere. Even if 1:17 is construed as phenomenal language, the raqiaכ still cannot be air or atmosphere. For the stars do not look like they are located in the air or atmosphere. Rather (as anyone can tell on a clear night away from city lights) they look like they are embedded in a solid vault which is exactly why scientifically naive peoples believe in a solid vault, and why 1:17, in accordance with that belief, says God placed the stars in the raqiaכ.

Gen 1:14-17 is such a clear proof that the raqiaכ is not air or atmosphere that some conservatives have tried to dissociate the raqiaכ in vv. 14-17 from the raqiaכ in vv. 6-8. But the statement in v. 14, "Let there be lights in the firmament or heaven," immediately raises the question, What "firmament of heaven"? To which the context immediately replies, the firmament of vv. 6-8 which was called heaven. The contextual identity of the two firmaments is really beyond question. Taken in context it is impossible to say the raqiaכ of vv. 6-8 was just air or atmosphere.

On the contrary. For when God divided the light from the darkness (two intangibles) nothing was made. But in order to divide the tangible upper ocean from the lower ocean the raqiaכ was made ( חוּם ). The combination or dividing two tangibles (as opposed to intangibles) with something that was made ( חוּם ), a verb which often means "manufacture," implies a tangible, i.e., solid divider. It would be unnatural to use חוּם to say that God made space. Nor is it a particularly apt word for saying God made air. If a nonsolid divider had been in mind for separating the primeval ocean, the idea could have been communicated in a much more natural way. It could have been simply said that God put room ( מָקוֹם ) or space ( חוֹר ) as in Gen.
32:16 (17), or space (רֶחֶם) as in Josh 3:4, between the two bodies of water. If air (a word never appearing in the OT) had been in mind as the divider, נֶשֶׁר ("wind") could have been used, as in Exod 14:21, or נְפָשׁ ("breath") as in Gen 2:7; Ps 150:6.

If the writer wanted to communicate the idea of a nonsolid divider, his choice of the word raqi֓א was particularly unfortunate since its verbal cognate raqא ("stamp, beat, spread out") is used of hammering metal into thin plates (Exod 39:3) and hence suggests that a raqi֓א was something hammered out, an idea consonant with both Egyptian and Sumerian views of the sky. In addition a Phoenician cognate (mrqא) means "plating."\(^{46}\)

Conservative writers usually try to avoid this implication of solidity by stressing the meaning "expanse" or "thinness" for raqi֓א and pointing out that Isaiah also speaks of the sky as a curtain or tent (Isa 40:22) or scroll (Isa 34:4). But in Isa 42:5 the earth is called an "expanse" (raqi֓א) without in any way implying that it is not solid. So even if the raqi֓א in Genesis is translated "expanse," this in no way implies that it is not solid. And even though gold can be beaten very thin, it never loses its solidity.

As for Isaiah, he never says God made a curtain or tent or scroll as Genesis says God made a raqi֓א. Rather he says the sky is like a curtain or tent or scroll. His statements are always poetic similes, but Gen 1:7 is not a simile (nor is it just phenomenal language). Gen 1:7 makes a prosaic statement about the creation of a part of the universe, a part just as physical as the earth, sea, sun, or moon. The statements in Genesis and Isaiah are not really comparable.

We see then that Gen 1:17 and 1:20 testify that the raqi֓א is not air or atmosphere. The verbal cognate of raqi֓א, as well as the use of the verb יָסָר ("made"), in 1:7 imply the raqi֓א was solid. More important, the purpose and function of the raqi֓א imply its solidity, for it functions as a horizontal dam (cf. 7:11; 8:2; Ps 148:4), holding back a mighty heavenly ocean. The water above the firmament is not clouds as some rationalize (and we shall delineate this fact more fully in Part II), for while the sun, moon, and stars are in the raqi֓א (v. 14), the waters of the upper primeval ocean are above the raqi֓א (v. 7).\(^{47}\) This ocean over the raqi֓א, indeed resting upon it (Gen 7:11; 8:2; Ps 148:4), tells us quite clearly that the firmament is a physical part of the universe. It is not just phenomenal language as it might have been if Genesis were a modern Western book. Rather it is an ancient Near Eastern concept similar to if not related to that found in Enuma Elish Tablets IV and V.

As for the rest of the OT, the word raqi֓א is used a number of times but usually in contexts that do not help us define the word any further than saying it means "sky." But in Ezekiel 1 the nature of a firmament is described. This is the clearest description of a raqi֓א found in the OT. It was

\(^{46}\) E. J. Young, Studies in Genesis One (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1964) 90 n. 94.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.
a divider of some kind over the heads of four cherubim (vv. 22-25), and on top of it was a throne with a man on it (v. 26). As to the composition of this firmament, it looked like "terrible crystal or ice."

Inasmuch as the throne mentioned was apparently sitting on this firmament (cf. Exod 24:10) and the firmament looked like crystal or ice, it is apparent that the firmament is solid and is certainly not mere atmosphere or space or simply phenomenal language. Nor does anyone to my knowledge doubt that it was solid. Even conservatives admit the firmament in Ezekiel 1 is solid. Having then this clear definition of a raqia כ as a solid divider, one is hermeneutically bound to interpret the raqia כ in Genesis as solid unless there is some clear reason to differentiate the one from the other.

As it turns out there is no reason to differentiate the raqia כ in Ezekiel 1 from the raqia כ in Genesis 1. On the contrary, there is good reason to identify the one with the other. For we can see in Ezekiel that above the firmament is the throne of God in glory (vv. 26-28) just as above the firmament of heaven described in Genesis is the throne of God in glory (1 Kgs 22:19; Ps 2:4; 11:4; 103:19; Isa 6:1; 14:13; 66:1). Also the firmament in Ezekiel looked like it was made of crystal, exactly the substance that primitive peoples believed the sky was made of.48 These two similarities between the firmament in Ezekiel and the firmament in Genesis could hardly be coincidental. The firmament in Ezekiel 1 must be related to the firmament in Genesis 1, and a number of commentators have made the identification.49 Eichrodt, for example, calls the firmament in Ezekiel a "copy of that vault of heaven." The NT confirms the virtual identity of the firmament in Ezekiel and the firmament in Genesis by combining them into one image (Rev 4:6; 15:2).50

We ought then on both biblical and hermeneutical grounds to interpret the nature of the raqia כ in Genesis 1 by the clear definition of raqia כ which we have in Ezekiel 1, and all the more so since the language of Genesis 1 suggests solidity in the first place and no usage of raqia כ anywhere states or even implies that it was not a solid object. This latter point bears repeating: there is not a single piece of evidence in the OT to support the conservative belief that the raqia כ was not solid.51 The historical meaning of raqia כ, so far

50 Note the "sea" (Genesis 1) and the "eyes" (Ezekiel 1) in Rev 4:6. See also commentaries on Revelation, especially by R. H. Charles. It might also be noted that although Exod 24: 10 does not use the word raqia כ, it testifies to the solidity of the firmament as well as to the idea that it was crystalline by saying that the "pavement" under God's feet was "like the material or substance of heaven in transparency."
51 The conservative interpretation (if an interpretation that rejects the historical-grammatical meaning of Scripture can be called conservative) rests on two arbitrary assumptions. One, that ancient men would conceive of the sky the same way modern men do (cf. J. Orr,
from being overthrown by the grammatical evidence, is confirmed by it. The historical-grammatical meaning of \textit{raqia$^c$} in Gen 1:6-8 is very clearly a literally solid firmament.

It is to the credit of E. J. Young that, although believing in biblical inerrancy as much as any other conservative, he alone did not alter or rationalize the historical-grammatical meaning of \textit{raqia$^c$}. In his Studies in Genesis One he defined \textit{raqia$^c$} as "that which is hammered, beaten out" and noted that "the LXX $\sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\rho\varepsilon\omega\mu\alpha$ and Vulgate firmamentum are satisfactory renderings."\textsuperscript{52}

Additionally and finally, the historical-grammatical meaning of \textit{raqia$^c$} possibly illustrates the words of B. B. Warfield, who said as he defined biblical inerrancy, that an inspired writer could share the ordinary opinions of his day in certain matters lying outside the scope of his teachings, as, for example, with reference to the form of the earth, or its relation to the sun; and, it is not inconceivable that the form of his language when incidentally adverting to such matters, might occasionally play into the hands of such a presumption.\textsuperscript{53}

Certainly the historical-grammatical meaning of \textit{raqia$^c$} is "the ordinary opinion of the writer's day." Certainly also it is not the purpose of Gen 1:7 to teach us the physical nature of the sky, but to reveal the creator of the sky. Consequently, the reference to the solid firmament "lies outside the scope of the writer's teachings" and the verse is still infallibly true.

1544 S.B. 34th Ave.
Portland, Oregon 97214

in principle by C. Gaenssle, "A Look"). Two, that God would not speak in Scripture to ancient men in terms of the ordinary opinions of their own day (cf. article 12 from the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy's Nineteen Articles in R. C. Sproul, \textit{Explaining Inerrancy}, ICBI 1980, 28-27). Both assumptions are contrary to Scripture (cf. Seely, \textit{Inerrant Wisdom}).

52 Young, Studies, 90 n. 94.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Westminster Theological Seminary
2960 W. Church Rd.
Glenside, PA 19038
www.wts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
THE PRE-MOSAIC TITHE: ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Mark A. Snoeberger*

In Leviticus 27 the Mosaic Law expressly commands the practice of tithing, codifying it for all Israel as a combined act of spiritual service and economic obligation for the advancement of the nation. This codification, however, was by no means the birth of the tithe, but a new expression of the ancient Near Eastern tithe infused with theological significance for the new political entity of Israel.¹

The payment of tithes was no novel practice, having been performed for centuries by both biblical figures and pagans alike. It is well attested that the tithe² was present in the very earliest of cultures—Roman, Greek, Carthaginian, Cretan, Silician, Phoenician, Chinese, Babylonian, Akkadian, and Egyptian—stretching back to the earliest written records of the human race.³ This extra-biblical practice of tithing must, of course, be considered when searching for the origin of the tithe. Was the tithe a divinely conceived custom, original with Yahweh and unique in its expression, or was tithing a divine adaptation of an originally pagan custom, bequeathed with theological significance by divine fiat? Further, was the tithe an act of worship alone, or a demonstration of political subservience: a primitive form of taxation? Or was it a combination of the two?

Many scholars (including most liberals) contend that the levitical

*Mr. Snoeberger is Director of Library Services at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary in Allen Park, MI.


² The author intends the term in its technical sense—a tenth. As John E. Simpson notes of the nearly universal pagan practice of tithing, "the amount so given was almost invariably one-tenth" (This World’s Goods [New York: Revell, 1939], p. 88). Cf., however, Joseph M. Baumgarten, "On the Non-literal Use of ma’aser/dekate," Journal of Biblical Literature 103 (June 1984): 245-51.

institution was borrowed strictly from early contemporary heathen practices. On the other pole, some, generally more conservative, scholars contend that the universality of the tithe and the failure of attempts to discover its origin within secular sources point to a much more ancient practice—-one instituted by God at the very dawn of human history.

To make either claim, one must look to the early chapters of Genesis for clues to the genesis of the tithe. If, indeed, concrete evidence for its origin can be discovered here, one can be assured that the tithe originated with God and that it was revealed by him from the very earliest times to mankind. Failure to discover the origin here does not rule out the possibility of divine origin, but it does render the origin of the tithe an argument from silence for either position. It is, therefore, the purpose of this essay is to probe the OT material, beginning with the sacrificial practices of Cain and Abel, continuing with the unprecedented payment of tithes by Abram to the priest of the most high God, Melchizedek, and concluding with Jacob's intention to tithe, for clues to the genesis of the pre-Mosaic tithe. We will then decide whether sufficient evidence exists to confirm its divine origin, then discuss briefly its relationship to the levitical tithe and its continuing applicability (or non-applicability) today.

THE GIVING PRACTICES OF CAIN AND ABEL (GENESIS 4:3-7)

So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard. So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." 

In an attempt to establish the continuity of the tithe throughout human history, several older conservative scholars adopted an alternative

---


5 Landsell, Sacred Tenth, 1:38; Babbs, Law of the Tithe, pp. 24-25.

6 All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the 1995 edition of NASB.
text and translation to affirm that Cain's and Abel's sacrifices establish tithing as early as Genesis 4. The LXX reading of verse 7 apparently reflects the Hebrew "לֹּמִהל" (to dissect or divide) rather than the MT's "לֹּהַת" (reflected in NASB's "at the door"). The resulting English translation of verse 7 identifies Cain's sin as his failure to "divide rightly." Furthering this conclusion is an alternate reading of a NT text, Hebrews 11:4, namely, that "Abel offered unto God a more abundant\textsuperscript{7} sacrifice than Cain." The conclusion drawn from these combined readings is that Cain's sin was specifically a failure to give an adequate percentage of his income to God. The percentage, it is deduced, must be none other than a tithe.\textsuperscript{8} This understanding is not unreasonable, as it follows the reading of the LXX, the text (though not the interpretation) of the early church fathers.\textsuperscript{9} However, the difficulty of this reading and the high degree of accuracy of the MT at this point have led most modern commentators to reject this reading out of hand,\textsuperscript{10} and with it the implied reference to proportional tithing by Abel.

The Occasion

The preceding discussion does not render the Cain and Abel incident as having no value to the discussion of the tithe. On the contrary, herein is the first recorded instance of an offering presented to God in the OT--offerings that would later be expanded to include the tithe.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{7} The term in question, πλεῖον, includes in its range of meaning both the qualitative idea of excellence and the quantitative idea of abundance (BAGD, p. 689), though most NT commentators have understood the usage in Hebrews 11:4 to be qualitative, that is, "a better sacrifice."

\textsuperscript{8} Landsell, \textit{Sacred Tenth}, 1:40-41; Babbs, \textit{Law of the Tithe}, p. 25.


\textsuperscript{11} The use of the word "expanded" in not intended to imply that the Israelite "cult" evolved on its own apart from the sovereign hand of God, as is asserted by many liberals.
The background of this incident is meager. We are no sooner told that Cain and Abel have been born when we suddenly find the boys as men, each with the respective occupations of agriculturalist and herdsman. After a period of time, both bring an offering to Yahweh. Cain brings some of the vegetables and fruits resulting from his labor as a farmer, Abel an offering of some of his livestock. For some reason not specified in this text, Yahweh rejects the former but receives the latter.

Several obvious questions arise from the narrative. How did Cain and Abel know to bring an offering to Yahweh? What was the nature of their offering? Why was Cain's offering rejected and Abel's accepted? And, ultimately, does their gift have any bearing on the levitical tithe or on the NT believer? Naturally, a correct understanding of the term used for this offering (הֵמָּן) is essential to the understanding of the purpose of the sacrifices presented in Genesis 4. We begin here in our search for the tithe in the OT.

**The Term Employed**

Many have concluded that the offerings of Genesis 4 were intended as atoning, expiatory sacrifices, based on the assumption that God's displeasure with Cain's offering stemmed from his failure to give a blood sacrifice. This theory fails on two counts. First, the term used to describe the offering, הֵמָּן, is elsewhere used of a bloodless sacrifice, and is the standard term used in the levitical code for the meal offering. Here in Genesis 4 Moses avoids using readily available, general terms that (see below); instead, it simply recognizes the progress of divine revelation which expands man's knowledge and adjusts his responsibilities. We need not, indeed, must not see the shadow of the Mosaic code veiled in the Cain/Abel narrative; nonetheless, this first recorded sacrifice does give us insight into God's expectations and the means by which he communicated them to early believers.

Robert S. Candlish, *An Exposition of Genesis* (reprint ed., Wilmington, DE: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1972), p. 65. Scofield sees the sin offering in the phrase "sin is crouching at the door." The term for sin (רחש) may refer to sin or to its sacrificial remedy, the "sin offering." Thus, Yahweh was informing Cain that he had not done well, and that his only solution was to offer a blood sacrifice (*The Scofield Reference Bible* [New York: Oxford, 1909], p. 11). The identification of this רחש as a crouching beast (ךְבָּרו), however, makes this option unlikely.

J. H. Kurtz goes so far as to say that the הֵמָּן was "exclusively" bloodless (*Sacrificial Worship of the Old Testament*, reprint of 1863 edition [Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980], pp. 158-59), as does Hamilton (*Genesis*, 1:223), though 1 Samuel 2:17 and 26:19 indicate otherwise. The term has a broader meaning than its technical sense as a meal offering (*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "הֵמָּן." by Richard E. Averbeck, 2:980-87). It is best to conclude that the הֵמָּן was usually bloodless, and in its prescriptive, levitical sense (which is not the case here) was always bloodless.
The Pre-Mosaic Tithe

denote blood sacrifice (e.g., נָא). While we may not extrapolate levitical language anachronistically onto the Genesis 4 incident, Moses' usage of the same term he would later use for the meal offering strongly suggests that this sacrifice was not intended to be viewed as a sin or guilt offering. Second, the event is predicated on the culmination ("in the course of time"—מנפ יב ובו [v. 3]) of a lengthy period of agricultural productivity ("Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" [v. 2]), indicating that this was no ordinary expiatory sacrifice, but a special, additional offering--one of thanksgiving for God's abundant blessing. Thus it is roughly, though not exactly, equivalent to Israel's firstfruits or meal offerings, not to their regular sin offerings or tithes. The term מְנִנָה, in its non-technical usage, is also frequently associated with payment of tribute or taxes (Gen 32:13 [14 MT]; Judg 3:15, 17-18; 1 Sam 10:27). For this reason, it may be suggested that Cain and Abel's gifts were mandatory. However, the term may simply be employed "as an expression of respect, thanksgiving, homage, friendship, dependence," which functions do not all imply obligation.

The Reason for Cain's and Abel's Offerings

Having deduced, then, that this was an offering additional to the ordinary expiatory sacrifices, we move on to discover why the offering was given. While biblical revelation gives us no precedent or mandate for this type of offering, God's displeasure with Cain's offering implies that Cain failed to meet some divinely revealed requirement. We have already rejected the possibilities of the inappropriate content or quantity of the sacrifice. Other options include inadequate quality in the offering.

15 I assume that the practice of expiatory sacrifices has been a theological necessity in every dispensation to effect forgiveness of sins and right standing before God. Cain's and Abel's gifts were mandatory, however, did not fall into this category.
17 Waltke suggests that the 1 opening v. 4 is adversative, highlighting the "fat" and "firstborn" elements of Abel's sacrifice in contrast to Cain's mere offer of "some" of his fruits and vegetables ("Cain and His Offering," p. 368; cf. also Delitzsch, Genesis, pp. 180-81; Hermann Gunkel, Genesis [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997], pp. 42-43; Allen P. Ross, Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988], pp. 157-58); Kenneth A. Matthews, Genesis 1:1-11:26; NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), pp. 267-68. We note, however, that there is no equivalent of fat for Cain's offering, nor does Moses specify that Cain's offering was not of the firstfruits. John Sailhamer, in fact, suggests that Cain was also
deficient integrity in the offerer, or even the simple possibility that Abel was the object of God's elective prerogative while Cain was not -- the text does not specify. The NT commentary is simply that Abel's offering was offered "in faith" while Cain's was not (Heb 11:4). This may imply that God had given explicit instructions regarding expiatory and other sacrifices; however, this argument flows purely from silence. All that can be conclusively deduced is that Cain's sacrifice did not issue from faith, but from other, inferior, motivation.

Conclusion

The offerings of Cain and Abel give evidence that men professing to be God-fearers, from earliest times, brought offerings to Yahweh (v. 3) from their bounty. There was, however, no percentage specified, nor any purpose delineated other than direct worship and gratitude addressed to God. Thus, there is little to link these offerings with the basis of the ensuing levitical tithe, nor to shed light on its continuing applicability. While it is possible that God may have established binding requirements for offerings in the OT apart from written revelation, we certainly cannot deduce from the Cain and Abel narrative that the tithe was among these requirements.

**ABRAM'S TITHE TO MELCHIZEDEK**
**(GENESIS 14:17-24)**

Then after his return from the defeat of Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him, the king of Sodom went out to meet him [Abram] at the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King's Valley). And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand." He gave him a tenth of all. The king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself." Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have sworn to the LORD God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a

---


The Pre-Mosaic Tithe

sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing except what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their share."

We move onward from Cain and Abel in our quest for the genesis of the tithe in the OT to Abram's unprecedented tithe paid to Melchizedek, king of Salem and priest of the most high God. It is in this passage that the technical term "tithe" (מָצָאת) is first used in Scripture, making it the first recorded instance of OT tithing. In this incident is found the most promising data for the current study, thus a large segment of the essay will be dedicated to it.

**The Occasion**

In Genesis 14, Abram is informed that a band of marauding monarchs led by Chedorlaomer had sacked the pentapolis that included Sodom; where his nephew Lot was living. Many of the goods of the city had been seized, and Lot had also been taken captive. Abram gathers a small band from his household, attacks and defeats the marauders in an unlikely nighttime foray, pursues them far to the north, and recovers what had been stolen. Emboldened by Abram's remarkable success, king Bera of Sodom travels northward to the "King's Valley" just south of Salem to meet Abram. He is joined by the local king, Melchizedek, in the valley. King Bera begrudges Abram the spoils but asks for the recaptured citizenry. Melchizedek, identified here as a priest of the most high God (לֶלֶךְ צְדָקָה), brings out bread and wine to refresh and reward Abram and his men, blesses Abram repeatedly, and blesses Abram's God for the victory. As a biblically unprecedented reciprocation, Abram gives to Melchizedek a tenth of all (presumably of all the spoils). The rest of the spoils are then meted out and the incident is closed.

**The Term Employed**

The Hebrew term for "tithe" (מָצָאת) is simply the adjectival form of the number ten, מִתְנָחָה.21 The term is used infrequently in Scripture apart from the levitical and deuteronomistic legislation concerning its contribution within the assembly. The term's employment is by no means complex, but it is precise. The tithe is an exact tenth, and is not used in a generic sense to refer to multiple types of offerings of varying amounts.22

In Ugaritic and Phoenician sources the tithe was generally paid as

---

21 BDB, p. 798.
the standard unit of taxation owed to the throne. While priests sometimes collected this tithe, there was often no idea of worship involved--the priests were viewed as any secular recipient of the tithe would be. Further, it is apparent that, even when the priests collected the tithe, the state, and not the religious personnel, controlled its distribution. This is contrary to the Mosaic legal practice, where, in all recorded situations save one (1 Sam 8:15-17), the tithe was paid to Yahweh through the hand of the priest, and presumably dispensed by the same.

The ancient Near Eastern tithe was paid to the king on everything earned by the subjects of the throne, including produce, animals, and loot won in battle. For this reason it is not unusual that Abram paid a tithe. What is unusual is the abruptness of Melchizedek's appearance, the lack of explanatory details concerning his kingship and priesthood, and the mystery surrounding his relationship to Abram. These enigmas must be resolved along with other questions, such as whether Abram was paying tithes to Melchizedek as his king or as his priest (or both) and whether the tithe Abram paid was voluntary or mandatory. A brief look at Melchizedek is in order to answer these questions.

**The Recipient of Abram's Tithe—Melchizedek**

Because Abram's tithe, unlike that of the other pre-Mosaic offerings, involves a human as well as a divine recipient, and because that recipient's role seems even more prominent than Abram's in the context of the narrative, Melchizedek merits special study. Rising suddenly to prestige in verse 18 and vanishing just as suddenly a scant two verses later, Melchizedek's function raises many questions. This brief study cannot answer them all, but will endeavor to answer two: What did Melchizedek's offices entail, and what was Abram's relationship to these offices?

**Melchizedek as King**

Several questions must be answered concerning Melchizedek as king before conclusions may be drawn about the tithe paid him. First, what

---

25 Ibid., p. 123. This is not to say that the Mosaic tithe had no secular function--the Mosaic tithe provided poverty relief (Deut 14:28). However, its primary function was to finance "the service of the tent of meeting" and to provide for the Levites "who have no inheritance" (Num 18:21-32).
was the nature of his kingship and the extent of his realm? Second, and closely related to the first, what was Abram's political relationship to the king?

Melchizedek's Realm

The term "king" (יְלֵד) may be misleading for the reader accustomed to the pomp and prestige of present-day royalty. The fact that at least six kings occupied such a small area of southern Palestine suggests that the kingdoms were quite small and the kings little more than local chieftains who ruled a city and the small tract of surrounding land used by his constituency. This is further attested by the fact that little extrabiblical material survives to tell us about these "kingdoms." On the other hand the marauding eastern kings were apparently much more powerful, one each from the Elamite, Amorite, Hurrian, and Hittite empires. This is not to say, however, that these kings represented the full force of these empires, nor that these empires were in the height of their glory when the invasion occurred.

Melchizedek's realm was the city of Salem. This inexplicable shortening of "Jerusalem" has led many scholars, even conservative ones, to at least entertain the possibility that this was not Jerusalem at all, but another town, perhaps Shiloh, Shechem, or Samaria. Since, however, Psalms 76:2 (3 MT) and 110:2, 4 identify Melchizedek's realm with "Zion," and since the common identification of the valley of הַיוֹשֵׁב (v. 17) is confirmed by 2 Samuel 18:18 to be the junction of the nearby Kidron and Hinnom Valleys, there is no doubt that the city, was Jerusalem. There is nothing to suggest, however, that Meichizedek’s reign in Jerusalem had any special significance to the narrative. Jerusalem was no "holy city" until David's establishment of the seat of his kingdom and the tabernacle (and later Solomon's temple) there.

26 Philip J. Nel indicates a wide range of meaning for the term, the minimum element being the exercise of rule over a realm, whether that be of a tribe, city-state, or larger territory such as a country or empire (NIDOTTE, s.v. "יְלֵד," 2:956).

27 Hamilton, Genesis, 1:399-400; Speiser, Genesis, 1:106-8.

28 For an overview of the options posited, see J. A. Emerton's article, "The Site of Salem, the City of Melchizedek (Genesis xiv 18)," in Studies in the Pentateuch, ed. J. A. Emerton, Supplements to Vetus Testamentum XLI (Leiden: Brill, 1990): 45-71.

29 Contra Driver, Genesis, p. 164.

30 In fact, the Jebusite occupation of the city until David's conquest of the city in 998 B.C., recorded in 2 Sam 5:6-8, makes it one of the last Canaanite cities to be conquered by Israel.
Melchizedek's Royal Relationship to Abram

Since it is widely held in liberal circles that the narrative concerning Melchizedek (vv. 18-20) is a fictional, secondary insertion, very little scholarship has been spent studying the historicity of Melchizedek or the correlation of the Melchizedek pericope with the local context.\(^{31}\) This void of serious study makes Melchizedek's relationship to the surrounding kings and to Abram difficult to discern.

Some propose that Melchizedek's was the smallest of the kingdoms in the narrative, suggested by his lack of involvement in the defensive campaign.\(^{32}\) Perhaps he could spare no men but could provide some provisions for the victors.

Others have suggested that Salem, since it is to be associated with Jerusalem (Ps 76:2 [3 MT]; 110:2, 4), the most prominent and advantageous geographical location for a city in the region, would have been the capital of a very important city-state in Palestine.\(^{33}\) Its presidency over the "valley of kings," apparently a very famous and important place in the ancient Near East\(^ {34}\) also suggests that Melchizedek's kingship was a powerful, even a supervisory one. Wenham suggests that his dual role as king and priest would have made him a wealthy and hence a powerful king, as evidenced by his supply of "royal fare" for Abram.\(^ {35}\) He further suggests that his supply of bread and wine was his duty as the "dominant ally."\(^ {36}\) There is no explanation given, however, why Melchizedek, if he was so dominant, did not become involved in the military action. It is also inconclusive that bread and wine were "royal fare" or that Melchizedek's wealth exceeded that of the other local kings.

It seems, therefore, unlikely that Melchizedek exercised authority as an overlord over Abram and the five western kings. This factor is of considerable importance for discussing the tithe paid by Abram--it is unlikely that the tithe represented a tribute or tax paid as a matter of duty to Abram's ruler.

Melchizedek as Priest

Having established the unlikelihood that Melchizedek's regal

\(^{34}\) Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 279.
\(^{35}\) *Genesis*, 1:316.
\(^{36}\) Ibid.
authority extended over Abram, we now turn to Melchizedek's role as priest of the most high God (יהוה שפתי דת). We face similar questions with Melchizedek's priesthood as we did with his kingship--What was the nature of his priesthood and the extent of his authority as priest? Second, and again related to the first, what was Abram's spiritual relationship to Melchizedek?

Melchizedek's Priesthood

Melchizedek is labeled by Moses as a נחֵל--a priest. This is the first mention of a priest in the OT, though the concept was not new. A priest is someone who stands in the gap between God and man, representing man to God and God to man.37 We note, then, that Abram, Noah, and presumably all godly familial heads and clan-leaders in the pre-Abrahamic era functioned as microcosmic priests in a limited capacity as primitive mediators of what would later become the theocratic kingdom.

The first consideration in the study of Melchizedek's priesthood is a very basic one--Whom was Melchizedek serving as priest? The text indicates that the deity served was called "the Most High God" (יהוה שרי). What has been of considerable debate is whether this deity is to be identified with Yahweh, the God of Abraham, or with some local deity.

Liberals have generally contended that יהוה שרי was a local deity.38 Based on their assumption that the Hebrew religion began with Abram and over time evolved into modern Judaism, they naturally contend that a reference to Abram's Yahweh in this pericope would be anachronistic. This contention is furthered by their conclusions that the shortened names for מִשְׁמֵיהָ, יהוה, and שרי are very late developments,39 heightening the anachronism of seeing Yahweh in Genesis 14:18-20. Further complicating the matter is the absence of the article on שרי, suggesting that this is a local god, and not the Hebrew God. Instead, it is assumed that the use of שרי is the widely used Semitic term for various and sundry gods, a term which Israel later borrowed as a designation for her evolving God.

This theory is fraught with bad exegesis and unbiblical assumptions. First, it must be noted that the absence of the article is common with compound names for God,40 rendering its absence here ancillary to the discussion. Second, the Hebrew term יהוה שרי has no secular parallels other

---

37 NIDOTTE, s.v. "נח"ל," by Philip Jenson, 2:600.
38 Speiser, Genesis, 1:104; Westermann, Genesis, 2:204; Driver, Genesis, p. 165; Gunkel, Genesis, pp. 279-80. Wenham also takes this view (Genesis, 1:316-17).
39 Speiser, Genesis, 1:104.
40 Delitsch, Genesis, 1:409.
than a rather recently developed Phoenician god, whom Philo labeled as Ἐλιοῦν, ὁ ὑψηλότατος, who even liberals admit emerged long after the Israelite usage had been established (Num 24:16, Deut 32:8, etc.). We conclude with Speiser and Gunkel that the term was not borrowed by Israel from her pagan neighbors; rather, Israel's neighbors borrowed the term from her.⁴¹ Further, as Hamilton points out, the late Phoenician deity Ἐλιοῦν was the grandson of ἴτη.⁴² Thus, even if a correlation is attempted, it fails to give us a single god, but two separate ones. In only one other occasion in all known ancient Near Eastern literature are ἴτη and Ἰαβγ found together—in Psalm 78:35 of the Hebrew canon, and that with reference to the God of Israel.⁴³ We conclude that there is simply no evidence for a god by the name of Ἰαβγ ἴτη in the Canaanite or any other pantheon.

Furthering this conclusion is later revelation in Psalm 110, where Melchizedek's priesthood is discussed with reference only to ἴτη—neither ἴτη nor its cognates are mentioned in the entire psalm. Sealing the matter is Hebrews 5:6, 10, where the Greek equivalents of both ἴτη and ἴτη (κυρίος and θεός) are used interchangeably in the context of the priesthood of Melchizedek. There is no question that the Ἰαβγ ἴτη whom Melchizedek served as priest was Abram's God, the God of Israel. Indeed, as Homer Kent points out, "it is inconceivable that [Abram] would have acknowledged the priesthood of anyone other than a representative of the true God."⁴⁴ We add to this that Abram would never have acknowledged anyone put the one true God as the "creator of heaven and earth" and the God who gave him victory in battle (vv. 19-20).

We move on now to discuss the extent of the authority of Melchizedek's priesthood. It apparently was a common practice in the ancient Near East for a king to function as a priest for his people.⁴⁵ In fact, it is apparent that Abram himself functioned in much the same capacity, building altars and offering sacrifices (functions of a priest) while functioning as the leader of his clan as a "mighty prince" (MygiloxxyWin), a term translated as "king" (βασιλεύς) in the LXX version of Genesis 23:6. This is in keeping with the dispensational setting of Melchizedek's day. As yet there had been no establishment of a single central altar.

⁴¹ Speiser, Genesis, 1:104; Gunkel, Genesis, p. 280.
⁴² Genesis, 1:410.
⁴³ Cf. also Psalm 7:17 (18 MT) for the use Ἰαβγ with ἴτη.
⁴⁵ Gunkel, Genesis, p. 280; Westermann, Genesis, 2:204-5; Wenham, Genesis, 1:316.
There had been no formal introduction of Abram as the priest for the world, though it had been privately revealed that his was to be the chosen line to bring blessing to all the nations. Thus it seems likely that, until this point, the dispensation of human government was in effect. God-fearers of this period approached God through their various God-fearing clan-leaders--such as Melchizedek.

This solution, however, only leads to another question. If Melchizedek had jurisdiction as priest only within his own clan (there being no biblical basis for regional high priests with hierarchical sovereignty over lesser priests) why did Abram recognize Melchizedek as his priest?

Melchizedek's Spiritual Relationship to Abram

If Melchizedek's jurisdiction extended no further than his clan, the tithe paid by Abram to Melchizedek seems a bit out of place. Hebrews 7:7, however, in discussing Abram and Melchizedek, insists that, "without any dispute, the lesser is blessed by the greater," thus implying that Melchizedek was in some sense greater than Abram when he blesses Abram, and, presumably, when he received tithes from Abram.

Alva J. McClain recognizes the complexity of this passage and acknowledges the possibility that "in the era before Abraham there were other kings who held a similar mediatorial authority between their subjects and the true God." He goes on to theorize that it was "this precise point in Biblical history...[that] marks the end of an era and the beginning of a new order of things." Melchizedek's blessing effectively heralded for the whole world that the mediatorial idea was being localized in "concrete form historically in miniature." The theory makes Melchizedek roughly comparable to other transitional figures, such as Anna, Simeon, and John the Baptist, who, having announced the arrival

46 This essay assumes, with most commentators, that the tithe was paid by Abram to Melchizedek, although the text is perhaps less than absolutely explicit on this point. R. H. Smith contends that it was Melchizedek who paid the tithe as an attempt to bribe the warlike Abram to leave the area ("Abraham and Melchizedek," Zietschrift fur die Altes-
tamentliche Wissenschaft 77 [1965]: 134). This narrow view ignores, however, the broader context of Scripture (Hebrews 7) and the traditional understanding of the passage (LXX). J. A. Emerton objects to Smith's view, but asserts that leaving Abram as the tither contradicts verse 23, where Abram is said to have given all the spoil back to the king of Sodom ("Riddle," p. 408). But this is not what verse 23 says. It says, in fact, that Abram would not take anything that belonged to the king of Sodom. This statement does not preclude his tithing or giving the culturally accepted share owed to hired mercenaries (see below).

47 The Greatness of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 50.
48 Ibid., p. 51.
49 Ibid., p. 50
of the Messiah, faded into oblivion. Representative of this view before McClain was none other than Robert S. Candlish, who, though no dispensationalist, on this one point sounds like one:

Melchizedek, as the last preserver, as it were, of the primitive patriarchal hope, hands over his function to one more highly favored than himself, in the very spirit of the Baptist—"He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). His own occupation, as a witness and standing type of the Messiah, is over; one newly called out of heathenism is to succeed and to take his place. He hails in Abram the promised seed, and blesses him accordingly. Thus the Patriarchal, the Abrahamic, and the Levitical dispensations appear, all of them, in their true character, as subordinate and shadowy.\(^{50}\)

Although the theory cannot be verified (McClain and Candlish argue from silence that Melchizedek relinquished his priestly functions after this incident), there is much to commend it. The timing is correct, since Abram's call was quite recent. The public announcement is appropriate, for without it no one would have been aware of the dispensational change. The prominence of Melchizedek's delivery of blessings (יָרַת is employed three times in the two verses of Melchizedek's brief discourse) is also significant in light of the reciprocal blessings promised in the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:1-3) to those who would bless Abram. Melchizedek's repeated blessings and his disclosure that God was blessing and being blessed\(^{51}\) specifically through Abram announced to the listening world that Abram had been specially selected by God as his unique mediatorial representative.\(^{52}\)

The question still remains, however, why Melchizedek was viewed as "greater" than Abram, able to give him a blessing, and worthy of receiving his tithe. The commentaries are generally silent on this issue, and the question is difficult to answer. It seems best to understand that

---

\(^{50}\) Genesis, p. 143.

\(^{51}\) The action of blessing implied in the term יָרַת, as explained by Hebrews 7:7, always flows from the greater to the lesser. It is no contradiction, however, that Melchizedek "blessed" God. While active blessing (the impartation of something of value to someone) can never be offered by mortals to God, men can "bless" God in a "passive and stative sense" by speaking highly of him or attributing praise to him (NIDOTTE, s.v. יָרַת, by Michael L. Brown, 1:764). Hebrews 7:7 is by no means at odds with Genesis 14:20.

\(^{52}\) Victor Hamilton completely misses the point of the repeated use of יָרַת when he begrudges Abram his blessings while his 318 companions went unmentioned with the sarcastic comment, "As one would expect, it is the general, not the private, who gets the kudos" (Genesis, 1:409). It is not because Abram was the "general" that he got the "kudos"; it was because he was one with whom God had covenanted to make a great nation and to be a source of blessing to all the nations.
Melchizedek was not permanently or personally superior to Abram, but that at that moment Melchizedek stood between God and Abram and as the better. Indeed, any time a person stands in the place of God his superiority is instantly, if temporarily, confirmed by virtue of the God he represents. McClain's comments (above) may also be informative: Melchizedek, representing the authority of the old dispensation, was ceding the reins of the incipient mediatorial kingdom to its new mediator, after which time Abram became superior to Melchizedek.

We thus conclude that Abram's recognition of Melchizedek as a superior was not because Melchizedek was some type of regional high priest, hierarchically presiding over all other lesser priests in the area. Nonetheless, for the moment, Melchizedek stood in the place of God, and, as such, exercised temporary spiritual authority over Abram, an authority which Abram recognized by the giving of a tithe.

The Reason for Abram's Tithe

In the previous section we established that the basis for Abram's tithe was the (temporarily) superior priesthood of Melchizedek. We now move to Abram's purpose for giving him a tithe. Was it a social (political) function or an act of pure worship? Was it mandatory or voluntary?

Some suggest that Abram's was a primitive payment to the deity for making him victorious in battle. This is generally a liberal idea and is held only by those who deny that Melchizedek was a priest of the one true God.

Others, chiefly those who view Melchizedek as a theophany, view

53 Kent, Hebrews, p. 129.
54 By using this qualifier the author is not intending to negate the arguments of Hebrews 5-7 or Psalm 110. For typological purposes, that moment of superiority was captured by the later authors and coupled with a few of the sudden and mysterious factors surrounding the appearance of Melchizedek in Scripture to provide vivid illustrations of the superiority of Christ. As with all types there is not a one-to-one correspondence between every detail, thus it is not necessary to elevate Melchizedek to some mysterious or supernatural plane to preserve the analogy between him and Christ (as some have done by suggesting that Melchizedek's appearance in Genesis 14 was a theophany). Melchizedek, it should be concluded, was simply a literal, historical human being whose life was directed by God to serve as a type of Christ (See Kent, Hebrews, pp. 124-27).
56 A more radically liberal idea, held by Gunkel (Genesis, p. 281) and Driver (Genesis, pp. 167-68), is that the character Melchizedek was pseudepigraphal, being invented, along with the legend of the Jebusite coalition, in David's time to lend legitimacy to the establishment of his new capital in Jerusalem.
the gift as a direct act of worship to God.\textsuperscript{57}

Still others suggest that the tithe was rendered to Melchizedek as his share of the spoils of battle in compensation for his role in the conquest of the four invading kings, a "postbellum distribution of the booty, in which the spoils are distributed equally between those who personally fought. . . and for those who for one reason or another did not actively engage in the fighting."\textsuperscript{58} This reminds us of similar incidents in Numbers 31:17 and 1 Samuel 30:21-25, where personnel left behind were afforded shares of the spoils despite their failure to actively participate in the battle.

While this last theory is attractive, it has a few flaws. First, the tithe to Melchizedek is set apart from the rest of the distribution of the spoils—the tithe occurs in verse 20, but the provisions for distribution of the spoils are not made until the very last verse of the chapter. Further, Abram's tithe is mentioned in close proximity to Melchizedek's priestly blessing of Abram, suggesting that his tithe-giving had a purely spiritual purpose, not a politico-cultural one. The king of Sodom clearly did not understand this exchange, and apparently thought that the division of spoils had begun in v. 20. He immediately jumped in and made his bid for the people of his city, abandoning all hope of regaining anything else. Abram's negative response is quite revealing: he wanted no blessings, material or spiritual, from the wicked king of Sodom to becloud or overshadow the priestly blessing he had just received from Melchizedek, nor create any sense of obligation of Abram to Sodom.\textsuperscript{59}

As a result, he renounced all claim to the spoils. Third, Abram's comments in verse 23, that he would not take anything that rightly belonged to the king of Sodom, seems to indicate that, after Melchizedek's tenth and a small mercenary stipend for the efforts of Abram's companions, the rest of the spoils went back to their previous owners. This is in contrast to the ancient Near Eastern custom. While the spoils belonged legally to Abram,\textsuperscript{60} simple kindness required him to return the property to its rightful owners.

It seems most likely that the tithe was paid to Melchizedek as a voluntary reciprocation for the priestly functions performed by Melchizedek and a thank offering given to God for the success of the military excursion.\textsuperscript{61} As such it represented a willing consecration of a

\textsuperscript{57} Candlish, \textit{Genesis}, pp. 142-46.
\textsuperscript{58} Hamilton, \textit{Genesis}, 1:413.
\textsuperscript{60} Wenham, \textit{Genesis}, 1:317.
\textsuperscript{61} Delitzsch, \textit{Genesis}, 1:410.
portion of the goods to God through the hand of the priest, in acknowledg-
ment that the whole belonged to God. It also represented
Abram's recognition that the dispensational baton, as it were, was being
passed to him by its legitimate forebear.

Why Abram chose a tenth and not some other amount is not ex-
plained. As has been already demonstrated, payment of a tenth was a
universal practice in the ancient known world. We may hypothesize that
God, though unrecorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, established the tenth
as a general figure to be spent on priestly administration, but it may be
that this amount was simply selected by Abram as a reasonable amount
to fulfill sacrificial duty to God. Nor have we ruled out the idea that the
custom was merely adopted from Abram's heathen neighbors. Genesis
26:5, which informs us that Abraham obeyed God, along with all his
commandments, statutes, and laws, could point to the first of these op-
tions, but there is no clear link of 26:5 with the specific statute of tith-
ing.

We may only speculate about Melchizedek's subsequent usage of the
tithes he received, but it seems likely that they went to finance the
priestly services provided by Melchizedek as a mediator for God.

Conclusion

While Abram's tithe apparently meets with God's approval, several
factors lead us to conclude that it has little bearing on the levitical tithe
and on our current practice. First, the tithe mentioned here is unique to
the transition between the dispensations of human government and
promise and has no genuine parallels in the rest of Scripture. Second, the
silence as to the origin of and the apparently voluntary nature of
Abram's tithe render it unlike anything in the rest of biblical experience.
Abram's tithe had a purpose, origin, and nature distinct from the Mosaic
institution.

JACOB'S PROMISED TITHE (GENESIS 28:18-22)
So Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put un-
der his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the
name of that place Bethel; however, previously the name of the city had
been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and
will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and
garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the

62 Candlish, Genesis, p. 142.
63 See W. W. Barndollar's extensive discussion of this verse in his "The Scriptural
64 Ibid.
LORD will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You."

The second and only other OT mention of the tithe prior to the giving of the Mosaic Law comes in the form of a tithe promised to God by Jacob after his ladder vision at Bethel and God's reaffirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant to Jacob there (vv. 10-15). As in the Abram/Melchizedek narrative, the Hebrew term רספם is used, so we are sure that it is an actual tithe in question. Since this term has already been discussed, we move directly to a study of the occasion of this promised tithe to understand its purpose and to glean insights into the validity and continuing applicability of Jacob's practice.

The Occasion

The event comes at a particularly turbulent period in Jacob's life, a fact which weighs heavily on our study. In chapter 27, Jacob, true to his name, had completed the two-fold deception of his father and brother, and had successfully stolen the birthright away from Esau. Esau's resultant rage and apparent intent to kill Jacob for the deception led Jacob, at his mother's bidding and with the blessing of his father, to flee to the house of his uncle, Laban, until his brother's anger abated.

In route to Laban's house Jacob is arrested by a dream in the city of Luz (which he later renamed "Bethel")). In the dream, Yahweh renewed the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob. In so doing, Yahweh confirmed to Jacob that he was the chosen son through whom the covenant blessings would flow. Jacob awakens in fear and quickly erects an altar at the site of the dream and gives a sacrifice of oil on an altar to God. Upon making the sacrifice he offers up a vow to God that he would make Yahweh his God and give him a tenth, presumably of all his possessions, so long as Yahweh spared him, provided for his needs, and prospered him during his sojourn at his uncle's residence. God was true to his promise, but there is no indication whether or not Jacob fulfilled his vow.

Again, questions arise from the narrative that affect our understanding of the promised tithe. Was Jacob's promised tithe an act of faith or part of some sort of inappropriate "bargain" made with God? If the latter, can Jacob's tithe be considered normative or foundational to the study of the tithe in the rest of the OT, or have any bearing on its practice (or non-practice) today? Whether or not the vow was actually fulfilled, what was the reason and purpose for Jacob's tithe?

The Spiritual State of Jacob

While most evangelicals have maintained that this dream finds or at least leaves Jacob converted, there are three factors in the narrative and
one in Genesis 32 which indicate that Jacob's vow to tithe to Yahweh was an illegitimate act of worship.

First, Jacob's reaction of fright upon the appearance of Yahweh indicates an improper relationship to God. Many commentators take the reaction by Jacob to be a healthy, reverential awe of God and his description of the site as "awesome," inducing genuine worship. If this is the case, Jacob's succeeding actions denote consecration. This is a legitimate interpretation of the terms employed. In fact, the "fear of the Lord" seems to be the OT equivalent for faith (Prov 1:7). The Hebrew root קָרָא ("to fear"), represented in the Jacob narrative by the Qal imperfect and niptal participle respectively, however, has a wide range of meaning, extending from a meaning of "reverence" or "respect" on one pole to "terror" or "fright" on the other. The present context favors the second pole. First, whenever the term is used elsewhere of Jacob in subsequent contexts, it clearly denotes "fright," that is, fear that caused him to respond by running or conniving, rather than trusting (e.g., 31:31, 32:7, 11). Second, Jacob's ignorance that God could be here in Luz (v. 16) may indicate that he was shocked to find God here. Waltke and O'Connor concur, demonstrating from the emphatic adverb כִּי that the verse conveys "a sudden recognition in contrast to what was theretofore assumed." If this is the case, then Jacob is betraying a woeful lack of knowledge and respect for the Almighty. Third, as Hamilton points out, this is the only instance in the patriarchal narratives (except possibly 15:12) that a theophany is ever met with astonishment or fright. The other patriarchs always "took theophanies in stride." Further developing the "fright" idea of the term קָרָא is Jacob's apparent lack of faith in the explicit promises of God. After hearing the promises, Jacob makes a conditional vow whose conditions were the very promises he had just received from Yahweh. In verse 15 Yahweh promises to be with Jacob, to keep him, and bring him back to the land. Jacob responds in verse 20 that if indeed God remains with him, keeps


68 Hamilton, Genesis, 2:244.

69 Ibid., 2:243-44.


71 Genesis, 2:245.
him safe, clothes and feeds him, and returns him to the land, then he
would make Yahweh his God, pay tithes, etc. By thus casting his con-
version in the future, Jacob is apparently refusing to exercise faith at this
time. Some suggest the conditional particle, מִּי (“if”) used here precludes
a genuine contingency, instead meaning “since,” or “forasmuch as,”
much like the Greek first class condition. However, the grammar of this
passage suggests otherwise. In his remarks about conditional clauses, Ge-
senius comments:

With regard to the difference between מָיְשֵׁךְ (ְאֶלָּמָא) and מָיְשֵׁשֵׁךְ (לְלִוְּאָ), the
fundamental rule is that מָיְשֵׁשֵׁךְ is used if the condition be regarded either as al-
ready fulfilled, or if it, together with its consequence, be thought of as
possibility (or probability) occurring in the present or future. In the former
case, מָיְשֵׁשֵׁךְ is followed by the perfect, in the latter (corresponding to the
Greek ἐν with the present subjunctive) by the imperfect or its equivalent
(frequently in the apodosis also).

The immediately following lead verb (ְֽיָֽבֵֽה) is in the imperfect, and all
the succeeding verbs of the protasis are cast in the perfect with the I con-
secutive (making their function equivalent to the imperfect), clearly
demonstrating that the vow represents a genuine contingency. Thus,
his actions of building an altar and his promise to tithe on his livelihood
are not deeds of faith; instead, they are wary, fearful acts of a trapped
person to appease and "strike a bargain" with God.

To the grammatical argument we add an obvious theological one.
The sheer brazenness of a mortal establishing a conditional covenant
with the Almighty gives evidence to Jacob's unconverted state. To place
God under obligation to act a certain way and to stipulate that God
must fulfill certain obligations before one consecrates himself is not an
act of faith but an audacious challenge to God's sovereignty, inspired by

72 Hamilton suggests that the latter half of verse 21 is actually part of the protasis,
not part of the apodosis (Genesis, 2:248). As such the verses should read, "If God stays
with me... protects me... gives me bread to eat and clothing to wear, and I return safely
to my fathers house and if Yahweh shall be my God; then this stone... shall be God's
abode... and a tenth will I tithe to you" (2:237-38). This interpretation does little to
change the "bargaining" arrangement proposed by Jacob.
73 Candlish, Genesis, pp. 294-95; also Barndollar, "Scriptural Tithe," p. 108.
(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. 494-95. On p. 496, the very passage in question is
used as an example of genuine contingency. Cf. also Waltke and O'Connor, Hebrew
Syntax, pp. 526-27.
75 Barndollar makes a serious error in affirming that "all the verbs which follow מִּי
in verses 20 and 21 are perfect" ("Scriptural Tithe," p. 108), a faulty affirmation which
he uses to support his theory that there was no actual contingency in Jacob's vow. The
grammar, in fact, proves quite the opposite.
unbelief.

Finally, the events surrounding Jacob's dream at Peniel and his wrestling match there (32:24-32 [25-33 MT]) indicate that this latter event was the actual conversion of Jacob. The name change (v. 28 [29 MT]) from Jacob ("deceiver") to Israel (probably "let God rule") is not a mere change of name, but is representative of a change in character—from a depraved self-server to one who recognizes and submits to God's sovereignty. Likewise, Jacob's naming of the site "Peniel" ("the face of God") is not due to his struggling with God himself, but because he has finally come to a point where he has recognized Yahweh as his God and, much to his relief, is enabled to exercise true faith in the promises made to him at Bethel so many years before. The contention that Jacob's conversion experience took place at Peniel, then, naturally precludes its occurrence at Bethel or some prior occasion.

One notable objection to such a late conversion date for Jacob, and perhaps the reason why most commentators assume Jacob to be saved in Genesis 28, is the bequest of the Abrahamic promises to Jacob at Bethel. It is contended that God's reiteration of the Abrahamic promises to Jacob assumes his salvation. This, however, is a logical non sequitur. The OT teems with examples of beneficiaries of national election, even heads of the mediatorial kingdom, who were never converted (e.g., many of the judges and kings, most notably, Saul). The unconditional covenant promises given nationally to the patriarchs and their descendants had no direct bearing on their individual election to salvation (Rom 9:6). Thus it was not necessary for Jacob to have been a believer to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant.

This author, with a fair degree of confidence asserts, then, that Jacob's vow to tithe was made while he was yet unconverted. This fact, coupled with the silence as to the fulfillment of the vow render this reference to tithing a rather slender strand of evidence for affirming the foundation of the levitical tithe or asserting an ongoing tithe in our present dispensation.

The Reason for Jacob's Promised Tithe

The fact that Jacob settled on a tithe as opposed to some other

---

76 Hamilton, *Genesis*, 2:334. There is a bit of debate regarding the exact meaning of this name. The scope of this essay, however, does not require interaction with the debate except to assert that the change of name signals a change of heart.

77 Whether or not the "man" with whom Jacob struggled was a preincarnate form of Christ is a matter of considerable debate; however, since this is not, apparently, the source of the name "Peniel," the issue will be left unresolved.

amount may indicate that he had some prior exposure to the tithe. Jacob may have been following the lead of his grandfather or other God-fearers with whom he was acquainted. In light of Jacob's faulty view of the extent of God's presence, authority, and faithfulness to His promises and of Jacob's willingness to demean God's sovereignty by "bargaining" with Him, it is more likely that he was borrowing the tithing practice of the surrounding pagans. As with Abram, no clear conclusions may be drawn.

Nor is it certain what the purpose or method of payment was if, indeed, Jacob fulfilled his vow. While Abram still had a priest external to himself, it seems unlikely, if McClain's and Candlish's theory\(^\text{79}\) is correct, that any legitimate priests of Yahweh remained to whom Jacob could pay his tithes.\(^\text{80}\) Perhaps he would have consumed the tithe on an altar to Yahweh, or used it to finance priestly duties performed among his family. Again, the text gives us no sound answers.

**Conclusion**

Because Jacob's promised tithe resembles, even derives from, the heathen practices of his neighbors, it adds little to our study. The basis for the levitical tithe certainly does not derive from Jacob's practice. This fact, coupled with Jacob's unconverted state and the silence of Scripture as to the fulfillment of Jacob's vow, should cause us to dismiss Genesis 28 from consideration in the quest for the genesis of the tithe.

**IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRE-MOSAIC TITHE FOR PRESENT-DAY INSTITUTIONS**

If tithing were confined to the Mosaic Law it would be easy to dismiss its validity today. In that the Mosaic Law has been set aside in the work of Christ (Rom 10:4,2 Cor 3:7-11, etc.), tithing, as part of that unified legal corpus, would also be set aside.\(^\text{81}\) The pre-Mosaic tithe complicates the issue, raising the possibility that the tithe might be a trans-dispensational practice, part of the moral code of God, and thus a continuing obligation for NT believers.

There can be no denial of the fact of tithing before the Law;

\(^{80}\) Cf., however, Barndollar, "The Scriptural Tithe," p. 111.

\(^{81}\) To be sure, many a covenant theologian would recoil at such a statement and assert that the law is still in effect and the command to tithe is still in vogue (e.g., Edward A. Powell and Rousas J. Rushdooney, *Tithing and Dominion* [Vallecito, CA.: Ross House, 1979], pp. 11-14). The scope of this essay does not include this issue, so it will be left for others to debate. Instead this section will address the continuing validity of the tithe strictly on the basis of the pre-Mosaic practice.
however, the assertion of a continuing principle necessitates more than a mere mention of the term "tithe" prior to the giving of the Law. As Pieter Verhoef, a non-dispensationalist, concedes, "a pre-Mosaic custom does not, as a matter of course, transcend the Old Testament dispensation, becoming an element of the universal and timeless moral code."82

There must also be clear evidence that the tithe was divinely mandated before the Law or somehow sourced in God's nature. Further, there must be a parallelism between the practice of the tithe in the pre-Mosaic period and that in our present experience.

**God's Nature and Mandate and the Pre-Mosaic Tithe**

Many suggest that the universal practice of the tithe and the failure of attempts to identify its origin in the secular realm point to its divine origin and continuing practice from Adam onward.83 Others do not trace the practice to Adam, but contend that God gave Abram direct revelation, and "started allover," establishing a new precedent with Abram that was continued by Israel,84 and presumably today. There are many flaws with this theory.

First, it has already been established that neither Abel's nor Jacob's practices are legitimate paradigms for a biblical tithe. Thus, we are left with only Abram's practice to prove that the tithe was practiced by all God-fearers for the millennia prior to the giving of the Law. This hasty generalization from a single datum of evidence renders the argument very weak.

Second, universality of practice in the secular realm does not prove that God is the originator of the tithe. This is yet another logical non sequitur. It seems far more reasonable that Abraham was not acting by divine mandate, but in accordance with the ancient Near Eastern customs of his day.85

83 Landsell, *Sacred Tenth*, 1:38; Babbs, *Law of the Tithe*, pp. 24-25. E. B. Stewart further maintains that «divine acceptance...is a demonstration of a divine institution" (*The Tithe*, p. 37). This is a classic example of a non sequitur.
85 This possibility in no wise reduces Israel's religion to a conglomeration of pagan practices that evolved into a final form. God clearly created the OT Jewish legal system by divine fiat, and was by no means bound to pagan customs in his formation of the Law. On the other hand, neither was he obliged to avoid all pagan customs in the formation of the Law. Timothy H. Fisher, for instance, notes that the pagan practice of circumcision predates God's institution of circumcision in Genesis 17 by hundreds of years ("A Study of the Old Testament Tithe," [Th.M. Thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, 1990])
Third, there is no basis for claiming that Israel derived her practice of tithing from Abraham or Jacob. On the contrary, it is clear that "the normative significance of tithing must be considered within the context of the ceremonial law." Indeed, both post-pentateuchal injunctions for Israel to pay tithes reference the Law as the impetus for the injunction, not the practice of the patriarchs (Neh 10:36-39; Mal 3:7-10).

Fourth, there is never an appeal to God's nature or to creation as a basis for tithing. How a mere percentage, apart from an explicit command, can take on moral value is impossible to establish.

Fifth and in summary, the hypotheses that the pre-Mosaic tithe had its basis in God's command, God's nature, or God's approval all argue from silence.

Parallels to the Pre-Mosaic Tithe

Another argument against the continuing applicability of the tithe is the simple lack of present-day parallels to the pre-Mosaic practice.

First, Abram's tithe was apparently a one-time act, not a regular giving pattern. There is no record of Abram's return to Melchizedek, and the references to his tithe in the singular in Hebrews 7:4, 6 point to a one-time gift.

Second, Abram's tithe was made strictly on the spoils of war seized from the coalition of eastern kings. While the Hebrew and Greek texts simply state that Abram made a tithe of "all," this clearly cannot mean he gave Melchizedek a tenth of his entire possessions--Abram surely was not carrying such a percentage of his property on a swift military raid. It seems certain that it was only the spoils on which Abram tithed.

Third, there is no present-day recipient of a tithe that can parallel Melchizedek. The church bears little resemblance to a priest/clan-leader. Furthermore, the usage of the tithe by Melchizedek and the church (missions outreach, etc.) are dissimilar.

We conclude, then, that there is nothing in pre-Mosaic tithing practices to serve as a basis for viewing the tithe as a trans-dispensational

---

p. 11, n. 1). This issue is also addressed by David G. Barker ("The Old Testament Hebrew Tithe" [Th.M. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1979], p. 131).


87 Again, Barndoller shows extraordinary carelessness in his exegesis, maintaining in support of a regular tithe that "the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews declares that Melchizedek 'received tithes of Abraham' (Heb. 7:6). The plural number of the word certainly suggests more than one visit by Abraham to Melchizedek for the purpose of the presentation of his tithes to the Lord's high priest" ("Scriptural Tithe," p. 60). While the King James Version does cast the tithe in verse 6 in the plural, and the Greek term for tithe, δεσκατωκε (δεσκατοκε in the Majority Text and Textus Receptus), is inconclusive, a simple comparison with verse 4 results in a conclusion opposite Barndoller's.
and thus a continuing principle for the NT church. There is simply no evidence to support the claim.

CONCLUSION

In summary, this paper leaves the reader with the difficult and perhaps unsatisfying verdict that the pre-Mosaic title did not originate with divine revelation. In fact, the evidence suggests identifying the practice of the patriarch's pagan neighbors as the basis for patriarchal tithing practices. It is only as God placed theological significance on the tithe in Leviticus that the tithe became mandatory and meaningful.

One looks in vain for evidence of proportional giving in the Cain and Abel narrative, finding only a few short verses to even fuel the possibility that any sacrifices at all were given to God apart from expiatory sacrifices. Certainly there is insufficient evidence to support a tithe.

The first OT mention of the tithe is in the context of an extraordinary event with no parallels in the levitical system or today. Instead, it was a dispensational marker heralding the shift from the dispensation of human government to the dispensations of promise. The recipient of Abram's tithe and its purpose have no parallels in NT practice or in the levitical system.

The second OT mention of the tithe is even less helpful, as the promised tithe of Jacob is never said to have been actually paid and the giver has been demonstrated to be unconverted at the time of the vow. The recipient and purpose of Jacob's tithe, if it ever materialized, are cloaked in such obscurity that the identification of any parallels in the present-day or in the levitical system is impossible.

We conclude, therefore, that the pre-Mosaic tithe was merely a culture-bound, voluntary expression of worship reflective of the ancient Near Eastern practice of the time, and adapted by Abraham as a means of expressing gratitude and attributing glory to Yahweh.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal
4801 Allen Road
Allen Park, MI 48101
www.dbts.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
THE GREAT REVERSAL:
THEMATIC LINKS BETWEEN GENESIS 2 AND 3

ZDRAVKO STEFANOVIC

Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies
Silang, Cavite, Philippines

The break between Gen 1 and 2 has been discussed at length by many scholars. Umberto Cassuto, for example, has made a clear distinction between the story in Gen 1 and the one recorded in chaps. 2 and 3. Cassuto argues that the first chapter relates "The Story of Creation" to teach us "that the whole world and all that it contains were created by the word of the One God, according to His will, which operates without restraint." The second section, more precisely Gen 2:4-24, is part of the "Story of the Garden of Eden," which stretches to the end of chap. 3; its purpose is "to explain how it is that in the Lord's world, the world of the good and beneficent God, evil should exist and man should endure pain and troubles and calamities." On the other hand, the unity of chaps. 2 and 3 is generally recognized, although different reasons are given in support of this conclusion. Cassuto bases his argument for the unity of this passage on

1 For example, G. von Rad notes: "The difference is in the point of departure: Whereas in ch. 1 creation moves from the chaos to the cosmos of the entire world, our account of creation [chap. 2] sketches the original state as a desert in contrast to the sown" (Genesis: A Commentary [London: SCM, 1972], 76). Likewise, Claus Westermann states: "The narrative of Gen 1 is characterized by its onward, irresistible and majestic flow that distinguishes it so clearly from the drama narrated in Gen 2-3" (Genesis 1-11: A Commentary [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 80). David J. A. Clines posits that "while ch. 1 views reality as an ordered pattern which is confused by the flood, chs. 2-3 see reality as a network of elemental unions which become disintegrated throughout the course of the narrative from Eden to the flood" (The Theme of the Pentateuch [Sheffield: JSOT, 1978], 75).


3 Cassuto, 7. For a different view see von Rad, 46: "Faith in creation is neither the basis nor the goal of the declarations in Gen., chs. 1 and 2. Rather, the position of both the Yahwist and the Priestly document is basically faith in salvation and election."

4 A Commentary, 71.
noticeable similarities between certain elements found in the beginning
of chap. 2 and at the end of chap. 3.\footnote{Ibid., 159, 169-171. Cassuto argues for linking some passages through common terms; for example, Gen 2:7, 17 to 3:19; Gen 2:25 to 3:7, 21; Gen 2:5, 7 to 3:23; Gen 2:8, 15 to 3:24. Considering the two chapters as a unit, E. A. Speiser calls them "the brief Eden interlude" (Genesis, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1981], 18), while G. W. Coats uses the term "Paradise Tale" (Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 28). In their respective studies Derek Kidner (Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967], 58) and John Skinner also treat the two chapters as a single unit (A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, ICC [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1951], 1:51.}

Claus Westermann holds that the idea of the two chapters as an independent and separate narrative was "one of the most important and decisive results of literary criticism."\footnote{Westermann notes that in consequence "it is but logical to use this same method as a tool for a more exact interpretation of the passage" (186).} The presence of thematic links between the two chapters has been proposed also by von Rad.\footnote{"The serpent 'which God had made' in ch. 3.1 points back to the creation of the animals in ch. 2.18. The theme of shame in ch. 3.7 ff. is taken up and attached (almost abruptly) to the narrative about the creation of man (2.25)" (von Rad, 100). Also contributing to the discussion is J. T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:46-3:24: A Synchronic Approach," JBL 96 (1977): 161-177.} David J. A. Clines points to four areas of harmonious relationship in chap. 2 that are disrupted in chap. 3.\footnote{"In ch. 3 the relationship of harmony between each of these pairs [man and soil, man and animals, man and woman, man and God, all in chap. 2] is disrupted. The communion between God and the man who breathes God's breath (2:7) has become the legal relationship of accuser and defendant (3:9ff); the relationship of man and woman as "one flesh" (2:24) has soured into mutual recrimination (3:12); the bond of man (adam) with the soil (‘adamah) from which he was built has been supplanted by 'an alienation. . .' (3:17 ff); the harmonious relationship of man with beast in which man is the acknowledged master (2:19 ff.) has become a perpetual struggle of intransigent foes (3:15)" (Clines, 75).}

In addition to being a literary unit, as seen by the structural and thematic links already noted,\footnote{On the structure of Gen 2 and 3 see the whole issue of Semeia 18 (1980).} these two chapters also show a unity of purpose. The two come together to present the first of many reversals in the Bible.\footnote{See Zdravko Stefanovic, "Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals," AUSS 30 (Summer 1992): 139-150.} The purpose of this article is to explore this reversal theme in Gen 2 and 3.
The Content of Genesis 1:1-2:3

According to von Rad, Gen 1:1 is the "summary statement of everything that is unfolded step by step in the following verses." He also says that the "hidden grandeur of this statement is that God is the Lord of the world" (49). For Westermann the same verse is "a heading that takes in everything in the narrative in one single sentence" (94).

The language of the chapter is simple, yet decisive: God's powerful word created the world in such a way that "it was firm, or well established." The creative activity of the first three days parallels that which ensued on the following three, while the Sabbath rest, established on the seventh day, had no counterpart. The structure of Gen 1 follows the pattern: introduction + 3 pairs + climax or conclusion. This structure is visualized in Figure 1. The seventh day, rich with God's blessings, was the climax of God's creative work. In the words of Abraham Heschel, "Last in creation, first in intention, 'the Sabbath is the end of the creation of heaven and earth.'" Everything was declared to be "very good" and no shade of disorder can be traced in the complete Creation Story.

11 He also says that the "hidden grandeur of this statement is that God is the Lord of the world" (49). For Westermann the same verse is "a heading that takes in everything in the narrative in one single sentence" (94).

12 Cassuto derives ken (1:30) from the root kwn and translates the phrase "and it was firm or an established thing" (34).

13 On this idea, see Jacques B. Doukhan, The Genesis Creation Story (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978). See also W. H. Shea, "The Unity of the Creation Account," Origins 5 (1978): 9-38. A structure similar to that proposed in Figure 1 is found in other biblical passages. In Matt 1 the disputed number of 14 generations can best be explained as 7 x 2.

14 The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), 14. Further describing the uniqueness of the Sabbath, V. Hamilton notes: "Silence and stillness once again enter the atmosphere. The mood of the prologue now resurfaces in this epilogue. There is no activity, no noise, no speaking. All that God has willed and designed for his canvas of the universe is now in its place" (The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 141). Von Rad contends that "the declarations about a Sabbath at creation contain one of the most remarkable and daring testimonies in the entire priestly document" (61). For Westermann, "the sanctification of the Sabbath institutes an order for humankind according to which time is divided into time and holy time, time for work and time for rest. The work of creation began with three acts of separation" (171).
INTRODUCTION
(Gen 1:1-2)
Summary of the Story

A. FIRST DAY (1:3-5)
   1. Creation of light
   2. Light described as good
   3. Light separated from darkness

B. SECOND DAY (1:6-8)
   1. The Expanse created (heaven)
   2. Waters divided from waters (seas)
   3. Heaven named

C. THIRD DAY (1:9-13)
   1. Dry ground appears (earth)
   2. Grass, plants, and trees created
   3. Vegetation yields seeds according to their kinds

A: FOURTH DAY (1:14-19)
   1. Creation of luminaries
   2. Luminaries described as good
   3. Times divided by luminaries

B: FIFTH DAY (1:20-23)
   1. Creatures fly toward heaven
   2. Creatures move in the seas
   3. Creation blessed

C: SIXTH DAY (1:24-31)
   1. Earth population created
   2. Livestock, ground creatures, and animals made
   3. God creates man in His image and likeness

CLIMAX: THE SEVENTH DAY
(2:1-3)
Unparalleled Blessing

Figure 1. A Structural Outline of the Creation Story in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

The Content of Genesis 2:4-25

After introducing the sinless and fully blessed life on the newly created earth, the Genesis narrator describes the creation of man in retrospect. This crown of all creation was placed in the beautiful garden of Eden, whose main source of blessing was a four-branched river carrying fertility to all the earth, both inside and outside of Eden.

The privileges and responsibilities of the first human being in the garden are stated. The immediate responsibility was to make an inventory of all the animals and give to each a name. This action emphasized man's loneliness. The Creator provided a solution to this problem, and man's pleasant surprise at receiving this gift is recorded.

The first part of the story climaxes in the closing verses of chap. 2 with the description of a happy life of intimacy and innocence. Verse 24 speaks of the union between Adam and Eve which perpetuated their lineage.
The Content of Genesis 3

Gen 3 opens with a new character in the story, one not necessarily unknown to the Genesis narrator's audience. The tempter described as "serpent" deceives the humans in a subtle way.15 The lengthy persuasion to taste the forbidden fruit culminates in quick action: both Eve and Adam sin.16 The tragic outcome of the transgression was increased by Eve's expectation of becoming a divine being, according to the serpent's promise. Realizing the first results of sin, the couple tried to hide from God.

God informs the man and the woman of the terrible consequences of their fall. His pronouncement of the sentence commences with the serpent, then moves to the woman, and finally to the man. This order of the sentence is reversed from the order of the narrative, forming a small-scale reversal in the story. Then judgment is pronounced and man is expelled from the garden. Von Rad notes that "the penalties go in reverse order to the trial proceedings."17 Finally a celestial guardian is set "to keep the way" to the life-giving tree.

Relationship Between Genesis 2 and 3

A close study of Gen 2 and 3 discloses a carefully-crafted structure.18 The structure is chiastic, since the content of chap. 3 contains a reversed order of similar elements and events found in chap. 2. For the sake of comparison, the two chapters can be divided into four logical parts, each containing distinctive themes. The parts of chap. 3 are in fact reversals of those in chap. 2. Following is a detailed analysis of the structure and meaning of both chapters, stressing the chiastic art of the narrative and showing the great reversal in the story of the Garden of Eden. (The same information is summarized in Figure 2.) When viewed

15 Hebrew, wehanndhas. The subject in this sentence precedes the predicate for emphasis.
16 The lengthy dialogue between the serpent and the woman (3:1-6a) is in sharp contrast with the swift action expressed by a succession of four consecutive verbs: took, ate, gave, ate (3:6b), all four preceded by waw consecutive.
17 Von Rad, 92. The order of subjects in the beginning of chap. 3 is serpent-woman-man. Then in the trial one finds man-woman-serpent. Lastly in the sentence the order is again serpent-woman-man.
18 The Hebrew root 'rm found in 2:25 and 3:1 is the best discernible lexical link between two chapters. Says J. T. Walsh: "On a literary level Gen 2:46-3:24 is a highly structured unit" (177).
this way, Gen 2 has no independent structure of its own. If this fact is overlooked, the plan of the chapter can be chronologically misleading.\(^\text{19}\)

\textit{Gen 2:4 An Introductory Verse Alluding to the Reversal}

This introductory verse reminds the reader that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The emphasis on this fact is expressed by a double repetition. Everything which follows in the first part of the story reported in chap. 2 is traced back to the Creator who is the protagonist of the first part of the drama.

The words in Gen 2:4 are marked by the use of double chiasm. Not only is the subject/verb order reversed ("heaven/earth" and "created" is reversed to "made" and "earth/heaven"), the "heaven/earth" is reversed to "earth/heaven." One should see in these reversals, especially in the second one, an allusion to the reversal on a larger scale in the story as a whole, called in this study "the Great Reversal." The verse further matches the introductory statement of the Creation story in Gen 1:1.

\textit{Part One: A. Created and Settled (Gen 2:5-8);
A'. Judged and Expelled (Gen 3:22-24)}

The very beginning of the story of Gen 2 and 3 speaks of innocent and carefree life on earth before man's creation. There was no toil, "no bush of the field," "no plant," no "rain on the earth" (2:5-6). The end of the story (Gen 3:22-24) stresses the opposite. Because of the entrance of sin the man knows both "good and evil."

Whereas before there were "streams" coming up from the earth to water the ground (2:6), after the sin, blessings do not come automatically and man's responsibility is increased (3:23). Thus the beginning of the story declares that "there was no man to work the ground" (2:5), while the end of the story ironically reveals that after the act of sin, man must work the ground (3:23).

\(^{19}\) Westermann finds in "Gen 2-3 repetitions, lack of agreement, lack of balance, gaps in the line of thought, contradictions. One could not expect anything else." These he attributes to "the many-sided process of the formation of this text" (190).
INTRODUCTION
Gen 2:4

A. CREATED AND SETTLED (2:5-8)
1. Innocent, carefree life: no toil, no plants, no rain
2. Streams water the ground
3. No man to work the ground
4. Through breath becomes a living being the tree of life and living forever
5. God plants a garden in the east
6. The man settles in the garden

A'. JUDGED AND EXPELLED (3:22-24)
1. The man knows good and evil
2. The man's responsibility increased
3. There is a man to work the ground
4. The man is prevented from eating of the tree of life and living forever
5. God places cherubim in the east
6. The man expelled from the garden

B. BLESSINGS AND ORDER (2:9-17)
1. Trees and plants pleasing to eye and good for food planted in the ground in the garden
2. Blessings related to a river and its four head-waters
3. Havilah's 3-fold blessing: gold, resin, onyx
4. The man to work in the garden and care for it
5. On the day man eats he will die

B'. CURSES AND DISORDER (3:14-21)
1. Thorns and thistles grow out of the ground
2. Curses related to four subjects: animals, woman, man, ground
3. Serpent's 3-fold curse: being cursed, crawling on belly, eating dust
4. In sweat the man tills the cursed ground and eats of it
5. Verdict: Return to the dust

C. WOMAN CREATED (2:18-23)
1. God's concern: Man is alone
2. The man needs a helper
3. God provides a helper
4. Man's lordship over
5. All animals in harmony with man
6. Woman taken from the man
7. Man's admiration for the woman
8. Happy intimate relationship

C'. WOMAN TEMPTED (3:1-13)
1. Man hides from God who still looks for him
2. Together with helper, man is helpless
3. The man blames his helper
4. Man is afraid, naked, hiding
5. An animal deceives the man
6. Woman takes fruit and gives to man
7. Woman's admiration for fruit
8. Fear and shame of naked body

CLIMAX (2:24-25)
Happiness in sinless and innocent human relationship

Figure 2. The Chiastic Structure of Genesis 2 and 3
The same man who through the breath of life "became a living being" (2:7) is now rendered unable "to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (3:22).

Lastly, the same God who "planted a garden in the east, in Eden" (2:8) now places "on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24). Thus the man, who had been created by God and placed in the garden (2:8), is now judged and expelled from it by God (3:23).

Following is a list of the Hebrew words and expressions shared by both sections in the story: yhwh 'elohim, "the Lord God"; ha'adam, "the man"; la "bod et-ha"damah, "to work the ground"; hayyim, "life"; gan-b'edem miqqedem, "a garden in the east in Eden"; sam, "there."

Part Two:  
B. Blessings and Order (Gen 2:9-17); 
B'. Curses and Disorder (Gen 3:14-21)

The story continues in section B of Gen 2 (vv. 9-17) with a detailed description of the garden of Eden and its blessings. The trees that God made to grow out of the ground "were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (2:9). After the sin, in section B' of Gen 3 (vv. 14-21), the narrator reports that the ground produced "thorns and thistles" displeasing to the eye. Thus, two kinds of weed plants take the place of the two trees in the perfect garden.

The blessings of the garden are related to a river flowing from Eden, and its four "headwaters." After the sin, the curses have to do with four subjects: animals (3:14); woman (3:16); man (3:17-19); and ground (3:17).20 In Gen 2 "the land of Havilah" was decorated with a threefold sign of blessings; "good gold," aromatic resin, and onyx (2:12). In contrast, Gen 3 reveals one of the animals, the serpent, carrying a threefold sign of curse: being cursed above all creatures, crawling on the belly, and eating dust (3:14).21 The reversal occurred because the human beings once had freedom of eating from any tree except one (2:16-17), yet they dared to eat from the single forbidden tree (3:17); they could eat from only one of these two trees at a time.

Section B closes with a prohibition against eating from that single tree lest one die (2:17), while in section B', after the sin, the verdict is pronounced: Man will return to the ground out of which he was taken.

---

20 Even though the text does not explicitly state that the woman and the man were cursed, the two were deprived of many blessings.
21 "To eat dust" is a Biblical idiom relating to an utmost humiliation and curse (see Psalm 72:9).
The section, however, closes with a ray of hope. First, assurance is given that the line of living human beings will continue (3:20); second, God takes care of the immediate needs of the man and woman by clothing them (3:21).

The following is a list of the Hebrew words and phrases found in both sections: *smh* (hiphil imperfect), "grow out"; *yhw* *elohim*, "the Lord God"; *ha'adamah*, "the ground"; *‘kl... ’es*, "eat ... tree"; *ro’s*, "head"; *sem*, "name"; *hlk*, "walk"; *lqh*, "take"; *swh*, "command"; ‘adam ... ’mr, "man . . . said"; *lo’ to’kal mimnenu*, "you shall not eat from it."

**Part Three:**  
* C Woman Created (Gen 2:18-23)  
* C. Woman Tempted (Gen 3:1-13)

Section C of Gen 2 (vv. 18-23) focuses on God's concern for man's social needs. The Creator declares that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (2:18). After the sin, however (Section C' of Gen 3:1-13), that same man wants to be alone and hides from God who still looks for him (3:9). Thus the man who had no helper suitable for him (2:20) is now helpless, in spite of having a helper (3:10). God states that he "will make a helper" (2:18), yet now the man blames that very helper whom he affirms God "put here with me" (3:12). Man's superiority and lordship over the livestock, birds, and the beasts (2:20) stands in sharp contrast to the man who is afraid, naked, and trying to hide (3:10). Whereas part C says that all animals were in harmony with man and subject to him (2:19-20), part C' speaks of the man and the woman deceived by an animal and in conflict with it (3:13).

Section C describes the woman as the being "taken out of the man" (2:22), while C' speaks of the same woman in an active role, taking some fruit and giving to the man (3:6). Man's admiration for the woman (2:23) is replaced by her admiration for the forbidden fruit (3:6). Whereas before the man was in an intimate relationship with the woman—bone to bone, flesh to flesh (2:23)—now man and woman are ashamed and afraid (3:7-8).

The following is a list of words and phrases common to both sections: *yhw* *elohim*, - "the Lord God"; *ha'adam*, "the man"; ‘sh, "make"; *qr’... ha'adam lo*, "the man called it"; *lqh*, "take"; *issah*, "woman", is, "man."

---

22 Hebrew ‘ezer k’negdo is found twice in section C (2:18, 20).
The Climax of Sinless Life (Gen 2:24-25)

The climax of the Story of Creation was reached when God rested on the seventh day (2:2-3). The climax of the story of the Garden of Eden focuses on man's relationship to other human beings, beginning with the family unit. The climax speaks of a sinless, harmonious and happy human life in all its innocence. A supernatural unity is related here in which two beings are able to become basar 'ehad, "one flesh" (2:24).

Summary

A structural study of chaps. 2 and 3 of the book of Genesis reveals the presence of a chiasm in the narrative and strongly suggests the unity of the story as argued by scholars. The theme of the story of the Garden of Eden is the Great Reversal brought about by the entrance of sin into the world created by God. Clines affirms that "the flood is only the final stage in a process of cosmic disintegration which began in Eden." The presence of the chiastic structure or reversed parallelism presents the literary beauty of Genesis through a story that teaches how God was the source of creation in all its perfection, while the disorder was brought about by man's act of sin. Elsewhere the Bible teaches that the last cosmic reversal in history will be God's reversal.

23 Ibid, where v. 25 is called "The climax of the creation."
24 "Expressed more concisely, Gen. ch. 3, asserts that all sorrow (von Rad, 101). comes from sin"
25 Clines, 75.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, MI 49104
www.andrews.edu
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
GENESIS 1-3 AND THE MALE/FEMALE ROLE RELATIONSHIP

MICHAEL F. STITZINGER

An examination of certain considerations in Genesis 1-3 contributes to a proper view of a hierarchical distinction between male and female. Genesis 1 primarily emphasizes the relationship of spiritual equality. Genesis 2 focuses upon the positional distinction in the area of function. Contrary to the feminist position, several indications reveal that a hierarchical relationship exists prior to the fall of mankind. The New Testament consistently upholds this same relationship between male and female. Genesis 3 indicates that the sexes reversed their respective roles with their fall into sin. An aspect of the curse that is subsequently placed upon the woman is Genesis 3:16b, which indicates that sin affected the hierarchical relationship, but did not disannul it. The "desire" of the woman provides a reminder to all women that the subordinate role still remains as her correct posture. As a consequence of sin, man will often abuse his headship, exercising his "rule" harshly over the woman. Together, the first 3 chapters of Genesis consistently argue for a continuing hierarchical order between male and female.

*      *        *

INTRODUCTION

ONE of the most important subjects of our day is that of the role of women. Our society is in the midst of a sexual revolution. Increasing confusion has developed about our identities as men and women. A diminishing influence of the Judeo-Christian heritage, the rise of the feminist movement, and pressure for the Equal Rights Amendment have called into question traditional understandings of sexual roles. This has created great uncertainty in our contemporary situation both inside and outside of the church about what it means...
to be a man or a woman. As John Davis observes, "The proper roles of men and women in marriage and family, in the church, and in the wider society are the subject of an ongoing debate that has touched us all." Under the guise of the term "evangelical," many current writers are advocating positions that are acceptable to the women's liberation movement. Individuals such as Paul Jewett, Virginia Mollenkott, Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, Don Williams, and Patricia Gundry have suggested similar arguments in support of egalitarianism. This understanding of Scripture provides a very real threat to the traditional hierarchical view of male and female.

There is a great need for a proper understanding of the respective roles God has established for man and woman. This study will examine certain considerations in Genesis 1-3 which contribute to an understanding of a hierarchical distinction between male and female.

FEMINIST CLAIMS AND THE CREATION ACCOUNT

No one denies that the apostle Paul used the creation account to support his claims for a subordinate position of the woman. In both 1 Cor 11:9 and 1 Tim 2:13, Paul specifically appeals to the fact that Adam was created before Eve.

Rather than accept this as a divinely inspired commentary on the creation order, Paul's teaching about women is viewed as a result of cultural conditioning and providing no application for the 20th century. According to the "evangelical" feminists, there is no role distinction.

Herein lies the heart of the issue. The feminist advocates have taken the liberty to reconstruct the creation account of Genesis in order to argue for complete egalitarianism. Fellowship and equality are said to be the main purposes for God's creation of the male and female (Gen 1:26-30). Any suggestion of subordination prior to the

---


2Ibid.


5Letha Scanzoni and Nancy Hardesty, *All We're Meant To Be* (Waco: Word, 1974).


fall is disregarded. For this reason, any hierarchy of relationships in Genesis 2 (Gen 2:15-24) is de-emphasized. Not until the perfect relationship of Genesis 1 was shattered in chapter 3 is there any suggestion of subjection. When subjection did come about, it was only a temporary measure that ceased with redemption. The work of Christ again provided the basis for complete egalitarianism. Individuals such as Jewett and Mollenkott have de-emphasized Genesis 2 in order to establish positional equality from chapter 1 as the standard for both chapters. The account of Genesis 1 is much more general and does not explain any hierarchical relationship that may exist between male and female. Thus, it could allow for complete equality between the sexes. Mollenkott states:

I suggest that if religious leaders want to maintain any credibility with the younger members in their congregations, they had better shift their emphasis from the "Adam first, then Eve" creation story of Genesis Two to the simultaneous creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis One.8

It appears that Mollenkott assumes a contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2 which allows her to disregard the latter. Jewett also holds to this view by his designation of a "partnership model," instead of the hierarchical arrangement in Genesis 2.9 In this account, man and woman are understood to relate to each other as functional equals whose differences are mutually complementary in all spheres of life and human endeavor.10 This does not parallel Genesis 2, however, unless the essential meaning of this latter chapter is altered. Jewett accomplishes this by understanding the central theme of chapter 2 to be that the woman's creation from man "is to distinguish her from the animals by implying her essential likeness" to the man.11 Genesis 3, in turn, reveals the first mention of the woman's subordination to man as a punishment of the fall.12 While these alterations result in what seems to be a fairly consistent interpretation of the three chapters, they do not adequately consider what is being stated. When the creation accounts are allowed to speak for themselves, a positional distinction becomes quite clear.

8Mollenkott, "The Woman's Movement Challenges The Church," 307; Jewett ("Mary and the Male/Female Relationship," Christian Century 90 [1973] 1255) states much the same idea: "I have come to reject this whole approach as contrary to the fundamental thrust of Scripture. The first creation narrative contains no hint of female subordination, and the second, which speaks of the creation of the woman from the man, does not say what it has traditionally been interpreted to mean. . . ."
9Jewett, Man As Male And Female, 14.
10Ibid.
11Ibid., 126.
12Ibid., 22, 114.
The emphasis of Genesis 1 is altogether different from that of Genesis 2. A chronological method is employed to express the creative events as they develop—day one, day two, etc. Mankind is first mentioned in the account of the sixth day; "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness'" (Gen 1:26). The creation of man and woman was distinct from all that was created prior to them. As the crown of creation, they were to exercise supremacy over the cosmos. On a scale of ascending order, God created the highest of all his handiwork last.13

Genesis 1 gives only a general statement of the details surrounding the creation of male and female. Both are described as though created simultaneously (Gen 1:26). In addition, God gave both of them the commands to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it, and rule" over the earth (Gen 1:28). In these verses, two relationships are addressed: the ontological or spiritual realm as man relates to his Creator, and the economic or functional realm regarding his specific duties upon earth.

There is also no elaboration of the functional relationship of the male and female in this account. Some have thus concluded that both male and female share equally in position with regard to the commands of responsibility. Two areas of function are evident, however. 1) Being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth include responsibilities toward each other. 2) Subduing and ruling over the earth emphasize obligations with regard to the created universe. It is not clear from this account whether or not each was given equal status to exercise their responsibility. There is nothing to suggest hierarchical relationship, but there is also nothing to deny it. These details remain incomplete without the further revelation given in Genesis 2.

**Spiritual equality**

The thrust of the creation account of male and female in Genesis 1 appears to be that they were made in the image (οἰκονομία) and likeness (τύμπον) of God (Gen 1:26-27). These terms are best regarded as essentially synonymous.14 There is no distinction made between the male and female in this regard. For this reason, the use of the word "man" (ἄνδρα) is significant in these two verses.15 ἄνδρα is here being

---

13 Clarence J. Vos, *Women in Old Testament Worship* (Delft: Judels and Brinkman, 1968) 17; John Murray (*Collected Writings of John Murray* [Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1977], 2.5) states, "That man's creation is the last in the series, we may regard as correlative with this lordship."


15 The use of ἄνδρα is important in determining the spiritual relationship between God and mankind and in distinguishing between the positional roles of man and
used corporately and generically of the human pair, or species. As Jewett points out, "man" in this instance is "dual" ("male," רְמִּ֔ים and "female," נְמוֹנֶ֖ים; "created he them." Both the male and the female comprise mankind, and in this respect they are of corresponding value before God (cf. Gen 5:1-2; 9:6; Matt 19:4).

The image of God

The image has to do with the ontological or spiritual qualities, namely, the communicable attributes that man and woman reflect from God. This is best understood as a moral, not a physical, likeness. The image of God is usually understood to include the will or freedom of choice, self-consciousness, self-transcendence, self-determination, rationality, moral discernment for good and evil, righteousness, holiness, and worship. Basically, it is that which makes men "persons."

The statements of Gen 1:26-27 assert that the woman is an equal participant with the man in respect to the image of God. The NT continues to uphold this doctrine of the equality of the image. The Apostle Peter indicates that a woman must be granted "honor as a fellow-heir of the grace of life" (1 Pet 3:7).

Thus far, the feminists, by an argument from silence, may be correct in supporting complete positional equality. However, this equality can only be certain to exist in the spiritual realm. There is simply no information in this chapter regarding the functional relationship of man and woman. The feminists argue that the spiritual equality presented here is proof against a distinction in role relationships. They fail to recognize, however, that spiritual equality does not prohibit a distinctiveness in role relationships.

woman. דָּ֫רְשׁ is used in the first chapters of Genesis in three ways. (1) It is used generically to refer to man as a race, species, as mankind or humankind. In this way, דָּ֫רְשׁ with or without the article refers to both male (רְמִּ֔ים) and female (נְמוֹנֶ֖ים) (cf. Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2 and 9:6). (2) It is a) used to refer to the individual man (שִׁמְךָ), as in Gen 2:5, 7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25; 3:9, 20; or b) to designate both the individual man and woman (man, שִׁמְךָ and woman, נְמוֹנֶ֖ים), as in Gen 3:22-24. The article is used in every case except 2:5, 20. This is used when denoting the functional realm. (3) דָּ֫רְשׁ is also used to designate the proper name, "Adam." This occurs in Gen 2:20; 3:17, 21; 4:25. This usage is always without the article.

17 Jewett, Man As Male And Female, 39.
18 Charles L. Feinberg, "The Image Of God," BSac 129 (1972) 246; see also Gordon H. Clark, "The Image Of God In Man," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 12 (1969) 215-22; Murray, Collected Writings, 2. 3-13,34-36. Murray also includes the body as part of the image.
19 1 Cor 11:7; Gal 3:28; Col 3:10; Eph 4:24; James 3:9.
Further expansion of the events of the sixth day is revealed in Genesis 2. The new revelation given in this chapter focuses mainly on the functional aspect of man and woman, rather than the image. The account relates the duties and relationships God commanded the first man and woman to maintain toward each other and creation. Man was commanded to cultivate and keep the garden (2:15). Various stipulations about the eating of the fruit were given (2:16-17). He also named the animals, which helped to convey to him that he had no one like himself to help him in his tasks (2:18-20). The woman was created sometime after this on the same day (2:21-22). The man subsequently named his wife "woman" as a derivative of himself. It seems apparent from the development of man's purpose that a hierarchical relationship does exist in man's functional realm. The account assumes this rather than states it directly. Still, however, the evangelical feminists refuse to allow for anything but complete egalitarianism.

Evangelical feminist claims

Feminists have a unified opposition to interpreting Genesis 2 as teaching subordination. Gundry reflects upon this passage, stating that

The fact that Adam is spoken of in Genesis 2 as having been created first, . . . does not argue for his being superior in authority. . . . God created living things in an ascending order of complexity. If order of creation means anything, it would have to mean Eve was superior because she was last.20

In similar fashion, Jewett makes three fundamental claims about this chapter. First, he claims that to assume any type of hierarchy of man over woman also means that the male is superior to the female.21 Second, the superiority over the animals and not the woman's inferiority (in function) to the man is the basic thought of the context.22 She is shown, by this fact, to be in the same likeness as Adam. Third, the fact that the woman was created after man demonstrates, if anything, that "woman is superior to the man."23 His reasoning is that man's creation is the highest event in all the work of

20Gundry, Woman Be Free!, 23; also p. 61, "No indication of man's position of authority appears until after the fall."
21Jewett, Man As Male And Female, 14.
22Ibid., 126.
23Ibid., 126-27.
creation. He is superior to all that proceeded. The woman came after the man and thus, she is even higher in importance than he. He goes on to say that, "If men do not find this conclusion palatable let them ask themselves why women should stomach the rabbinic conclusion that the woman is inferior because created after man."24

Virginia Mollenkott interprets the creation account to provide for positional equality by the "rang technique."25 She tries to demonstrate that the objective of chapter 2 is the same as that of chapter 1; mankind is the masterpiece of creation. By the "rang technique" she means that chapter 1 discloses man as the zenith of creation by a chronological fashion (Gen 1:26-27). Chapter 2 also demonstrates man to be the zenith of creation by placing his creation "in the most emphatic positions: the first (Gen 2:5, 7) and final (Gen 2:22)."26 She proceeds to emphasize the stress of chapter 2 as an equality in "relationship." Adam instantly recognizes Eve as different from the animals and exactly like himself. The development of chapter 2 provides no basis for hierarchy whatsoever. Mollenkott is correct insofar that both accounts emphasize that man is the zenith of creation. However, her use of the "rang technique" in chapter 2 fails to address certain indications that support a hierarchical relationship. All three of these writers are guilty of neglecting contextual evidence within Genesis 2 itself. Chapters 1 and 2 make use of the important Semitic historiographical principle known as recapitulation. Genesis 1 gives a short statement summarizing the entire creation of man. The second chapter follows with a more detailed and circumstantial account dealing with matters of special importance.27 While Genesis 2 harmonizes with Genesis 1, it must not be expected to report the events identically. Moses stipulates the concept of equality of image in chapter 1 but presumes it in chapter 2. He proceeds to emphasize the function of man, and in his expansion he assumes a hierarchical relationship.

Gundry and Jewett have suggested that because the woman is created last in Genesis 2 she may be positionally superior to the man.  

24Ibid.  
26Ibid.  
27Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction (Chicago: Moody, 1964) 118. "There is, however, an element of recapitulation involved, for the creation of the human race is related all over again (cf. Gen 2:7 and 1:26, 27). But this technique of recapitulation was widely practiced in ancient Semitic literature. . . . To the author of Genesis 1, 2, the human race was obviously the crowning or climactic product of creation, and it was only to be expected that he would devote a more extensive treatment to Adam after he had placed him in his historical setting (the sixth day of creation)."
Chronologically, it may be granted that there is an ascending order in chapter 1, with mankind as the zenith of creation. However, it is conjecture to argue that this ascending order extends into the events within each particular day. To assume that the events of the sixth day, which culminate in the creation of the woman, are chronologically ascending in importance cannot be substantiated.28

Role distinctions

There are several internal factors in Genesis 2 which suggest a hierarchical relationship in which the woman, by virtue of her place in creation and the God-ordained structure of events, is in a position of subordination. Hierarchy is not directly stated but is implied by many duties and obligations that the man exercises. It is a non sequitur to conclude, as Jewett has, that for the woman to be subordinate would be to make her inferior in value, ability, or as a human being. The man's headship over woman is solely a position of rank. The man owes this authoritative preeminence to God's appointment rather than to personal achievement.29 There are several indications which point definitely and consistently to a role distinction.

Signs of headship

First, v 7 stipulates that man was created prior to the woman. Second, the man was designated as "Adam" (Gen 2:20), which was also the term used to describe the entire race!30 That the man was given this name and not the woman suggests that he occupies the position as head of the relationship. Third, the events of the narrative reveal that Adam was invested with his position of leadership, responsibility, and authority prior to the creation of Eve (Gen 2:15). He was commanded to "cultivate" and "keep" the garden. He was also restricted from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Fourth, Adam immediately began to exercise his authority by naming the animals (Gen 2:10).31 Motyer notes that, "To give a name

30Man is designated such by several different words. He is called מָנָה --"man-kind," רְבַע --"the male," מָאָס --"the man," מִדָּס --"Adam," and נָא "man."
31Ps 8:5-9 also substantiates the claims of man's investiture of leadership (cf. Heb 2:6-8). While man (שֵׁם, Ps 8:5) most likely refers to mankind (Gen 1:26), v 7 supports fully the leadership that man was given in Genesis 2. Adam was assigned or caused (לָלֶדֶת) to rule over the works, flocks, cattle, birds, and fish. David could very well have in view man's positional leadership given and exercised prior to the woman's creation.
is the prerogative of a superior, as when Adam exercised his dominion over the animals. . . ." 

Fifth, Adam's leadership role is designated by his need of a helper (Gen 2:18, 20). The expression used to describe the type of person Adam needed is "a helper suitable for him" (Gen 2:18, 20). The particular usage of כִּמה קֵרוֹ וְכִּמה קֵרֵּי, "helper," in this chapter has generated considerable debate. Sixteen out of the twenty-one usages in the Old Testament refer to God as a superior helper assisting the needs of man. The remaining three refer to men helping other men. In each of the latter instances, man's help is ineffectual. It is unlikely that the helper referred to here (Gen 2:18, 20) is "corresponding to" or "suitable to" Adam in nature and ability. The term "helper" is generally agreed to be a designation of position. With this in mind, Scanzoni and Hardesty have suggested that the "helper" referred to is a superior, just as God is a superior helper to man. However, this suggestion neglects the context of the passage. The kind of helper proposed in Genesis 2 is not a divine helper but a human helper. Another suggestion is that the woman helper is equal in rank with man. In arguing for this view, Vos takes 고ֶלֶי to mean "counterpart" or "corresponding to" in position. However, in view of other contextual indications suggesting positional superiority of the man, it cannot be argued consistently that "corresponding to" refers to a complete equality of position. The most consistent and harmonious answer is found when the helper proposed for man is understood as positionally subordinate in function to man. Until this time, all of man's help was superior. However, man had a specific need for a human helper. The divine helper supplied this need by designating for him a subordinate human helper.

33BDB, 740.
34See Gen 2:18, 20; Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Pss 20:3; 33:20; 70:6; 89:20; 115:9, 10, 11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:4; Isa 30:5; Ezek 12:14; Dan 11:34; Hos 13:9.
35BDB, 617.
36Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, 26; George W. Knight III (The New Testament Teaching On The Role Relationship Of Men And Women [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977] 43) refutes Scanzoni and Hardesty: "This argument cannot be valid. Cannot a word, however, have a different nuance when applied to God than it does when applied to humans?"
37Katharine E. Sakenfeld, "The Bible and Woman: Bane or Blessing?" Today 32 (1975) 224-25; Vos, Woman In Old Testament Worship, 16; Jewett, Man As Male And Female, 124-25.
38Vos, Woman in Old Testament Worship, 16.
helper who would aid him in obeying the commands. This woman, who was to be voluntarily submissive to man in function, would "correspond to" or be "suitable to him" spiritually, physically, mentally, and in ability.

Sixth, man's headship is unveiled when he names his wife "woman" (הוָאִית--Gen 2:23). Prior to this point man gave names to all the birds and cattle. Now the dominion that God gave to Adam comes to expression again as he exercises authority in designating his helper's name. In conjunction with this name, Adam also titles his wife נְּסָתוּ in Gen 3:20, and specifies her function as "the mother of all living." These actions give further evidence of his authority.

Some, such as Cassuto, do not identify any parallel between these texts (Gen 2:23; 3:20), but view Gen 3:20 as the beginning of headship. Coming just after the post-fall decree in 3: 16, "and he shall rule over thee," it evidences man's first act of rule over his wife. However, it seems more likely that the authority exercised here is not a new act, but parallels the same type of authority exerted by Adam when he named her "woman."

Seventh, man's leadership is demonstrated by the fact that he is to leave his mother and father and cleave to his new wife (Gen 2:24). These acts are read by some as a point of weakness and inferiority on the part of the man. To read this as the man's weakness, however, is

39 Although it is not mentioned in the account, it is obvious that the woman's physical makeup is different from that of a man. God gave her a physical constitution that is inherent to her role as a helper and a complement to the man.

40 Submission must not be confused with inferiority. As a helper, Eve was equal to Adam in capability and value but appointed to a subordinant position by God. She was to voluntarily place her abilities under the man. Martha E. Rehn ("Did Paul Require Women to Wear Veils in the Church? An Exegetical Study of I Corinthians 11:2-16" [M.A. Thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, 1978] 55) states, "Eve was, nevertheless, created to meet Adam's needs and to assist him in his life and purpose. Her capabilities are not a factor in her subordinant role to man. It is by virtue of the fact she was added to his life that she must be submissive-because she was created to assist and be a companion to him."

41 Six different words are used to refer to the woman in the first three chapters; עָל--"mankind," נְּסָתוּ--"female," עָל--"helper," נְּסָתוּ--"woman," נְּסָתוּ--"Eve," and נְּסָתוּ--"counterpart to."

42 U. Cassuto (A Commentary on the Book of Genesis [2 Vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961], 1. 170) states, "To me it seems that the elucidation is to be sought in the fact that the giving of a name, . . . was considered an indication of lordship. Since the Lord God decreed that he [the husband] should rule over her he assigns a name to her as a token of his rulership."

43 Vos, Women in Old Testament Worship, 18, n. 25 states, " . . . it is the man who cleaves (dabaq) to the woman and usually with regard to persons the lesser cleaves to the greater (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Josh 22:5; 23:8; Ruth 1:14; 2 Sam 20:2; 2 Kings 18:6)."
to overlook the major significance of the verse. This is not Adam's declaration but God's pronouncement (Matt 19:4-5) instituting the first marriage. The proper emphasis of leaving and cleaving is not headship as much as it is to demonstrate the complete identification of one personality with the other in a community of interests and pursuits. This new unity of Adam with his wife is to be closer than it would be with a father and mother. It is important to notice that God addresses the man and not the woman to accomplish this activity (Eph 5:21). He is placing the responsibility primarily upon Adam (and his male descendants) as he has done thus far with other commands. Rather than a sign of weakness this appears to be a sign of leadership on Adam's part.

The final indication of the headship of the man is found in Gen 3:9, 11. The Lord addresses and receives a response from the man, who is the spokesman for the relationship. This factor suggests strongly, if not conclusively, that the man was the head of the relationship.44

The importance of Genesis 2 must not be underestimated. Revealed to man are the keys of creation order. A thorough analysis of its contents argues for a hierarchical relationship between the man and the woman.

THE NEW TESTAMENT AND CREATION ORDER

On several significant occasions, the NT recognizes or refers directly to Gen 2:18ff as supporting a role distinction between the male and female. First, Paul asserts that man is the head (κεφαλή) over the woman in I Cor 11:3. The meaning of "head" in v 3 is indicative of man's "rank"45 over the woman rather than "source" or "origin."46 His statement is not ascribing a deficiency in intellect or ability of the woman, but is designating her to a subordinate position in function.

Paul substantiates his comments in a relationship more basic than the creation account, namely, the economic aspect of the

44Gen 3:17 could as well be used as a proof of Adam's headship. Adam is condemned for listening and following the voice of his wife to commit an act he knew was wrong. In doing so, he inverted the role of leadership that was initially established for him to fulfill.

45BAG, 431; Edwin Hatch and Henry A. Redpath, A Concordance to the Septuagint (Oxford: Clarendon, 1897), 2. 761-62; see the following: Deut 28:13, 44; 32:42; Judg 10:18; 11:8,9, II; 2 Sam 22:44; I Kings 8:1; 21:12; 2 Kings 2:3, 5; I Chron 23:24; Pss 18:43; 110:6; Isa 7:8, 9; Jer 31:7; Lam 1:5; Dan 2:38; Hab 3:13.

46F. F. Bruce, 1 and 2 Corinthians (New Century Bible; Greenwood: Attic, 1971) 103; Colin Brown, "Head," NIDNTT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2. 160.
Trinity. The Son is God as the Father is God ontologically (John 5:18-23; 10:30; 20:20). However, economically (in function) the Son's redemptive work involved a volitionally subordinate position or rank (I Cor 15:28; John 4:24; 5:18-19).

Further support is derived from the creation account itself. "Man does not originate from woman, but woman from man; for indeed man was not created for the woman's sake; but woman for the man's sake" (I Cor 11:8, 9; cf. 1 Tim 2:13). The time and purpose of the woman's creation is significant in Genesis 2. She was created as a co-laborer to share in the mandates of creation. From the very first, however, she was to participate as a subordinate in rank.

At the same time that Paul establishes a role relationship, he is careful to include a caution, lest men pervert their designated leadership into spiritual superiority and functional snobbery (I Cor 11:11). Spiritually, man and woman remain equal before God (cf. Gen 1:26-27). The Apostle may also have in mind the role distinctions manifested in various functions between the sexes. A woman can and often does assist men in advice, counsel, and guidance in the home, church, and society. However, she is never to take on the role of a leader over men. "In the Lord" she will retain her subordinate role as she shares in these responsibilities.

A man must remember that he is not independent of the woman just because he is superior in rank (1 Cor 11:12). He needs her help even to gain existence in this life. Thus, God has established a mutual dependency to coincide with the headship that man continues to exercise over the woman.47

Second, the apostle makes use of the term "to be subject" (ὑποτάσσω) to describe the relationship of the female to the male both in and outside the context of marriage (1 Cor 14:34-35; Eph 5:21, 22, 24; CoI 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11-14; Titus 2:5). The term "to be subject" from the verb τάσσω, has a background in military usage, namely, that soldiers were appointed or placed in positions under others. "Τάσσω carries the meaning "to place under," "to affix under" or "to subordinate oneself to the control of another."48 However, this word in no way implies that the subordinate is an inferior, except in position. A woman may be superior to a man in ability, personality and even spirituality, but because of the divine order of creation, she recognizes the superior rank of the man and "ranks herself under man."49 This principle is to demonstrate itself

47Contra Williams. The Apostle Paul and Women in the Church, 67-68; Scanzoni and Hardesty, All We're Meant To Be, 28-31.
both in the marriage relationship, and/or outside of marriage to various extents. In all of these texts, Paul alludes in principle, if not in actuality, to the creation account to substantiate his claims. A final support for a role distinction is expressed in 1 Pet 3:1, 5-7. Concurring with Paul, Peter uses the term "submission" to describe the position of a wife toward her husband. While he does not refer to creation, he does use the example of Sarah's relationship to Abraham. It is fairly certain that her relationship to Abraham stems from the divine order of creation in Gen 2:18-24. Furthermore, while Peter discloses the wife as the "weaker vessel" in rank, he also maintains that she is spiritually an equal ("fellow-heir of the grace of life," 1 Pet 3:7).

A significant contrast sheds light upon the role relationship of Abraham and Sarah and that of Adam and Eve. In Gen 3:17, Adam is condemned by God for "listening to" or "obeying" the voice of his wife ( חשׁפת). In Gen 21:12, Abraham is told to "listen to" or "obey" ( חשׁפת) the voice of Sarah. Peter indicates that Sarah was submissive to her husband, calling him "lord." The use of the verb "obey" to condemn and condone the same activity poses an apparent contradiction. This contrast is explained when the total picture is examined.

Two different conditions are presented in these contexts. It is suggested that Eve received her knowledge of the command not to eat of the fruit through the instruction of her husband. Eve's encouragement to her husband to partake of the fruit was an act of insubordination. Furthermore, when Adam chose to eat of the fruit, he ignored his leadership role and followed his wife's sinful promptings. God's condemnation of Adam for obeying his wife is justified. It should not be concluded from this passage that men must reject the voice of their wives in all situations.

Gen 21:12 provides a blueprint for the correct role relationship between husband and wife. Abraham was distressed at the thought of expelling Hagar and Ishmael. Sarah realized the full implications of not expelling them, however, and thus encouraged her husband along these lines. When Abraham's mind would not be changed, God corrected him by telling him to listen to the voice of his wife. The key is found in that once Abraham was corrected by the Lord, he took the initiative to exert leadership (v 14). Unlike Adam, he did not ignore his role as head of the relationship and follow a course of

---

50 The account in Gen 2:16-17 indicates that man was given the prohibitions prior to the creation of Eve.

cognizant error prompted by his wife. Sarah can thus be viewed by Peter as a woman who "obeyed her husband, calling him lord," yet provided advice in a submissive role.

From these examples, it is rather obvious that the NT supports a role distinction between the male and female, a distinction which originates before the fall. On certain occasions, the concept is applied to the husband and wife relationship; on other occasions, Paul refers generally to the male and female. In both cases, however, a role relationship exists to differing extents in which the woman is instructed to be submissive in function to the male.

**GENESIS 3**

A final claim of the feminists is that subordination for the woman began as a result of the fall. Yet, examination of the text has demonstrated that subordination was established prior to the fall. The events of chapter 3 follow immediately after and are predicated upon the events of chapter 2. They reveal that man and his new helper reversed their hierarchical positions in their act of sin. The outcome was that the effect of sin corrupted the relationship between man's headship and woman's subordination, but did not change it.

*Woman's part in the fall*

The woman was an active participant in the fall. Her initial sin began when she continued to listen to the serpent, who was intentionally deceptive by his communication. During the course of the conversation the woman was deceived (Gen 3:13). It was at this point that her appetites gave birth to the first sin.

The deception of the woman is of major significance for Paul's NT teaching. In 2 Cor 11:3, Paul warns the Corinthian believers "lest as the serpent deceived (ἐχαπατήσεν) Eve by his craftiness" they would be deceived also. The use of ἐξ is added to ἀπατάω for intensity, i.e., Eve was completely deceived. Paul is stressing that Eve was led to believe something that was not true. She was doctrinally beguiled into hostility toward God and sensual desire for the unknown. This same deception could happen to both men and women at Corinth.

Paul also uses the term in 1 Tim 2:14, where he states, "It was not Adam who was deceived but the woman being quite deceived, fell

---

into transgression.” This statement is made as a supporting argument for the limitations given to women with regard to positions of leadership in the church. In contrast to Paul's appeal in I Corinthians, the deception described in I Timothy could only happen to women.

The apostle may have had more than one idea in mind by this mention of the woman's deception in I Tim 2:14. He may be suggesting that a woman's emotional faculties are different than man's in such a way that she is more apt to be led into a course of unintentional error, and/or he may be using this verse as an argument for what her deception precipitated, namely, a usurpation of her role as a helper.

In either case, Gen 3:1-7 indicates that Eve allowed herself to listen to the serpent. In the course of this, she was deceived and subsequently sinned. She then introduced her husband to sin, who willfully ignored his headship and partook of the fruit. Eve's sin was disobedience to God, which expressed itself, in part, by a self-assumed position of leadership above her husband.

**Man's part in the fall**

The woman is often viewed as forcing, driving, or compelling her husband to eat. It is true that Adam participated in the sin because of his wife's offer (Gen 3:6); however, he was not forced to eat the fruit. The account does not reveal whether Adam was present, passively listening to the serpent, or if he was away at the time. V 17 declares that he "listened to" or "obeyed" the voice of his wife prior to eating the fruit, which may indicate that he was not there initially. In either circumstance, v 17 is the key; Adam freely chose to obey the voice of his wife. This sin actually began at the point when he failed to exercise his position of leadership over his wife. While Adam was not deceived, his action was equally as wicked as Eve's. Not until he sinned was the entire human race plunged into sin (Rom 5:19; I Cor 15:22). The sin of the first human beings was a direct violation of

---

54 Using a contrast, Paul states that Adam was οὐκ ἦπεν τατηθην (was not deceived—a simplex usage) while Eve ἔπειθεντατηθεὶσα (was completely deceived-intense usage).


56 BDB, 1034: ὑπακοtorrent with the ἦ as in Gen 3:17 is a common idiom for "to obey."

57 Young (*Genesis 3* [London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1966] 130-31) takes Adam's forfeiture of position a step further. Not only did Adam place himself in a subordinate position under the woman, but "he listened to her when she was deceived by the serpent. Hence, Adam had abandoned his place of superiority over the creatures."
God's command, which expressed itself, in part, by a complete inversion of the roles. This was a total distortion of the pattern established in Genesis 1 and 2.

*Some background to Genesis 3:16*

Another verse showing a positional differentiation between man and woman is Gen 3:16, "Yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." Most liberals and evangelical feminists interpret this pronouncement as the beginning of female subordination. Conservatives generally prefer to assume that subjection was intensified to the point of servitude at this point.58

Gen 3: 16 cannot be treated in a vacuum. Much of the preceding context deals with the headship of the man. The first section of this chapter demonstrates a reversal of the roles. This will have some bearing on the meaning of v 16. It should also be noted that this verse comes in the middle of the curse section. This pronouncement is basically divided into 4 areas: the curse upon the serpent (3:14-15), the woman (3:16), the man (3:17-19), and the creation (3:17b). The curse placed certain alterations upon individuals, animals, and nature. Biologically, woman became the recipient of increased pain in childbirth; the snake began to crawl on his belly; all individuals became participants in physical death; nature received agricultural and other changes (Rom 8:22); and man had to compete against nature by toil and sweat.

Spiritually, man and woman became depraved and alienated from God, shattering the perfect harmony that existed at the beginning of their marriage. In some fashion, sin impinged upon the hierarchical relationship as well. It is not evident from any passage after Gen 3:16 that the pronouncement made here canceled or changed the hierarchical arrangement (cf. 1 Cor 11:3-10; 14:34; 1 Tim 2:13-14). In light of this background, a thorough examination of this verse provides for its proper understanding.

Much controversy has surrounded the meaning of "desire" in v 16. "Desire" (ἱδµητη, from the verbal root ἱδµα) may be derived from the Arabic root *saqa*.59 Traditionally, *saga* has had the meaning of "to please, delight, longing, craving, desire, arouse, yeard or desire ardently."60 From this Arabic derivation, scholars usually understand

---


59 BDB, 1003.

the "desire" to contribute positively to her husband's rule. On the other hand, "desire" may have come from the Arabic root saqa, which means "to drive, urge on, herd, impel as one would a prisoner or control cattle." It envisions harsh, forcible and negative treatment upon the receiver. If this is the meaning, then the "desire" of the woman will not contribute to the rule of her husband.

A further complication exists with the Hebrew root (ןוֹרָשׁ), because there are no examples in verbal form found anywhere in Scripture. It has been hypothetically drawn by the lexicons from the Arabic possibilities. Outside of Gen 3:16, there are only two other usages of the noun נוֹרָשׁ in the OT (Gen 4:7; Cant 7:10). Thus, the usage of the word must be established by the context in which it is found.

Canticles 7:11. "Desire" in Cant 7:11 (になれ is expressed by the bride toward her spouse. The "desire" is primarily a physical one, or possibly a desire that is all-encompassing (sexual, mental, and emotional). The context surrounding this word argues against it being derived from the Arabic root saqa in the sense of "a forcible, driving, urging or impelling desire." The meaning here is "a more gentle, passionate, yearning that contributes positively to the mate." Thus, it corresponds with the traditional root, saqa.

Genesis 4:7. The narrative of Gen 4:7 depicts Cain in the midst of a struggle with sin. The Lord said regarding his sin, "Sin is lying at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it." The desire of sin will overcome him if he does not master it.

The possibilities for the root of "desire" could be related to either saqa or saqa. The traditional meaning of "desire," from the root saqa, would indicate that sin's desire for Cain is "a passionate, longing, craving appetite for ownership." The emphasis of this root is "a desire to possess." This harmonizes with its meaning in Canticles, only here it is "a desire for evil." On the other hand, if the "desire of sin" is connected to the root saqa, its meaning is "to drive or impel" Cain into subjection by force. The emphasis of this root is in the idea of "compulsion." Yet the idea of a forceful, compulsive desire does not seem to be evident in the

61BDB, 1003; KB, 597.
62Wehr, Dictionary, 443.
63S. Craig Glickman, A Song For Lovers (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976) 86-87.
64"Master" is the word "יָדָךְ; literally, "you should rule." In this instance, the imperfect of "rule" is best understood to express "obligation"; also the modal idea of "potential, of taking place, or not taking place in the future" is in view. GKC, 330.
narrative. Rather, the traditional meaning of "desire" in the sense of "a yearning or craving for possession" seems to be predominant.65

*Genesis* 3:16. Three worthy views have been offered to explain the meaning of the woman's desire in Gen 3:16. First, following the traditional root for "desire," the word is understood as "a passionate sexual desire that becomes so strong in the woman that she will never rid herself of the pain of childbearing."66

Second, some have understood "desire" to represent "a deep, natural attraction which a woman will have for her husband."67 This yearning is to fulfill certain psychological and protective needs which she does not possess herself. Keil and Delitzsch suggest that this "desire will be so strong that it will border on disease."68 While these two views of the meaning of "desire" cannot be readily denied, it is questionable that the desire ought to be limited to such narrow senses as sexual or psychological needs in view of the preceding context. A third view argued by Susan Foh tries to draw a linguistic parallel between Gen 3:16 and 4:7, affiliating both instances of the word "desire" with the Arabic root *saqa*.69 Eve's desire was to forcibly drive or urge her husband in the same way sin was trying to forcibly drive Cain.70 The meaning of "rule" is changed from a future indicative to the modal aspect of the prefix conjugation. Instead of "the husband shall rule," it is "he should rule," indicating potential rather than certainty. The whole statement thus reads, "Your desire shall be to control your husband but he must rule over you if he can."

Making these changes, Gen 3:16 is made parallel to Gen 4:7, "Its (sin's) desire shall be to control you but you must rule over it if you can." Thus, these words in v 16 mark the beginning of the antithetical...
battle between the sexes. The woman's "desire"\textsuperscript{71} will work against her husband. As a result of the fall, man no longer rules easily; he must fight for his headship.

There are major difficulties with this view. The basic defect of this proposal is that it assumes certain conclusions about the passage at the expense of the context. This argument is predicated upon the assertion that exactly what happened in the fall became God's continuing pronouncement upon man. However, examination of the context already has established that Eve did not forcibly urge her husband, which this interpretation requires. On the other hand, neither did Adam try to rule over her. He listened to her and then made his own choice to participate with her in sin (Gen 3: 17).

Also arguing against Foh's suggestion is the fact that it reads a possible rendering of Gen 4:7 back into 3:16, just because the phrases are almost identical in the Hebrew. This provides a good grammatical parallel, but not a contextual one.

A final major deficiency in this view is that it fails to provide for a consistent usage of $\overline{\nu}v\,\overline{\alpha}\nu\,\overline{\lambda}$. Cant 7: 11 will not permit the meaning of a forcible desire.

A suggested solution to Genesis 3:16. The exact meaning of Gen 3:16b continues to perplex scholars. It is not possible to come to any kind of a definite conclusion. The best that can be provided is an alternative solution.

A suggested solution to Gen 3:16b is found in assessing the pronouncement made to the woman as a curse, which has its major emphasis in the "rule" of the man. The sense of "rule"\textsuperscript{72} in this context is negative, predicting the type of abuse that man will vent.

\textsuperscript{71}The LXX rendering of $\nu\,\nu\,\overline{\lambda}$ as $\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\omicron\varphi\eta$ in Gen 3:16 and 4:7 cannot be used as a positive support for this view. Instances do demonstrate that $\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\omicron\varphi\eta$ can be rendered: (1) a positive sense of "turning, turning back, refuge, bend in a direction toward"; this would be derived from the Arabic root $\textit{saqa}$; (2) it may also be a negative sense of "turning away from" as a derivative of the root $\textit{saqa}$. The LXX rendering of Gen 3: 16 is, "Your desire is toward your husband," ($\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma\tau\omicron\nu\,\overline{\alpha}\nu\,\overline{\delta}\,\omicron\sigma\omicron\,\overline{\nu}$ $\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\omicron\varphi\eta$ $\sigma\omicron\omicron$). In Gen 4:7 ($\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma\sigma\epsilon\,\overline{\nu}$ $\alpha\pi\omicron\sigma\tau\omicron\rho\omicron\varphi\eta$ $\alpha\omicron\tau\omicron\omicron\omicron$), the LXX translators interpreted this as a reference to Abel's "desire, toward his brother." In both instances, the preposition $\pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$ with the accusative expresses "direction toward." $\Pi\rho\omicron\varsigma$ may only carry the meaning "against" when it follows a verb of disputing or hostility, which is not the case in these instances; see George B. Winer, \textit{A Grammar of the Idiom of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature} (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1957) 717. The LXX translators would most likely have used $\overline{\alpha}n\,\overline{\nu}\,\overline{t}$ if they meant Gen 3:16 and 4:7 to mean "desire that resists or works against."

\textsuperscript{72}The word "rule" ($\overline{\nu}v\,\overline{\lambda}$) was already seen to have reference to man's headship over creation (Ps 8:2-7). Now, for the first time, this word is found in the text of Genesis.
upon his wife. He will carry his headship to domination because of his depraved nature. While this aspect of the curse primarily refers to the husband and wife, it can also refer to men and women outside of the context of marriage where role relationships exist.

Almost every husband, or even most men in general, who have exercised leadership over women have used their position to dominate at one point or another. Paul continually reminds men not to "rule" over their wives in this negative fashion (Eph 5:25-30; Col 3:19; cf. 1 Pet 3:7-9; see also an inference concerning all men in 1 Cor 11:11-12 as to how they should treat women). If a man is controlled by the Spirit, he may to some extent rise above the downward drag of his depravity and thus nullify the effects of this aspect of the curse. It is even more difficult to make a dogmatic statement concerning the woman's desire. It appears that this statement must be taken in conjunction with the rule of man in order to be part of the curse. Yet this statement must not be viewed, as it has by many, to suggest that "all women willingly or unwillingly shall subject all their desires to their husbands."73 Nor is there any evidence to support the view that woman is here placed under subjection for the first time. It is also doubtful whether Foh's suggestion is compatible. Women often do battle against their husbands, but this does not serve the intent of Gen 3:16.

The term "desire" is best related to the traditional root, *saqa*. It refers to "the woman's longing or yearning that she may have about the affairs of life." In the course of the fall, she failed to subordinate this desire under her husband. With this in view, the phrase, "your desire is to your husband," is best regarded as a statement of fact, reminding the first woman that the subordinate principle still remains in effect. However, it is not a pronouncement that all women will submit all their desires to their husbands. Their sin nature precludes that they will do this.

Women, for the most part, have continued to perpetuate the subordinate relationship established prior to the fall to different extents. In almost every case, however, they have experienced a varying degree of harsh rule from men. The statement regarding the woman's desire is not a curse in and of itself, but it becomes one when it is treated in relation to the man's sinful rule.

73Young, *Genesis 3*, 127-28; Calvin (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, I. 172) states, "'Thy desire shall be unto thy husband,' is of the same force as if he had said that she should not be free and at her own command, but subject to the authority of her husband and dependent upon his will; or as if he had said, 'Thou shalt desire nothing but what thy husband wishes.'" See also Foh, "What Is The Woman's Desire?" 379.
Women, by virtue of their sin nature, resist the leadership of men by rejecting the harsh rule pronounced in the curse, or, often, any positive rule as well. In either case, the NT confirms that such women are subordinate (1 Cor 11:2-16; 14:34-35; Eph 5:22-23; Col 3:18; 1 Tim 2:11-14; 1 Pet 3:1-7). Depending upon the temperament of the man, as well as the amount of a woman's insubordination, she may receive more or less harsh treatment. The rule of man may not actually seem like a curse to those women who refuse subordination altogether, for they are not in a position to receive it. However, they potentially remain under this curse.

The consistency of this view over other views is found in several factors. It provides a unified explanation of הָוָתָן throughout the OT. It also upholds the hierarchical relationship established prior to the fall. At the same time, it acknowledges the effects of sin that tend to distort and corrupt this role relationship. This view also brings the meaning of Paul's commands concerning the woman's subjection and the man's leadership to full expression.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this article has been to examine the key themes of creation order for their contributions to role relationship. The evangelical feminists who promote egalitarianism emphasize Genesis 1 as the main account describing the positional relationship between the sexes.

First, it was noted that Genesis 1 is a general, chronological account of the events in creation. It introduces the reader to two realms, the spiritual and the functional. The main emphasis is placed upon the spiritual realm in which man and woman correspond in every respect. Both share equally in the image of God.

On the other hand, Genesis 2 shifts the emphasis. When the details of the sixth day are unfolded, they reveal a definite positional distinction between man and woman. The feminists refuse to believe this and have provided several explanations to dilute a role distinction. However, many indications argue for the headship of the man. This chapter is also the backbone for the NT's emphasis upon role differentiation in the church, home, and society. Paul uses this pre-Fall principle to support post-Fall subordination.

Moreover, Genesis 3 does not disregard a positional distinction between the male and female. The events of the fall relate, among other considerations, that there was a sinful disregard for the headship established in the previous chapter.

The specific meaning of Gen 3:16b becomes vital to understanding the role relationship. Several views were observed, and a suggested possibility was then presented. Gen 3:16 pronounces a curse
upon the woman, with emphasis upon the abusive rule that man will exercise. The "desire" mentioned provides a reminder to the woman that the subordinate role still continues for her and is the correct position for women in every age. In and of itself, this is not a curse to women. However, it becomes a curse in conjunction with the man's sinful rule. When women do submit themselves under men, it will become hard, at times, because of the man's misuse of rulership. Not all women have placed themselves in a subordinate position to men, but the statement was not meant to express this. In almost every case, women who have subordinated themselves to men have experienced harsh rule in varying degrees. Gen 3: 16 continues to uphold the creation account wherein God established the hierarchical relationship. Together, the first three chapters of Genesis consistently indicate that God's order for man and woman has never changed.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Grace Theological Seminary
200 Seminary Dr.
Winona Lake, IN 46590
www.grace.edu
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
Scholia et Homiletica

Eve's Answer to the Serpent:
An Alternative Paradigm for Sin and
Some Implications in Theology

P. Wayne Townsend

The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God
did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you
must not touch it, or you will die." (Gen. 3:2-3)

Can we take these italicized words seriously, or must we dismiss them as the
hasty additions of Eve's overactive imagination? Did God say or mean this when he
instructed Adam in Genesis 2:16-17? I suggest that, not only did Eve speak accu-
rately and insightfully in responding to the serpent but that her words hold a key
to reevaluating the doctrine of original sin and especially the puzzles of alien guilt
and the imputation of sin. In this article, I seek to reignite discussion on these top-
ics by suggesting an alternative paradigm for discussing the doctrine of original sin
and by applying that paradigm in a preliminary manner to various themes in the-
ology, biblical interpretation, and Christian living. I seek not so much to answer
questions as to evoke new ones that will jar us into a more productive path of the-
ological explanation. I suggest that Eve's words indicate that the Bible structures
the ideas that we recognize as original sin around the concept of uncleanness.

Scholarly Discussion of Eve's Words

Eve has very few complete defenders in the history of scholarship in
Genesis.¹ Of those, only U. Cassuto explains why he is confident that Eve cor-

¹ Among all the literature, I could locate only four scholars willing to grant that Eve's words
correctly describe God's will concerning the tree: Basil F. C. Atkins, The Book of Genesis
(London: Henry E. Walter, 1954); Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Creation and Fall: A Theological
Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, part 1, trans. Israel Abraham (Jerusalem:
Magnes Press, 1972), 145; Leon J. Wood, Genesis: A Study Guide (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,
1975).
rectly stated God's will. After an analysis of the word meaning "to touch" (ng), he concludes, "Hence in the final analysis the clause neither shall you touch it is simply synonymous with the preceding clause." If we accept Cassuto's argument, Eve's words represent little more than a stylistic variation by the writer. Robert Davidson openly adopts this position. Yet, the deviation so catches the eye (as evidenced by Eve's many detractors noted below) that one could justly wonder why the writer would insert such a variation here.

A second class of defenders accepts Eve's words as substantive variations, but deflects criticism of Eve. Nahum M. Sarna suggests the possibility that Eve "is quoting what her husband told her." But the lack of any textual support that the writer of Genesis intended this conclusion gives this the appearance of desperate speculation. John J. Scullion and Phyllis Trible independently conclude that Eve "builds a 'fence around the Torah,' a procedure that her rabbinical successors developed fully to protect divine law and ensure obedience." But this would imply that the writer of these words lived in a context where his readers would be broadly familiar with such "rabbinical fencing," making these words impossibly late additions to Genesis.

Occasionally, commentators omit any comment on the words at all, evidently assuming that they are self-evident, as for example Walter Brueggeman. But the vast majority of commentators consider these words of Eve, at best, unfortunate mental or emotional slips, and, at worst, deliberate distortions. Writers as diverse as James Montgomery Boice, Nahum Liebowitz, Henry Morris, Gerhard von Rad, Claus Westerman, and George A. F. Knight populate this camp, indicating a broad tradition of commentary. All these join in cho-

2 U. Cassuto, Commentary on the Book of Genesis, 145.
3 Robert Davidson, Genesis 1-11 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 40: "This addition to the prohibition as originally stated in 2:17 has led certain scholars to suggest that the woman herself is not beginning to overplay God’s strictness. It may, however, be no more than a stylistic variation on the prohibition of eating.
5 John J. Scullion, Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992), 38: "The woman, in defense, builds a fence around it something God did not say." Phyllis Trible, "Feminist Hermeneutics and Biblical Studies," Christian Century 99, no. 4 (1988) : 117: "If the tree is not touched, then its fruit cannot be eaten. Here the woman builds a ‘fence around the Torah,’ a procedure that her rabbinical successors developed fully to protect divine law and ensure obedience.
6 Walter Brueggeman, Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).
rus in proclaiming Eve's culpability. Some even go so far as to delve into Eve's psyche, finding resentment before the Fall. However, this tradition is fraught with difficulties for anyone who wishes to take seriously the logic of the narrative of Genesis 1-3.

The rabbis that Plant quotes are right in considering an "embroidery of the truth to be the opening wedge of sin." Indeed, the Bible consistently condemns any addition to God's Word as sin. Thus, if Eve presumptuously added to God's Word in her conversation with the serpent, she sinned, or began sinning, prior to taking the fruit and eating it.

Yet, the biblical narrative will not allow this. The effects of the Fall (the knowledge of transgression and the shame that drive them to hide first from each other and then from God) occur immediately after their consuming the fruit: "Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Gen. 3:7). The Fall is not a process, but a point of disobedience, after which original sin takes hold, and before which we can assume only innocence.

Some commentators have attempted to overcome this difficulty by moving Eve's motivation for the "addition" into her subconscious or emotions. They paint a picture of an Eve who has harbored discontent over God's strictness. However, emotions such as resentment or exasperation directed toward God, 

---

**Genesis** (Moody Press: Chicago, 1982), 26: "she ... added 'neither shall he touch it.'" Claus Westerman, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 239-40): "But while the command is being discussed, it is altered in the very act of defending it the narrator makes this know by means of a slight refinement that the woman introduces: 'Neither shall you touch it.'... One who defends a command can already be on the way to breaking it."

George A. F. Knight, *Theology in Pictures: A Commentary on Genesis Chapters One to Eleven* (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1981), 36: "She shows her exasperation by adding that she and her husband are forbidden even to touch the fruit." Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 74: "[she said it] to temporize, to give expression to resentment against God's command by adding... 'neither shall you touch it.'" Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 78: "Is there, however, a touch of resentment lurking in the refinement that she adds to the original stipulation, namely that they may not even touch the forbidden fruit?" [italics original]


Numbers 20:7-12; Deuteronomy 13:1-5; 18:22; Proverbs 30:3-9; 1 Corinthians 4:6; Colossians 2:22-23; Revelation 22:18

Robert S. Candlish, *Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 62: "she dwells on the prohibition, amplifying it and magnifying it as an intolerable hardship." Knight, Theology in Pictures, 36: "She shows her exasperation by adding that she and her husband are forbidden even to touch the fruit." H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1942), 148: "By this insertion Eve betrays the course her thought have taken. She feels the prohibition was unduly sharp so unconsciously she sharpens it herself." C. H. MacIntosh, *Genesis to Deuteronomy: Notes on the Pentateuch* (1880; reprint, Neptune, NJ.: Liozeaux Brothers, 1974), 28: "whether her misquotation proceeded from ignorance, or indifference, or a desire to represent God in an
or a hidden desire for the fruit that exists prior to the temptation, imply a corrup­tion or defect in Eve's character prior to the Fall; she harbored moral rebellion in her heart while still "unfallen" and was therefore created evil. Nor does it assist us to grant her clemency due to "alarm and foreboding" over the conniving of the serpent. Presumption driven by fear remains presumption.

The high commitment across theological lines to such a position suggests a deeper foundation. Gowan notes that there is a history of sexism in the interpretation of Genesis 3, in which commentators attempt to understand why Eve was the target of the Serpent's temptation. To do so, they call her either the weaker or stronger partner because of her gender. Perhaps a better explanation may simply be theological inertia. The denigration of Eve's person, motivation, and words in Genesis 3:2-3 has a long and venerable history, going back to the Reformation and before. But, to do justice to both the text and the logic of the text, we must accept Eve's words, "do not touch it" as significant, logical, and innocent. To accomplish this we can do no better than to pose, regarding Eve's words, the questions that Scullion poses regarding the Serpent:

What is the function of the Story?
What did it symbolize in the ancient Near East?
What associations would it evoke in the minds of the people of Israel as they listened to the story?

What Was the Function of the Story

Most commentators on Genesis seem to read Eve's words as if no other revelation existed. If they refer to any other text at all, it is only Genesis 2:17 in which the original command from God is first rendered. But such a reading overlooks the way Genesis assumes the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan and how it uses the Sinai code.

arbitrary light, or from all three, it is plain that she was entirely of the true ground of simple confidence in, and subjugation to, God's holy Word." Stigers, A Commentary on Genesis, 74: "To temporize, to give expression to resentment against God's command by adding ... 'neither shall you touch it.'" Vawter, On Genesis, 78: "Is there, however a touch of resentment lurking in the refinement that she adds to the original stipulation, namely that they may not even touch the forbidden fruit?" [italics original]

12 John W. Willis. Genesis (Austin, Tex.: Sweet Publishing, 1979), 118: "The woman's hidden desire for the forbidden fruit is revealed in her overreaction to the serpent's question: 'We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die

13 Franz Delitzsch, A New Commentary on Genesis, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1899), 153: "It is more probable that the woman seized with alarm and foreboding of what the serpent was trying to persuade her to, sought by this addition to cut off any further allurements."


15 Scullion, Genesis, 38.
Genesis was written to a redeemed people of God. Genesis, as received, contains an apologetic for the origins of Israel as a distinct nation and its claim on the land of Canaan. Chapters 1-11 place Israel in the context of a fallen and diverse humanity, culminating in the table of nations and the tower of Babel. In the table of nations, Genesis lays special emphasis on Egypt (Mizraim) and Canaan, the two principals in the exodus-conquest by detailing their genealogies most extensively (Gen. 10:13-19). The remainder of Genesis focuses on the selection of Abraham and his descendants as God's special people (Gen. 12:2-3; 13:16; 17:2, 4; 18:18; 22:17; 26:4; 28:3,14; 32:12; 35:11; 41:49; 46:3; 47:27; 48:4, 16, 19) and the land as God's promised possession (Gen. 12:7; 13:15, 17; 15:18; 17:8; 23:18; 24:7; 28:13; 35:12; 48:4; 50:24). In the process, Genesis 15:12-21 provides a theodicy of sorts covering the entire experience of slavery-exodus-conquest. Genesis 9:25 effectively authorizes the subjugation of the Canaanites.

Thus, Genesis assumes the history of exodus-conquest, in the midst of which Israel received the law-code of Sinai. Traces of this law-code play important parts in the drama of Genesis. The story of Judah and Tamar assumes the levirate marriage of Deuteronomy 25:5-6. And the flood depends in part on a common understanding of clean and unclean animals and their respective appropriateness for sacrifice. While such concepts did predate the exodus, the post-exodus context of the first readers implies that these passages were intended to be read in the light of the law given at Sinai, including the cleanliness code found in Leviticus.

In this context, the story of the Fall functions as a pretext for the exodus-conquest. Genesis 3 identifies the sources of evil that have led to the suffering of slavery. It also justifies the conquest by expanding the division between the woman and the Serpent to an ongoing struggle between their descendants (Gen. 3:15). All of this relies on a separation from, and over against, the rest of the nations--the very separation identified in the Levitical code (Lev. 18:24-30; 20:22-27).

I happily count myself among those whom Walter Houston derides as "biblicistic scholars swallowing whole the Bible's own account of their [Israel's] origin." Walter Houston, Purity and Monotheism (Sheffield, U.K.: JSOT Press, 1993), 120. I freely admit that I assume the validity of the scriptural history that depicts God's giving the laws found in Exodus through Deuteronomy prior to the entrance into the land. Such are the assumptions of faith, for which I make no apology, except to note that the assumptions of criticism which allow others to give these laws a postexilic (or at least Davidic) origin are equally grounded in presuppositional faith commitments.


Note that here the woman and her seed are identified with the side of holiness and godliness over against the evil of the Serpent. This should surely add more stature to Eve in her conversation with the Serpent.
Some will find this position naturally untenable. The hermeneutical descendants of Wellhusen may object that any uncleanness reference must arise from a late priestly source and therefore must be derivative of, not foundational to, Old Testament thought. Traditionally, critical scholars designate Genesis 2-3 as derived from the "J" or "Yahwist" document or source or tradition (commonly dated to the Davidic or Solomonic era), whereas they place the whole of Leviticus in the venue of the "P" or "Priestly" tradition (commonly proclaimed to be postexilic).\(^{19}\) Furthermore, they give J a purpose distinct from P (critiquing royal authority versus salvaging the traditions and identity of a despairing, postexilic community).\(^{20}\) Whether this prevented some commentators from questioning the significance of Eve's words cannot be known because they remain universally silent on the issue of any supposed source for the phrase, "do not touch," separate from the rest of the text in which it sits.

Thomas Kuhn has noted that theoretical paradigms, such as the documentary hypothesis, serve not only to organize thought, but to set the boundaries for what a theorist can possibly perceive to exist.

Surveying the rich experimental literature from which these examples are drawn makes one suspect that something like a paradigm is prerequisite to perception itself. What a man sees depends both upon what he looks at and also upon what his previous visual-conceptual experience has taught him to see. In the absence of such training there can only be, in William James' phrase, "a bloomin' buzzin' confusion."\(^{21}\)

Indeed, according to Kuhn's analysis, even major theoretical crises do not force theoreticians to spot evidence that runs counter to their paradigm.\(^{22}\)

This must surely condition the perception of those holding to the documentary hypothesis, for Genesis 3:2 lies at the heart of the theory. The docu-


\(^{22}\) Ibid., 77: "Though they may begin to lose faith and then to consider alternatives, they do not renounce the paradigm that has led them into crisis. They do not, that is, treat anomalies as counter-instances, though in the vocabulary of philosophy of science that is what they are." Interestingly, such a crisis may be in the offing, heralded by the likes of Scullion, *Genesis*, 6-7, who notes Rendtorff's attempt to dispense with the documentary hypothesis as "tried in the fire, found wanting, and leading to an impasse." Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 37: "In a book that is patently anonymous, and where all original texts have long since disappeared, it is most likely that a project to determine Genesis' authorship and mode of composition is doomed from the start." and Jay W. Marshall, Israel and the *Book of the Covenant: An Anthropological Approach to Biblical Law* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1992), 25: regarding the hook of the covenant the notes that source criticism has ceased, form critics "have posited just about every imaginable origin and Sitz im Leben, but actually have offered little information about the cultural context," and neither history nor redaction studies "can offer much progress without accompanying knowledge of the relationship between law codes and legal procedures."
Commentary hypothesis originated in part in a distinction between the use of the names Elohim and Yahweh in the text of the Pentateuch, such as found in Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 and ascribing these to different eras and intentions. Universally, this hypothesis has assigned Genesis 1 completely to P and 2-3 completely to J.23 Having made that theoretical commitment, one could easily overlook any connection between any phrase in the Yahwist chapters 2-3 and the Priestly book of Leviticus.

But even within the camp of criticism, room can be made to accept the validity of a Priestly insertion in this story. In reciting the basics of the Documentary Hypothesis, von Rad notes that even P "contains an abundance of ancient and very ancient material"24 and allows for "minor insertions from the Priestly Document" throughout Genesis,25 though he does not identify this as one. (This resonates with R. K. Harrison's criticism of dating P late: "Modern discoveries have always shown that priestly material from the Near East is always early rather than late in arising, and that priestly traditions are usually preserved in a meticulous manner."26 Moreover, Van Seter has recently suggested that the Yahwist (J) is possibly later than earlier thought, perhaps in the early postexilic period.27 Wenham further squeezes J and P together, noting that it is difficult to maintain a postexilic date for Leviticus "in the face of abundant quotations in Ezekiel and linguistic evidence that P's vocabulary does not resemble that of late biblical Hebrew."28 Additionally, Anthony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien declare that the Documentary Hypothesis applies only to narrative texts, and on that basis designate the uncleanness code of Leviticus as undated "non-source text."29 Finally, though he holds to a late dating of Leviticus, Walter Houston notes, "that the biblical system of rules arose in a setting that was eminently compatible with it: it required no sharp changes in habitual dietary and cultic practices general in the land and its environs since the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age."30 Such being the case, one can hardly exclude the possibility, even from within the structure of the Documentary Hypothesis, that Eve's statements might be original to the story and indicative of the story's dependence on the cleanness code found in Leviticus 11.

23 Westerman, Genesis 1-11: A Commentary, 186: "The generally acknowledged conclusions that Gen.2-3 is to be attributed to a different literary source (J) from Gen. 1 (P) is assumed."
24 von Rad, Genesis, 25.
25 Ibid., 28.
27 John Van Seter, Prologue to History: The Yahwist as Historian in Genesis (Louisville: John Knox, 1992), 21, 129.
30 Houston, Purity and Monotheism, 177.
Given such a dependence, the phrase, "do not touch," functions to draw the readers' attention beyond the bounds of Genesis itself and into the cleanness code. As I will show shortly, it raises in the mind of the original reader many associations that enrich the meaning of the text and communicate more than our present tradition of commentary suggests.

What Did the Words of Eve Symbolize?

With this understanding, we may revisit the words of Eve to the Serpent. She specifies that "God did say ... you may not touch it [the fruit] " (Gen. 3:3). If we restrict the context of these words to Genesis, then we must admit that God did not say that (Gen. 2:17). But, if we allow that the writer of Genesis expected a basic familiarity with the law of Sinai, we must allow a broader context for this statement, including the Sinai laws found in the whole Pentateuch. In this broader context the words, "you may not touch," take on deeper significance.

We find parallels to Eve's words in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14. Leviticus 11 defines food that is lawful for Israelites to eat. Concerning unclean land animals, verse 8 states, "You must not eat their meat or touch their carcasses; they are unclean for you" (emphasis added). The vocabulary and sentence structure of this verse strongly parallel's Eve's words in Genesis 3:3: "You must not eat fruit ... and you must not touch it."

This parallel strengthens when we realize that this is a special prohibition against touching unclean (forbidden) food and is beyond the prohibition against touching dead clean animals given in Leviticus 11:39-40. Furthermore, this combined prohibition against eating and touching repeats throughout the chapter (with certain stylistic variations) in reference to various forbidden foods. Indeed, the prohibition against touching becomes a crescendo of emphasis as the chapter proceeds: unclean water creatures--"And since you are to detest them, you must not eat their meat and you must detest their carcasses" (v.11) ; flying creatures--"These are the birds you are to detest and not eat because they are detestable to you ... whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean till evening." (v 13, 24b); land animals (again!)--"whoever touches the carcasses of any of them will be unclean ... whoever touches their carcasses will be unclean until evening. Anyone who picks up their carcasses must wash his clothes, and he will be unclean until evening" (26b, 27b-28a).

Deuteronomy 14:8b repeats this pattern once, phrasing the prohibition identically to Leviticus 11:8a, the closest Leviticus parallel to Genesis 3:3. While it could be argued that Deuteronomy 14 was derived from Leviticus 11, such a derivation does not lessen the strength of the parallel to Genesis 3:3. The very choice of this phrase over others in Leviticus 11, whether by derivation or common source, points to it as a key phrase in teaching the prohibitions against unclean food.

Read in this light, the original readers of Genesis 3 would have understood Eve's words as a natural outgrowth of God's command in Genesis 2:17. The
Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was forbidden food, and therefore unclean.

Obviously there are differences. Israel knew of no unclean plants or fruit. But then, Adam and Eve did not eat meat; fruit was the extent of the food granted (Gen. 2:16). Furthermore, the consequences of even touching the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was death (Gen. 3:3), while touching unclean food only made one unclean until evening (Lev. 11:24-28). Yet the consequences of even temporary uncleanness were severe. It required a sin offering for atonement (Lev. 5:2, 5-6), and cut one off from worship, requiring death for the unclean worshiper (Lev. 7:21 cf. Ex. 31:14 for the meaning of the phrase "cut off"). Following Meredith G. Kline, the Garden of Eden was a holy temple-garden, a thought reinforced by the garden motif found in the temple (1 Kings 6:23-35). Such an understanding would equate any unclean person in the Garden of Eden with an unclean person in the temple or even the Holy of Holies—a situation demanding death. But even if we ignore such a connection between the garden and temple, if an Israelite ate unclean food and did not cleanse himself, the ominous threat proclaimed "he will be held responsible" (Lev. 17:16). And eating unclean food was a sin that subjected the whole nation to exile (Lev. 20:22-26), an obvious parallel to the punishment of Adam and Eve.

Finally, we must reckon with the repeated emphasis on evening. Temporary uncleanness by touching demanded immediate cleansing and left one unclean until evening (Lev. 11:25, 28, 31, 32, 39, 40; 17:15). Could this be why Genesis 3:8 notes that God came walking in the "cool of the day," that is, after sunset? Does the narrative indicate that God is visiting them after the time when their uncleanness should have been cleansed, a time when the offense of uncleanness should normally have passed?

In light of all of this one can argue that the original readers of Eve's words would have understood the story in the context of God's commands concerning unclean foods, and would have understood that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was unclean food. This has consequences for both our reading of Genesis 3 and our understanding of original sin.

What Did Uncleanness Symbolize?

If we accept the connection between the words of Eve and the cleanness code of the Sinai laws, then we can move on to Scullion's second question:

32 Note the careful preparation given the high priest for entering the temple in Leviticus 16, including the atonement for sin, the bathing to cleanse, and the covering with holy garments to cover any remaining uncleanness. Leviticus 16:2 makes death the outcome of any less careful handling of the high priest's presence before God.
"What did it symbolize in the ancient Near East?" Here we run onto rough roads. The exact nature of uncleanness continues to elude scholars. And, as an added impediment to the evangelical scholar, the present theories assume a secular, sociological stance. They assume that the dietary laws of Leviticus arose solely from the culture surrounding the Israelites, the product of priests or social consensus. This contrasts starkly with the evangelical church's confession that the Scriptures have divine origin and the implication that any interpretation take seriously the testimony of Scripture concerning the historical circumstances that God describes in this revelation. Yet, these studies have shed light on the cultural context in which God gave these commands.

Following Walter Houston, we may divide most theories into etic and emic classes, or theories supposing that the meaning of cultural features arise to explain historically prior practices, as compared with those supposing that cultural features gain their meaning only in the context of currently held values and beliefs. Without replicating his extensive review of the theories, a few comments can be made. First we should take seriously Houston's suggestion that we need not "take sides," that "historical, material, and symbolic considerations must all be taken into account" in seeking to understand the meaning of a cultural symbol. As I stated earlier, and is evident from Houston's own expansive survey, cleanness codes were widespread throughout the times and cultures of biblical history. Thus, God merely appropriated that historical phenomenon and utilized it to express his will in the Levitical code. The practice does, indeed, precede the explanation. The practice may even have some origins useful for understanding the distinction among clean, unclean, and holy animals.

However, the emic school must command preeminence. One can doubt that any religious practice, however old, can persist in the face of temptation if not reinforced by concurrent values and beliefs. And indeed, there must have been temptation to raise and eat pigs and other unclean animals in Israel, otherwise the prohibition is meaningless. Indeed, Houston well assesses the point when he states, "Whatever the source of social tension, attitudes of contempt [toward food] only develop into formal taboos when a religious factor intervenes."

The Christian Reformed Synod of 1972 adopted the following pastoral advice which expresses this implication well: "Synod encourages the churches to see to it that biblical studies are carried on in a careful and disciplined way, submissively rethinking the thoughts of Scripture itself, and accordingly warns against the use of any method of interpretation which excludes or calls into question either the event-character or the revelational meaning of biblical history, thus compromising the full authority of Scripture as the Word of God. Acts of Synod 1972 (Grand Rapids: CRC Board of Publications, 1972), 69.

Houston, Purity and Monotheism, 120-21.

Ibid., 79.

Ibid., 176, 212.

Ibid., 212.
What is that religious factor? "The division into clean (edible) foods and unclean (inedible) foods corresponds to the division between holy Israel and the Gentile world." Peter's vision in Acts 10 and his subsequent visit to Cornelius confirms this concept as apostolic, since overcoming the Levitical aversion to unclean foods becomes the symbol for overcoming the aversion to evangelizing the unclean (Gentile) people. But current theorists display subtle differences on how certain animals become associated with the unclean Gentiles. Douglas (and Wenham following Douglas) suggests that cleanness and holiness designate conformity to standards of "wholeness and normality," which the unclean fail to meet. Douglas attributes the origin of this to an original division between pastoral and agricultural society, where pigs (of little use to pastoralists) would become abhorred as foreign animals and were therefore symbolic of foreign peoples.

Onto this original abhorrence, Douglas applies a deductive approach to the matter of cleanness. She begins with the general assumption (deduced from many cultural sources) that "uncleanness is a matter of place.... Uncleanness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained." This she then superimposes on the biblical text to determine the pattern that uncleanness breaks. Viewed through this lens, she concludes that "all holiness is exemplified by completeness. Holiness requires that individuals shall conform to the class to which they belong. And holiness requires that different classes not be confused." She settles on methods of locomotion as the criteria for the pattern, the frame into which various creatures must fit to be declared unclean: hopping, jumping, or walking for land animals; use of fins and scales for sea creatures. However, she admits that she cannot explain by this method why some birds are unclean.

Scholars have heavily criticized Douglas' thesis, and excellent summaries of these criticisms may be found in the work of Firmage and Houston. Without repeating their extensive analysis, we can note two basic defects in Douglas' theory. First, the criteria for uncleanness given in Leviticus does not limit itself to methods of locomotion. Chewing the cud (for land animals) and scales (for

41 Ibid., 40.
42 Ibid., 53.
43 Ibid., 55.
44 Ibid.
water creatures) have nothing to do with how a creature moves. (Note catfish who, without scales, move in a way indistinguishable from other fish.) This becomes especially apparent when discussing animals that swarm on the ground. "It is not convincing to suggest that there is anything in common between the modes of movement of a worm, a crab, a minnow, a butterfly, and a mouse. The conclusion must be that while in reference to creatures confined to the ground *seres* takes the place of *remes* and so has some connotation of movement, it does not in general define a group by their "mode of propulsion."  

Second, Douglas assumes that societies build taxonomic systems and then apply them to their reality, thereby designating what is normal or clean or acceptable. But people build their taxonomic systems in reality, classifying everything that appears there in some place. It would be only when some alien animal would invade an area with an already established classification system that something might appear so different as to be declared abnormal or unclean. And even then, people are likely to push something into a known category or even make a new category.  

Edward Firmage applies this separation from Gentiles via the temple cult. Israel was called to be holy as God is holy; not simply clean, not simply free from impurity, but holy. They were to approximate the character of God. Therefore, their diet had to be restricted to only such animals as were suitable for sacrifice. As with most theorists, he runs onto rough roads once he leaves the land animals behind and begins to explore swimmers and flyers. He finds an extension from the land to the sea by noting that forbidden sea creatures (such as eels and crabs) may resemble forbidden land animals (such as ser-pents and crawling insects). Turning to flyers, he admits to the utter speculative nature of his reflections and lands on the theory that those forbidden birds fail to live up to the image of the dove, the paradigm temple bird. But he must

---

46 Houston, *Purity and Monotheism*, 105.
47 Ibid., 103.
49 Ibid., 186.
50 Ibid., 189,200-201.
51 Ibid., 190-91.
wiggle under the strain that locusts have never been sacrificial animals and therefore must represent some kind of concession to the poor.\footnote{Ibid., 192.}

Houston would take us another direction. He suggests that unclean animals, such as pigs, might have been associated with worship of the dead and of underworld deities.\footnote{Houston, Purity and Monotheism, 168.} In such worship the unclean animals may actually have been eaten. This would associate unclean animals with foreign deities and with death and evil. Eating such food would be an obvious offense to God.

Underlying this emic construction, Houston sees an etic division between wild and domestic animals. "Wild creatures refuse the dominion of humankind, they tend to be violent and dangerous, and their diet typically tends to include waste matter and blood."\footnote{Ibid., 199.} Houston must quickly make exceptions for "those large herbivores that had always formed part of people's diet in this area ... certain wild beasts, because of their diet, behavior and mode of life, could be seen as domestic animals in an honorary senses, as it were."\footnote{Ibid., 200.} In the end, the diet is decisive for Houston, who connects the division between clean and unclean to an ideal, nonviolent prefall vegetarianism that "stands for the order and peace of civil society over against the disorder and violence of the wild."\footnote{Ibid., 258.}

One might wonder what were the vegetarian fish to which the Levitical code referred and why cattle and those wild herbivores were not excluded because they will eat carrion and fecal matter. Indeed, if eating meat made an animal unclean, why did that criteria not apply to man, and, therefore, why was the vegetarian ideal not commanded explicitly? Yet, this seems to be an extension to the logic of his theory, an embellishment rather than a foundation.

If we delve to the core of each of these theories, we see some possible outlines to consider. Douglas would have us see the ground of uncleanness in disorder. Firmage would concentrate on the separateness of holiness located in the sacrificial "food of God." And Houston would have us understand a need for separation from foreign deities and demons. Of these, Houston's insights seem to promise the most fruitful interpretation of the forbidden fruit. But I will consider all of them when examining Genesis 3.

Implications of the Fruit as Unclean Food for Genesis 3

Houston's concept of unclean food as connected with forbidden foreign deities would paint the words of Eve in Genesis 3 in black and white. We can
abandon the problematic idea that Eve added to God's command. Rather, with Bonhoeffer, we can proclaim, "Eve's answer still remains on the plane of ignorance of evil. She does not know or recognize evil and she can therefore do nothing but repeat the given commandment and put it correctly. This is a great deal, she remains true to the commandment."57

In this framework, Eve's words signal a deeper, more troubling understanding of the situation. The fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is unclean in a Levitical sense. All the implications derived from those commands can be applied to this passage.

First of all, the tree must be quite dangerous. It represents an embassy of impurity, a locale under the dominion of forces alienated from God. Following Houston, the tree takes on the darkest tones of an outpost of evil in the midst of God's dwelling. No one should be surprised to find the Serpent lurking there--the foreign deity-wanna-be, calling the faithful to transgress, to fall into the domain of death. The first readers, seeing the association of unclean food with underworld deities would find in the tree the gate to the grave. Thus the words of God, "when you eat of it you shall surely die," rang frighteningly true in their ears.

Second, eating or even touching the fruit made Adam and Eve unclean (Lev. 11:24-28). They had become disordered in creation (creatures striving to be "like God"). They had debased themselves with the food of foreigners. They had ingested the offerings of demons. Although the Scriptures only declare a temporary uncleanness for touching and eating such food ("till evening," Lev. 11:24-28), eating unclean food in conscious rebellion against God's command was grounds for being "cut off" from God (Lev. 20:22-26). Therefore, the death penalty would certainly be expected.58 And, inevitably, God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, just as the Levitical law demanded (Lev. 20:22-26).

From Douglas' perspective, even temporary uncleanness would render them out of place in the garden, an offense forcing their removal. Firmage would find a human couple standing in the garden-temple of God, with alien food on their lips, unholy. From Houston's vantage, Adam and Eve had committed idolatry, worshiping the serpent and submitting to his rule. They had forfeited their rights as his servants and had to be removed from the promised land.

But, additionally, it becomes clear that Adam and Eve's uncleanness was not temporary. For they were transformed: "The eyes of both of them were opened,

57 Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall: A Theological Interpretation of Genesis 1-3.*, 69.
58 The garden certainly represented living in the presence of God. God commanded that the garden be symbolically worked into the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle (Cherubim guarding the entrance-Ex. 26:31 cf Gen. 3:24), which Solomon expanded or repeated in the construction of the temple (1 Kings 6:29-35). Indeed, focus on the garden in Genesis 2-3 may have evoked a sense of humans living in the Most Holy Place.
and they realized they were naked" (Gen. 3:7 cf. 2:25). In her theory, Douglas
displays to us Adam and Eve as deformed creatures with no proper place in
God's world, warped away from God's creational standards. Firmage sees them
as alienated from God--common less-than-holy people. Houston darkens this
alienation, declaring them genetically aligned with foreign deities of darkness
and death, permanent residents of the unclean world.

Uncleanness as a Paradigm for Original Sin

The "natural" uncleanness of Adam and Eve would naturally transmit to all
their offspring. Unclean animals give birth, according to their kind, to unclean
animals. Likewise, unclean humanity gives birth to unclean humanity.

It may amaze some to apply this logic to people, but Paul applies it in
1 Corinthians 7:14. There, in arguing against a believer's divorcing his or her
unbelieving spouse, Paul notes that the unbelieving spouse has been sanctified
(made not only clean, but holy, for God's purposes). And he gives as proof that
the expected outcome of such a union would be unclean children but con-
tends that the children of such a union are holy.

Thus, to answer Scullion's third question, in Eve's words, we mark the warn-
ing that eating the fruit will change the holy stewards of God's creation (and
therefore all their descendants) into unclean creatures because of eating
unclean food. Our parents ate, and we are unclean. Their uncleanness (viewed
as deformity or alienation or both) becomes ours by birth. Uncleanness
describes that which we call original sin.

At this point, I urge caution. I do not suggest that the Bible declares that the
cultic uncleanness found in Leviticus 11 and echoed in Genesis 3:2 equals orig-
inal sin. Rather, in communicating the Fall to his people, God utilized the con-
cept of uncleanness (common to the cultures of the time), molded by his
specific use of the concept in the Sinai code, and applied it to Adam and Eve as
a way of communicating what original sin is like. God expounds the history of
the Fall through the metaphor of uncleanness.

Note also that I do not suggest that the Fall became the primary picture
through which God discussed that which we call original sin nor sin in general.
The Fall narrative fades quickly from Scripture's discussion of sin, even inside
Genesis, and does not arise again until Romans 5 and then only indirectly as a
foil to Christ's role in salvation. Rather, I suggest that the fall narrative is built
on the Levitical doctrine of uncleanness, a doctrine that is the primary para-
digm for Scripture's discussion of original sin. This doctrine permeates the Old
Testament, as one can show by any cursory review in an exhaustive concor-
dance of the words unclean, clean, and holy. As I have begun to show and will
show later, it plays significant roles in the New Testament as well.

Indeed, one step forward in the doctrine of original sin may be to simply
view it as the doctrine of congenital spiritual uncleanness. N. Kiuchi has noted
that in the view of Leviticus "sin [the Hebrew word ht'] is a kind of uncleanness,
produced on a dimension different from that of natural uncleanness, namely by breaking a divine prohibition." Here, we can distinguish the biblical distinction between original sin, on the one hand, and rebellion/sin [ḥr'] described in the oft cited exemplars of sin in the Old Testament, including the golden calf incident of Exodus 32, Baal of Peor of Numbers 25, and the grumbling at Meribah of Numbers 20. These were used as symbols of active rebellion, a category separate from natural uncleanness and related only indirectly to the innate sin-fullness understood by what we call original sin. Here the prominence of uncleanness stands unchallenged. Therefore, what the Bible declares about the nature and spread of cultic uncleanness in the Sinai code grants us insight into the nature and spread of original sin.

**Cultic Uncleanness and the Imputation of Sin.**

If this interpretation holds, the puzzle concerning the imputation of sin deserves a reinvestigation, for uncleanness points to a different biblical paradigm for addressing the issue. Uncleanness defines original sin as a culpable state of being. The unclean person was unclean not so much because of what they had done but because of what they were. And that uncleanness accrued to Israelites in situations beyond their control. If someone died suddenly in the presence of a Nazarite, the Nazarite became unclean and "sinned against the Lord by being in the presence of the dead body" (Num. 6:9-12). If, during the night, someone died in the tent in which another Israelite slept, the Israelite became unclean (Num. 19:14). Atonement required not only a sin offering (Lev. 4:1) but also the water of cleansing (Num. 19:11-12, 14). Failure to seek cleansing meant being "cut off" from God's people (Num. 19:13b).

Further, Israelite women became unclean every month during their period of menstruation (Lev. 15:19-23). Again, this required a sin offering (Lev. 19:28-30). And the penalty for ignoring this state of uncleanness meant sexually being cut off (Lev. 20:18). In addition, a descendant of a priest who had a physical defect was, in a sense, unclean (or at least incapable of holiness). Even though they could eat the holy food (Lev. 12:22), they could defile [yihalle] the tabernacle or altar merely by their ministry at them (Lev. 21:23). Such defilement implies uncleanness, since this is what unclean food does to one who eats or touches it (Lev. 11:42-43).

When we view these examples of God's holding people culpable for a state of being over which they had no positive control, the question of alien guilt becomes more concrete. Rather than wrestling with it simply via the interfer-

---

60 See Joshua 22:17; Psalm 81:7; 95:8; 106:19, 26, 32.
61 I take this to be a concession by God to the deformed descendants of priests, since they had no other means of subsistence.
ence of Romans 5:12-17, we are controlling it with a fully developed system of
guilt by uncleanness that is tied into the Fall directly.

Furthermore, this system does not fit the theories of federalism, realism, or
even mediate imputation. In opposition to Federalism, uncleanness declares
that we are guilty at the point of conception due to our state of being, not
through delegation of authority to Adam. Unlike Realism, uncleanness traces
our guilt to our present culpable state of being, not to historical actual actions
by us in Adam. And uncleanness eliminates the need to mediate guilt for
Adam's sin through the accompanying depravity, since our guilt resides in us
apart from Adam's actions because, by effect of Adam's actions, we are unclean
of ourselves. But uncleanness still resounds with the reformation understand-
ing of sin as "a corruption of all nature--an inherent depravity" (Belgic
Confession, art. 15).

Alien Guilt

Having said all of this, I recognize that we still face the problem of alien guilt.
Indeed, the reader's anxiety over alien guilt may have heightened as a result of
these musings. In a context of Western jurisprudence, where one is considered
innocent until it is proved that he did something wrong, the concept of being
born in a state of culpability grates against our sense of justice.
First of all, we should note that the guilt is no longer truly alien. Using
uncleanness as a paradigm for original sin, we note that the guilt is our guilt for
our corruption. The source of the corruption is alien to God's original intent
and act of creation, but even the corruption is "natural" and "normal" for us as
descendants of Adam and Eve. Our discomfort has shifted from the source of
the guilt to the reason for the guilt.

Second, we can note our own natural loathing of that which is grossly
deformed or polluted. In our continued reflection of the image of God (how-
ever warped) we instinctively pull back from that which radically departs from
normativity. In response to physical norms, we reflect God's judgment when
(before compassion can take its course) we recoil at gross deformities in babies,
the severely mutilated bodies of accident victims, or the festering wounds of
lepers. In nature, the ratty remains of a cat-killed robin, the stench of a massive
fish die-off from industrial waste, and the bloated body of a road-killed raccoon
all repel us. We abhor the obvious moral degradation of physical torture, per-
vise sexual practices, and massive political corruption. There are also limits to
our ability to accept ugliness in the place of beauty. (Even the most loving par-
ent can be challenged by a fifth-grade band concert.) In all of these, and many
more, we show that tolerance of the abnormal has its limits.

Finally, we can console ourselves by noting that even this is, at best, a proxi-
mate analogy to reality. Nothing can truly describe the offense of a finite creature
against the infinite, holy God of the universe. The proportions will simply not
allow a balance that we can easily grasp. God talks down to us with uncleanness, and in the process must simplify things that lie beyond our comprehension. In such a context, we must not so much ask how this can be, as ask what we can do in response. The unclean person in Israel often could not help his uncleanness. But he could seek the cure in sacrifice and unction. Although guilt comes on us unbidden from our birth, a just God has provided release: the infusing righteousness of Christ and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit.

The Imputation of Righteousness

As John Murray points out in his discussion of the Roman Catholic view of imputation of sin, the definition of imputation of sin affects the interpretation of imputation of Christ's righteousness in Romans 5. Here again, the Levitical doctrine of uncleanness illuminates the topic with a new light.

Often Christ came in contact with unclean people: lepers, the woman with the flow of blood, the dead daughter and son. In each of these instances, contact with them should have made Christ unclean. This would have implied separation from God and defilement of Christ's person. Instead, contact with Christ makes the unclean person clean (i.e., the cause of uncleanness is removed). Thus, the holiness of Christ reverses the common spiritual order where unclean things can contaminate, but holy things remain powerless to purify (cf. Hag. 2:12-13).

This, of course, reflects the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice: becoming sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God (2 Con 5:21). Indeed, our righteousness comes from being dead, resurrected, and ascended "in Christ" (Rom. 6:1-4; Eph. 2:4-9; Phil. 3:8-10). However one defines this, this doctrine points to the assumption of Christ's identity in contact and communion with him. Does this make us contagious carriers of Christ's righteousness? Perhaps the apostle Paul attaches such significance in his argument against a Christian's divorcing his or her unbelieving spouse in 1 Corinthians 7:14, as mentioned earlier.

Romans 5:12-17

Applying these reflections to the classic passage on immediate imputation suggests the following interpretation. Adam's sin and "all sinned" in verse 12 may reflect the understanding of Adam's sin as the cause of the culpable state of being that we call the sin nature or original sin. This sin nature bore the con-

---

64 Leviticus 22:4-6; Haggai 2:12-13; and by implication Leviticus 13:45.
sequences of death up to the time of Moses despite the absence of law (v. 14) because it was and/or is a transgression of being, not doing. As such, it constitutes sufficient grounds for condemnation without further transgression of the law. This reflects the Reformation understanding of original sin as "a corruption of all nature ... so vile and enormous in God's sight that it is enough to condemn the human race" (Belgic Confession, art.15). Due to Adam's transgression, this sin nature extends to all who descend from him, as does the consequent judgment, death, and condemnation (vv.15-18). Again, this accords with the Reformation understanding of original sin as an "inherited depravity" (Belgic Confession, art.15) spread "byway of the propagation of [man's] perverted nature" (Canons of Dordt, third and fourth main points, art.2).

In parallel, "by the grace of the one man" the "gift of righteousness ... through the one man" overflows to all who are in him. Christ's contagious righteousness mediated through union with him eliminates the uncleanness and brings redemption.

Other Possible Areas of Application

Moving beyond a purely theological understanding, uncleanness as a paradigm allows us to enter into cultural discussions of depravity and culpability. In response to the question, "Is alcoholism or any other addiction either sin or sickness?" the uncleanness theory responds, "Yes!" Sin resides not simply in the moral nature but in the whole being of a person. It should hardly surprise us that such depravity of being might manifest itself in physical defects leading to a vulnerability to addiction. Yet, the addict remains culpable for that deformed nature because that deformity, in itself, is an offense before God against which he must seek remedy, for which only Christ can atone, and from which only the Holy Spirit can liberate. Any form of physical deformity that affects moral decision making cannot not detract from our culpability before God.

Again, the uncleanness theory alters our understanding of being salt and light. If the righteousness of Christ is contagious in the relationship of marriage, it implies that other relationships may sanctify the partner for God's purposes. This calls us to reflect on how the presence of a Christian, living in Christ's holiness, sanctifies the unbelievers with whom they work so that the results of their collaborations become holy to God. Does the call by Paul not to be unevenly yoked identify distinct limits to the sanctifying effect of a Christian in relationship with an unbeliever, or is it a more practical exhortation on the dangers of freely entering into collaboration with someone who is unclean? And how does this affect the urgency of our witness in all forms of mission?

Homiletic Hooks

Of course, all of this will be sterile rambling if we cannot communicate the concept to the average believer. From the perspective of immediate imputa-
tion, the bridge was the "representative nature of Adam's headship." From there we could appeal to analogies of presidential or fatherly decisions that bear long-term consequences for those for whom they act. Uncleanness seems very alien to our culture and therefore will need massive translation. Several homiletic hooks can catch the imagination of the hearer and transform this concept into a useful doctrine.

To understand the offensiveness of our depravity we can again appeal to the image of God referred to above (see "Alien Guilt"). We, too, find gross abnormality offensive. But we can take it further. We are not merely objects out there but the personal creation of God. We, too, would be aggravated by a creation that refused to respond. For instance, suppose one of us invents a lawn mower. We engineer into it the finest in grass-cutting tooling. We pamper it with the finest of fuels, lubricants, and protectants. We store it carefully and keep the blade sharp. It runs efficiently, but cuts not grass. How would we respond?

The Gospels abound with imagery that may assist us. We can point to Jesus' responding to the offense of our unclean nature in cursing the fruitless fig tree in Mark 11:1-25 or in the parable of the unfruitful tree in Luke 13:6-9. These not only represent calls to repentance but question whether those addressed even have the ability (nature) to produce fruit. If not, they represent an offense to the maker/owner that calls down the curse of death. Indeed, Christ points in this direction when he notes that, "A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit" (Matt. 7:18). John the Baptist, too, warns about the consequences of unfruitfulness (Luke 3:9).

A second bridge will be needed for the concept of being born in a culpable state of being. Our culture is inclined to think of infants as innocent until they do evil, and equally liable to consider infant acts as infantile rather than evil, born of ignorance and immaturity rather than depravity. Here we might cautiously borrow from interspecies comparisons. I have a personal theory on the difference between cat lovers and dog lovers. Dog lovers love dogs because they can represent (at their best) what we fantasize people might be at their best: loyal, friendly, loving, willing, teachable. As a cat lover, I accept an animal that more closely resembles fallen humanity: aloof, self-centered, irritable, unteachable. Such characterizations, of course, caricature reality. But no sensible person really expects a cat to achieve the personable nature of a dog. By nature, cats display behaviors we would find unacceptable in humans. And if they were people, they would offend our moral sense, pouncing and scratching and doing pretty much what they please from birth. Our first parents were created as dogs, but they became cats, and so we are born cats, with all the offense that this entails.

Again, the Bible supplies an opening in Paul's phrase, "We were by nature objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). Our nature (who we are from birth, not what we do after birth) offends God to the point of judgment. Here, too, the image of circumcision from Genesis 17 comes into play. The infant male child, by
nature, has an aspect that must be cut away to be acceptable before God. Any child whose unclean foreskin is not removed, God rejects (Gen. 17:14). Finally, the concept of Christ's contagious righteousness steps us beyond the pedestrian evangelical shibboleths of salvation such as, 'Jesus paid for my sins.' The sacrifice of Jesus covers over our consistent offensiveness and, by the indwelling Holy Spirit, his presence works to decontaminate our nature. Lately, geneticists and doctors have increasingly discussed the potential of gene therapy for undoing latent genetic inclination to disease. What better analogy to the effect of the Spirit in our spiritual nature?

This transformation of being echoes in several passages. "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Cor. 5:17). The concept of "new birth" (John 3:3; 1 Peter 1:3) holds latent the concept of a renewed nature. Indeed, Paul's opening salvo regarding the life of gratitude in Romans 12:2 calls on us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Such transformation and renewal indicates that the nature-renewing power lies within us who are in Christ Jesus and in the Spirit.

The Bible supplies several analogies to this renewal's being contagious beyond us. Christ's claim that we are "the salt of the world" (Matt. 5:13) sets us firmly in the center of contagious renewal. Images of detergent and antibacterial soaps that, by nature, cleanse what they touch, might be modern equivalents. We might use this with Paul's discussion of Christ's contagious righteousness sanctifying the unbelieving spouse (1 Cor. 7:14). The antiseptic flow of righteousness in the relationship cleanses (at least outwardly) the spouse of the offensive stench, making him or her suitable in the relationship and rendering the children clean before God.

Homiletic Pitfalls

Introducing a new paradigm also leaves us open to new dangers. We cannot allow our explanations to confuse the shadow for the reality of things that have come. In the uncleanness codes of the Pentateuch, many types of people are singled out for exclusion. The sick, the deformed, and the menstruating all found themselves excluded in various ways from fellowship with God and his people. In using these categories, we must guard against letting people think that the concept of "culpable state of being" implies that such obviously diseased and genetically distorted natures offend God greater than the rest or that such physical signs of human depravity indicate greater sin and condemnation. Such was the error of the disciples in John 9:2, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Although I have stated that physical genetic defects that affect moral behavior cannot detract from culpability, this does not imply that it adds to that culpability. And amoral defects, though emblematic of our inner culpable state, merely expose in some what all of our nature's resemble before God.
Similarly, we must guard against the sorts of theonomistic thinking that would resurrect the food regulations. Any use of these texts should clearly indicate the provisional and tutorial goal of these passages. A heavy emphasis or the vision of Peter (Acts 10) will clearly display that such are merely metaphors and have not enduring spiritual worth.

An easy triumphalism could creep into any exposition of Christ's contagious righteousness. We must always make explicit that in all our theology God "talks down" to us, describing a greater spiritual reality with limited human-scale metaphors. The image of Christ's instantly vanquishing diseased uncleanness and death cannot imply that every believer finds themselves instantly beyond depravity. Nor can we imply that those we "sanctify" by our alliance or marriage become less depraved. We must emphasize that the instantaneous healings and/or cleansings reveal the thoroughness of Christ's saving work but not its timetable. Sanctification still transforms our natures slowly and incompletely until death or Christ arrive.

Summary

The words of Eve in Genesis 3:2, "you shall not touch it," have been grossly misrepresented. They are not the expression of prefall apostasy or weak-mindedness on the part of the first woman. They communicate to God's redeemed people that the Fall and original sin can be understood through the metaphor of uncleanness. Thus, our guilt resides, not first of all in what we do, but in what we are. In the same light, our redemption does not reside, in what we do. It resides in who we become identified as in Christ Jesus and transformed into by the power of the Holy Spirit. Just as the uncleanness of depravity is contagious and spreading, so the righteousness of Christ to, in, and through us can contagiously roll back the sin of the world.

I have endeavored to raise questions in this article to spur us to further reflection on original sin and to suggest some ways of communicating this new paradigm homiletically. If I have accomplished nothing else but to generate renewed interest in the reality of sin and our culpability before God, I will be grateful.

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Calvin Theological Seminary
3233 Burton St SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49546--4387
www.calvinseminary.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
The Creation Account
in Genesis 1.1-3

Part I: Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony

Bruce K. Waltke

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

CHALLENGES TO BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

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


EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).
evolution to explain the origin of species, the majority of the scientific community fell in with Darwin's hypothesis against the Bible. They believed they could validate Darwin's theory by empirical data, but they thought that they could not do the same for the Bible.

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

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

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

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

4 *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. s. v. "Creation."
Payne observed, "By the year 1900, therefore, many people had been educated to believe that the Bible's statements about creation were neither accurate, inspired, nor consistent."\(^5\) No wonder the sons of the fathers turned their backs on their heritage as they sought to answer the question, "How did the world originate?"

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

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

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

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

\(^5\) Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered*, p. 5.
Now the author is not suggesting that by this one experience he has refuted the hypothesis of evolution, but he is maintaining that all answers which attempt to explain the origin of the universe are essentially faith positions. The question that the LORD asked of Job is asked of every man: "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (38:4) Since science is the systematic analysis of presently, observed processes and their phenomena, science cannot and ought not attempt to answer the question of the origin of the universe. The answer is beyond the range of empirical proof.

IMPORTANCE OF BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

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

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

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

Ancient myths died at just this point; they could not be believed because there came into man's experience too much contradictory evidence. As long as the world view assumed by the myth satisfactorily accommodated the apparent realities of the
objective world, it served as a plausible explanation of things and gave a cohesive force to the community. But when that world view slipped radically out of line with the general experience of "the way things are," it ceased to be effective, Mary Douglas, in her work *Purity and Danger*, made the helpful analogy that myth and ritual are like money in providing a medium of exchange. As the test of money is whether it is acceptable or not, so primitive ritual is like good money so long as it commands assent.

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

> It is worthy of note that contemporary poets give expression to a sense of catastrophe. . . . As Amos Wilder points out, poets like John Masefield and Alfred Noyes, Vachel Lindsay and Edwin Markham, even Robert Browning and Alfred Tennyson, and many others who reflected the buoyant optimism of the nineteenth century doctrine of progress, no longer speak to our situation. Where are the Browning clubs or the Tennyson circle? They are gone because man can no longer believe in his own self-made Utopia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

ASSUMPTION UNDERLYING BIBLICAL COSMOGONY

Four assumptions underlie the method used in this series.

1. The validity of the philological approach used by the rabbis of Spain during the ninth century A.D. is assumed, in contrast to the mystical approach employed by their French peers.
2. The historical method of interpretation will be employed as faithfully as possible. Through the tools at our disposal, we must work our way back into the world of the biblical authors if we hope to understand their message.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CREATION AND THE RAHAB-LEVIATHAN THEME

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16 Ibid., pp. 4-6.
Isaiah 51:9 states that Yahweh cut Rahab in pieces and pierced the dragon, and Psalm 89:10 mentions that Yahweh crushed Rahab and quelled the turbulent sea associated with the dragon.

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

INTERPRETATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

A study of the texts in which the Rahab-Leviathan emblem is found shows that the biblical authors used it in one of three ways. First, as seen in the texts considered thus far, they employed the figure to describe God's creative activity in the prehistoric past. Second, the symbol of Yahweh's victory over the dragon is used as symbolic of Yahweh's victory over Pharaoh and Israel's enemies in the historic present. They were particularly fond of using Rahab as a nickname for Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus. Rahab evoked appropriate feelings of Yahweh's victory in creating Israel by destroying the oppressive tyrant and drying up his restraining sea. In Isaiah 30: 7 the prophet, referring to Egypt, wrote, "Therefore I have called her Rahab who has been exterminated." Later when Isaiah calls for the second exodus, this time from the oppressive Babylonian, he commands: "Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago. Was it not Thou who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon? Was it not Thou who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep; who made the depths of the sea a

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

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

SIGNIFICANCE

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

²² Anderson, Creation versus Chaos, p. 128. Incidentally, it may be noted that in contrast to Moses' rod which turned into a serpent (Exod, 4:3). Aaron's rod turned into a dragon (Exod. 7:12). It was Aaron's draconic rod that swallowed the draconic rods of the Egyptians. The point of the incident is now clear: The rod is a symbol of rulership, and God thus demonstrated that His kingdom would swallow up Pharaoh's kingdom. Moreover, God indicated that He would subsume its powers within His own dominion. The psalmist accordingly looked forward to the day when Egypt will be incorporated into Yahweh's rule: "shall mention Rahab and Babylon among those who know Me" (Ps. 87:4).
The Creation Account 
in Genesis 1:1-3

Part IV: The Theology of Genesis 1

Bruce K. Waltke

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

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

EDITOR’S NOTE: This is the fourth in a series of articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from Creation and Chaos (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).
in effect, the myth that sustained Babylonian civilization, that buttressed its societal norms and its organizational structure.¹

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

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

THE POLEMICAL FUNCTION OF GENESIS I

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

THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS I

The evidence of the continuity. First, there is a literary continuity. It has been noted, for example, that both the Enuma elish³ and Genesis 1:2-3 begin with circumstantial clauses followed by the main account of the creation.⁴ Also in both accounts the circumstantial

---

³ Many other versions of Babylonian creation myths are listed by Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis*, 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 61-81, but the Enuma elish may be taken as representative of them.
clauses serve a negative function. Westermann referred to these as the "when-not-yet sentence materials from the ancient Near East and Egypt."\(^5\) This same pattern prevails in Genesis 1:2-3; 2:4b-7; Proverbs 8:24-26; and Ezekiel 16:4-5. As Hasel commented: "In these passages as in the ancient Near Eastern materials, long series of descriptions negate later conditions of the world through formula-like 'when not yet' sentences."\(^6\) Of course, this continuity of literary structure comes as no surprise, for Israel belonged physically to the peoples of the ancient Near East. Her language was Canaanite and her literary compositions, in their physical outward form, conformed to the literary conventions of her age.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enuma elish</th>
<th>Genesis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal</td>
<td>Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primeval chaos; Tiamat, enveloped in darkness</td>
<td>The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light emanating from the gods</td>
<td>Light created</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of the firmament</td>
<td>The creation of the firmament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of dry land</td>
<td>The creation of dry land</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of the luminaries</td>
<td>The creation of the luminaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The creation of man</td>
<td>The creation of man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The gods rest and celebrate</td>
<td>God rests and sanctifies the seventh day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Ibid., p. 97.
9 Ibid., p. 129.
The explanation of the continuity. How can these correspondences be explained? One answer is that Israel's neighbors borrowed from her. But this is improbable for it is almost certain that many of these ancient Near Eastern myths antedate Moses.  

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

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

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

10 Ibid., pp. 130-32.  
14 In this connection also see R. N. Whybray, The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13-14 (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1971), pp. 62-77.  
Furthermore, any religion that even approaches the Mosaic faith, such as Mohammedanism, borrowed it from Israel. Moreover, this religion did not arise from Israel itself. Over and over again they confess that they are stiffnecked and prone to conform to the religions around them. No, Israel's religion did not originate in the darkened mind and heart of man. Instead, as the prophets consistently affirm, it is a revelation from God. This is the only answer that satisfies both the mind and spirit of man. If, then, the theological content is by divine revelation, does it not follow that the historical details may also have come by divine revelation?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Against this background, the polemical function of the first
chapter of Genesis is evident. Not that the tone is polemical; pre-
cisely the opposite. As Cassuto noted, "The language is tranquil,
undisturbed by polemic or dispute; the controversial note is heard
indirectly, as it were, through the deliberate, quiet utterances of
Scripture."20 By a simple straightforward account of the way it
happened, the biblical account corrects the disturbed pagan notions.
Here there is no theogony. No one begot God; God created all.
Stuhmueller commented: "Alone among all Semitic creative gods,
Yahweh underwent no birth, no metamorphosis."21 Moreover, here
there is no theomachy. The Spirit of God does not contend with a
living hostile chaotic force, but hovers over the primordial mass
awaiting the appropriate time for history to begin. How can the chaos
be hostile when it is not living but inanimate? It can only be shaped
according to the will of the Creator. The sun, moon, and stars, wor-
shiped by the pagans, are reduced to the status of "lamps" (Gen.
1:16). The dreaded תָּנִין ("dragons") are created by
God, who calls them good (v. 21). McKenzie put it this way:

19 Sarna, Understanding Genesis, p. 7.
20 Umberto Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, trans. Israel
21 Carroll Stuhmueller, "The Theology of Creation in Second Isaias,"
Against this background, the Hebrew account of origins can scarcely be anything else but a counterstatement to the myth of creation .... The Hebrew author enumerates all the natural forces in which deity was thought to reside, and of all of them he says simply that God made them. Consequently, he eliminates all elements of struggle on the cosmic level; the visible universe is not an uneasy balance of forces, but it is moderated by one supreme will, which imposes itself with effortless supremacy upon all that it has made. By preference the author speaks of the created work rather than of the creative act, because he wishes to emphasize the fact that the creative Deity, unlike Marduk, has not had to win his supremacy by combat with an equal.22

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

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

THE THEOLOGY OF GOD ACCORDING TO GENESIS 1

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

GOD AS THE CREATOR

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

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

23 Ibid., p. 102.
24 Gerhard von Rad, cited by Payne, Genesis One Reconsidered, p. 22.
from defeating the kings of the East, he blessed him and said:
"Blessed be Abram of El Elyon (the Most High God), Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:15). Abraham immediately recognized this king-priest who worshiped the Creator rather than the creation as his king-priest, and Abraham gave him a tenth of all. Indeed they worshiped the same God, but instead of calling God merely by the epithet El Elyon, Abraham added God's personal name and replied, "I have sworn to Yahweh, El Elyon, Creator of heaven and earth" (Gen. 14:22). By adding the personal name Yahweh, he revealed that the Most High Creator was also the God of history, law, and ethics, the God who would establish His kingdom on earth through Abraham's seed.

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

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

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

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

Two passages illustrate that בָּרָא was used to mean something other than creatio ex nihilo. In Genesis 1:27, God "created" (ברא) the man, but in Genesis 2:7 God "formed" (יצר) the man from the earth. Moreover, בָּרָא is used with a double accusative to define the production of a new mental state; for example, in Isaiah 65:18, the Lord declares, "for behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness." Gruenthaner observed: "Evidently, Jerusalem and the people are represented as being prior to the state into which they are converted."28

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

Comparison of בָּרָא and עשה

| Genesis 1:21  | God created the sea monsters -- בָּרָא עשה |
| 1:25         | God made the beasts -- עשה |
| 1:26         | God said, "Let us make man" -- עשה בָּרָא |
| 1:27         | And God created man -- בָּרָא |
| 2:4a         | When the heavens and the earth were created -- בָּרָא עשה |
|             | When the Lord God made earth and heaven -- עשה |
| 1:1          | God created the heavens and the earth -- בָּרָא |
| Exodus 19:11 | God made the heavens and the earth -- עשה |
| Genesis 1:16 | God made the two great lights . . . and stars -- עשה |

Ps. 148:3, 5  | Praise Him, sun, moon, . . . stars
|              | He commanded and they were created -- בָּרָא |
| Isaiah 40:26 | Who created these [sun, moon, stars] -- בָּרָא |

Anderson set forth similar comparisons in the use of these words in Isaiah 40-66 and found that יְצָר, עָשָׂה, and בָּרָא are all used synonymously.  

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

- God made (עשָה) the firmament, heavenly bodies, sea animals and birds, land animals and man.
- God separated (בדָּל) light and darkness, the waters above and firmament below, the water and dry land.
- God placed (נתן) the heavenly bodies above the uninhabited world, and man to rule over the inhabited world.
- God created (ברא) sea creatures, birds, man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The biblicist faces a dilemma when considering the origin of those things which are contrary to God. A good God characterized by light could not, in consistency with His nature, create evil, disorder, and darkness. On the other hand, it cannot be eternally outside of Him for that would limit His sovereignty.

The Bible resolves the problem not by explaining its origin but by assuring man that it was under the dominion of the Spirit of God.

GOD AS THE SAVIOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD AS THE RULER

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

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

35 Terry Hulbert, "Eschatological Significance of Israel's Annual Feasts" (Th.D. disc., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1965), p. 95.
Announcement: And God said .. .
Command: "let there be .. let it be gathered .
let it bring forth ..."
Report: And it was so
Evaluation: And God saw that it was good.
Temporal framework: And there was evening, and there was morning, the ... day.

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

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

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

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

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

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

And what an encouragement that they would ultimately succeed! The Creator did not leave His job half finished. He perfected the creation, and then He established it. He did not end up with chaos, as Isaiah noted (Isa. 45:18). Neither would He forget His people. The program He began with He would consummate in triumphant rest.
The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3

Part V: The Theology of Genesis 1--Continued

Bruce K. Waltke

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

GOD'S DIVINE ATTRIBUTES SEEN IN GENESIS 1

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

HIS GREATNESS

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


EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the final installment in a series of five articles first delivered by the author as the Bueermann-Champion Foundation Lectures at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, Portland, Oregon, October 1-4, 1974, and adapted from I(Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974).
If God was great to Israel which had a limited view of the universe, how much greater He ought to be to modern man. Today we know that our galaxy is spinning like a gigantic pinwheel extending for 104,000 light-years from one end to the other. Our sun is 25,000 light-years from the center of this gigantic spiral and rotates around its center once every one million years. Above and below the spiral of our galaxy are about one hundred clusters of stars with one million stars in each cluster, and some of them have a diameter of 16 million miles. And to think we are but part of one of thousands of galaxies! Certainly God's vast creation reveals something of His own greatness.

HIS WISDOM

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Light</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Luminaries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Water</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sky</td>
<td></td>
<td>Birds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Land</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Beasts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vegetation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Man</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four crucial differences separate the two translations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hebrew</th>
<th>NASB</th>
<th>Whybray</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>נקח</td>
<td>directed</td>
<td>understood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>רוח</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
<td>mind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>משפט</td>
<td>justice</td>
<td>to achieve order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>בונה</td>
<td>understanding</td>
<td>creative skill</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

3 R. N. Whybray, The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13-14 (Cambridge:
At the University Press, 1971), p. 18.
in verse 12 the same verb undoubtedly means "to measure." In fact, in verse 12 the NASB translated הֵתכְּנֶה "to measure." One would normally assume that the word would have the same meaning in the next verse. Moreover, the notion of "measure" fits this passage better. Isaiah is asking, "Who has measured the mind of Yahweh?" i.e., "Who has comprehended it?" or as the Septuagint correctly interpreted it, τίς ἐγνώσει καρπίου: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" In another connection Paul asked that same question: "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (1 Cor. 2:16).

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

**HIS GOODNESS**

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

---

4 Ibid., p. 76.
The separation of the elements into their life supportive systems enabled man to live. The heavenly bodies not only served as an example of rulership but also served to enable man to observe the seasons and times as he took part in the historical process, in which sphere the Creator was pleased to display His other sublime moral attributes of justice, righteousness, grace, and truth. The animals were under man's sway, and the herbs, vegetation, and fruit provided for his physical needs. It was not good that man should be alone, and so God made him a counterpart equal with himself.

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

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

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

The creation myth, then, underscored in the minds of its celebrants that they were slaves. Sarna observed, "The position and function of man in the scheme of creation paralleled precisely the status of the slaves in Mesopotamia."\(^6\)

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

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

**OTHER CREATION PASSAGES**

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

**PSALM 104**

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Ps. 104</th>
<th>Gen. 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>&quot;covering yourself with light&quot;</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>3-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>&quot;stretching out the heaven&quot;</td>
<td>2b-4</td>
<td>6-8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

JOB 38:4-11

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

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

\(^9\) John C. Whitcomb, Jr., and Henry M. Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phila-
To put it another way, is the earth referred to in Job 38:4 the unformed earth or the dry land separated from the sea?

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

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

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

PROVERBS 8:22-31

By means of soliloquy the wisdom poet seeks to show the primacy of wisdom. In the poem, wisdom claims to have existed prior to and at the time of God's first created acts. The issue is, What does wisdom include among God's creative acts? By implication the
"depths and springs" mentioned in verse 24 are included among God's creative acts.

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

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

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

I. Summary statement 8:22-23 (2 vv.)
The LORD possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.
From everlasting I was established from the beginning, from the earliest times of the earth.

II. Circumstantial clauses 8:24-29 (6 vv.)
A. Negative situation: "when-not-yet" sea or land.
8:24-26 (3 vv.)
1. When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.
2. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills I was brought forth;
3. While He had not yet made the earth and the fields, for the first dust of the world.

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

8:27-29 (3 vv.)

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

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

8:30-31 (2 vv.)

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

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

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

ISAIAH 45:7

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

CONCLUSION

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

John wrote about Him as the Creator: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him; and apart from Him nothing came into being that
has come into being. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:1-5).

Paul also wrote about Christ as the Creator: "For Him all things were created, both in the heavens, and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities— all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16-17).

And the writer of the Book of Hebrews spoke of Him as the man who will bring all things under His dominion: "He did not subject to angels the world to come, concerning which we are speaking. But one has testified somewhere, saying, ‘What is man, that Thou rememberest him? Or the son of man, that Thou art concerned about him? Thou hast made him for a little while lower than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, and hast appointed him over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet.’ For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:5-8).

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Dallas Theological Seminary
3909 Swiss Ave.
Dallas, TX 75204
www.dts.edu
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu
CAIN AND HIS OFFERING

BRUCE K. WALTKE

Introduction

Partially because of the laconic style in which the Cain and Abel story is told and partially because of prejudgments, scholars are divided in their opinions why God rejected Cain's offering. This essay aims to answer that question.

Prejudging that our story reflects the development of Israelite religion, Skinner proposed that the story represents an early stage of Israelite religion in which animal sacrifice alone was acceptable to Yahweh. He explained: "It is quite conceivable that in the early days of the settlement in Canaan the view was maintained among the Israelites that the animal offerings of their nomadic religion were superior to the vegetable offerings made to the Canaanite Baals." Disregarding the unity of Genesis and ignoring God's mandate that Adam, the representative man, till the ground (2:5; 3:23), Gunkel claimed: "This myth indicates that God loves the shepherd and the offering of flesh, but as far as the farmer and the fruits of the field are concerned, He will have none of them." Cassuto, by contrast, perceptively compared this story with the Creation story and the Garden of Eden story.

There is a kind of parallel here to what was stated in the previous chapters: the raising of sheep corresponds to the dominion over the living creatures referred to in the story of Creation (i 26, 28), and the tilling of the ground

---

1 For an excellent commentary on the Cain and Abel story see "Cain and Abel" in The New Media Bible Times 1/3 (published by the Genesis Project, 1976).
2 For the function of offerings see Claus Westermann, Genesis (BKAT 1; 3 vols.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1974-82) 1.401f.
4 Hermann Gunkel, Genesis ubersetzt and erklart (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922) 43.

363
is analogous to what we are told at the beginning and the end of the story of the Garden of Eden (ii 5, iii 23).\(^5\)

Some orthodox commentators, coming to the text with the prejudice that fallen man may approach offended God only through blood, think that God rejected Cain's sacrifice because it was bloodless. Candlish, for example, wrote: "To appear before God, with whatever gifts, without atoning blood, as Cain did--was infidelity."\(^6\)

This writer comes to the text with the prejudgments that the storyteller drops clues in his text demanding the audience's close attention to details in the text, Gen 4:1-16. Leupold underscored that in the lapidary style of Scripture "significant individual instances are made to display graphically what course was being pursued."\(^7\) The second presupposition entails that the interpreter also listen to the rest of Scripture in order to determine the text's meaning and/or to validate his interpretation of the narrative.\(^8\) Although the Cain and Abel story probably enjoyed preliterary independence, it must now be read as part of the Pentateuch. Skinner\(^9\) rightly noted that the exegete must pay attention to the audience to whom a story is addressed. Unfortunately, he reconstructed the wrong audience! Shackled by his presuppositions of source criticism and lacking the modern tools of literary criticism (sometimes called "rhetorical criticism"), he interpreted the story in the light of hypothetical "first hearers" instead of the readers of the Pentateuch to whom the text in hand was addressed. (Prior to and/or apart from the modern emphasis to hear a text wholistically, studies by William Henry Green,\(^10\) H. Segal,\(^11\) and D. J. A. Clines,\(^12\) each in his own way, put the unity of the Pentateuch beyond doubt.)


\(^8\) Bruce K. Waltke, "Is It Right to Read the New Testament into the Old?" *Christianity Today* 27/13 (September 2, 1983) 77.


\(^12\) D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (JSOT Supp. 10; Sheffield, England: University of Sheffield, 1978).
We commence our study with the observation that the text syntactically distinguishes between the offerer and his offering: "The LORD looked with favor on ['el] Abel and on ['el] his offering, but on ['e1] Cain and on ['el] his offering he did not look with favor" (Gen 4:4b-5a).

I. Cain's Offering

1. Offerings in the Pentateuch.

The Torah, especially the priestly legislation (the so-called "P document"), has a rich and precise vocabulary to represent the sacraments offered to the LORD on an altar; each term denotes a physical object representing a spiritual truth upon which the worshipper could feed spiritually in his approach to and communion with God. The most inclusive term for presentations to God on the altar is qorban, "offering," from a root signifying "to bring near." This term is not used in the Cain and Abel story.

Offerings can be analyzed broadly into two classes: voluntary and involuntary. Involuntary offerings include the "sin offering" (hatta’i) and the "guilt offering" ('asam). These sacrifices make "atonement" (kpr) and involved shedding blood for removal of sin. Were Cain presenting an involuntary offering, he would have been rejected for failure to offer blood. In fact, however, in the Cain and Abel story, a part of the Books of Moses, neither "sin offering" nor "guilt offering" is used.


14 Jacob Milgrom, Cult and Conscience: The Asham and the Priestly Doctrine of Repentance (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976). Other involuntary presentations include the substitute animal for the first born (Exod 34:19-20), the ritual for cleansing from leprosy (Leviticus 14), and defilement by contact with a carcass (Numbers 19).

The voluntary offerings included the "burnt offering" (‘ola), "meal offering" (minha), and "fellowship offering" (selem), including "acknowledgement offering" (toda), "votive offering" (neder), and "free-will offering" (nedaba). These dedicatory offerings could be either animal, as in the case of the burnt-offering (Leviticus 1), or grain, as in the case of the "meal offering" (Leviticus 2). The fellowship offering could be either (Leviticus 3). A libation offering (nesek) accompanied burnt and fellowship offerings. The priest's portion of the fellowship offering was symbolically "waved" before the LORD as his portion and called the "wave offering" (Tenupa). Certain portions of it (namely, one of the cakes and the right thigh) were given as a "contribution" from the offerer to the priests, the so-called "heave offering" (teruma).

The term "sacrifice" (zebah) may be a generic term for presentations on the altar (mizbeah) or a more technical term for representing rituals in making a covenant. The slaughtering of an animal in the latter case symbolized a self-curse (that is, the one making covenant would say words to the effect, "may it happen to me as it is happening to this animal I am killing") and effected a sacrifice.16 We need not pursue the word further because it is not used in Genesis 4.

Our narrator designates three times (vv 3, 4, 5) the brothers' offerings by minha, a grain offering, it will be recalled, in the so-called "P document." The unusual element in the story from a lexical viewpoint is not that Cain's offering is bloodless but that Abel's is bloody! In any case, by using minha, Moses virtually excludes the possibility that God did not look on Cain's offering because it was bloodless. Rothkoff said:

The terminology used with regard to the patriarchal age is that of the Torah as a whole; it is unlikely that the same words in Genesis mean something different in the other Books of Moses. Thus, Cain and Abel each brought a "gift" (minhah; Gen. 4:4f.), which was usually of a cereal nature as brought by Cain (Lev. 2, et al.) but could also refer to an animal offering (I Sam. 2:17; 26:19). Noah offered up a burnt offering (‘olah; Gen. 8:20ff.) and the pleasing odor of the sacrifice is stressed.17

He could have added that Noah in conformity with the later priestly and deuteronomistic legislation distinguished between "clean and

unclean" animals (Gen 7:2, the so-called "J document"! cf. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14).

2. The Meaning of minha outside the Pentateuch

Most scholars trace minha back to an Arabic root meaning "to lend someone something" for a period of time so that the borrower can have free use of the loan. In Hebrew, however, the idea of loaning is lost, and it comes to mean "gift," "tribute."

In nontheological texts it designates a "gift" from an inferior to a superior person, particularly from a subject to a king, to convey the idea of homage. The Israelites, for example, who despised Saul "brought him no present" (minha) (1 Sam 10:27), that is, as Carr explained: "did not acknowledge the new king." The kings submissive to Solomon brought "tribute" (minha) (1 Kgs 4:21 [Heb. 5:1]; cf. Jdg 3:15-18; 2 Sam 8:2, 6). "Gifts" to Solomon included articles of silver and gold, robes, weapons and spices, and horses and mules (1 Kgs 10:25).

A person brought a gift appropriate to his social standing and vocation (cf. Gen 32:13ff. [Heb. vv 14ff]). Appropriately, Abel, a shepherd, brought some of his flock (that is, from the fruit of the womb of sheep and/or goats), and Cain, a farmer, brought from the fruit of the ground. Furthermore, would God reject the eldest son's tribute because it came from the ground that he himself had commanded Adam to work? If minha were translated by either "gift" or "tribute" in Gen 4:3-5, it would be clearer that the absence of blood from Cain's presentation on his altar did not disqualify him (cf. Deut 26:1-11).

The theological uses of minha comport with its nontheological uses (cf. Num 16:15; Jdg 6:18; 1 Sam 2:17; Ps 96:8; Zeph 3:10). Snaith said that minha could loosely be used in the sense of "gift" or "tribute" even in specific cultic contexts. Carr likewise observed: "Of particular interest in this connection is the distinction between zebah and minha in 1 Sam 2:29; 3:14; and Isa 19:21; between 'ola and minha in Jer 14:12 and Ps 20:3 [H 4]; and between shelem and minha in Amos 5:22."19

Our lexical study for the term designating Cain's offering gives no basis for thinking it was rejected because it was bloodless. In fact,

18 Carr, "mnh," 514.
19 Ibid.
of the many expressions for presentations to God which were available to Moses, he could not have used a more misleading term if this were his intended meaning.

3. Descriptions of the Offerings within the Text

The storyteller intends to contrast Abel's offering with Cain's by paralleling "Cain brought some" with "Abel brought some," by adding with Abel, "even he" (gam hu) (v 4), and by juxtaposing in a chiastic construction the LORD's acceptance of Abel and his gift with his rejection of Cain and his gift (vv 4b-5a).

He characterizes Abel's offerings from the flocks as "from the firstborn" and "from their fat." By offering the firstborn Abel signified that he recognized God as the Author and Owner of Life. In common with the rest of the ancient Near East, the Hebrews believed that the deity, as lord of the manor, was entitled to the first share of all produce. The firstfruits of plant and the firstborn of animals and man were his. The LORD demonstrated that he gave Egypt its life and owned it by taking its firstborn. Israel's gifts from the animals involved those that open the womb (Exod 13:2, 12; 34:19) and gifts from the ground had to be the "firstfruits" (bikkurim) (Deut 26:1-11).

Abel's offering conformed with this theology; Cain's did not. In such a laconic story the interpreter may not ignore that whereas Abel's gift is qualified by "firstborn," the parallel "firstfruits" does not modify Cain's. Skinner cavalierly rewrote the story and misinterpreted the data thus: "Cain's offering is thus analogous to the first-fruits (bikkurim Ex 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; Nu 13:20 etc.) of Heb ritual; and it is arbitrary to suppose that his fault lay in not selecting the best of what he had for God."21

Abel also offered the "fat," which in the so-called "P" material belonged to the LORD and was burned symbolically by the priests. This tastiest and best burning part of the offering represented the best. Abel's sacrifice, the interlocutor aims to say, passed that test with flying colors. Cain's sacrifice, however, lacks a parallel to "fat."

---

20 Sometimes the principle of redemption by substitution came into play here. In the case of children, the LORD provided a substitute animal (cf. Gen 22:1-19; Exod 13:1-13; Dent 15:19), and the Levitical family was consecrated to God in place of the firstborn (Num 3:1-4; cf. Num 18:15-16).

21 Skinner, *Genesis*, 104; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 42 held the same view.
In this light Plaut's comment, "God's rejection of Cain's offering is inexplicable in human terms," appears obtuse.

Finally, is it not strange that if the narrator intended that Cain's sacrifice was disqualified for lack of blood that he does not mention blood with Abel's gift. Admittedly it is a negative clue, but when combined with the two positive clues, the mention of "firstborn" and "fat," it shouts out against Von Rad's baseless claim: "The only clue one can find in the narrative is that the sacrifice of blood was more pleasing to Yahweh."23

Rabbinic exegesis also picked up these clues ("two expressions to emphasize that the oblation was the best of its kind ..."24 without mentioning "blood") and then exaggerated them, maintaining that Cain brought produce of the poorest quality. We cannot agree with Westermann who negates these clues and draws the conclusion instead that the text merely speaks of God's immutability. He said:

Gott hat das Opfer des einen angesehen, das des anderen nicht. Das Gott das Opfer Kains nicht ansah, ist also weder auf seine Gesinnung noch auf ein falsches Opfer noch auf eine falsche Art des Opferns zurückzuführen. Es ist vielmehr das Unabänderliche damit ausgesagt, dass so etwas geschieht.25

Westermann's view represents God as capricious. Rather, Abel's sacrifice represents acceptable, heartfelt worship; Cain's represents unacceptable tokenism.

4. Witness of the NT

The writer of Hebrews says that by faith Abel offered a better sacrifice than Cain did (Heb 11:4), a statement that tends to support the rabbinic interpretation. No text in the NT faults Cain for a bloodless sacrifice. To be sure Hebrews mentions "the blood of Abel," but he has in mind Abel's blood, not that of his sacrifice (Heb 12:24). Jesus' cleansing blood, he says, is better than Abel's blood because Abel's cried for vengeance, whereas the blood of Christ,

24 Cassuto, Genesis 1.205.
25 Westermann, Genesis, 403.
typified in God's sacrifice to clothe the nakedness of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21), cried out for forgiveness and provided salvation.

III. The Characterization of Cain

1. The Character of the Priest in the Pentateuch

The unity of the Pentateuch also enables us to discover, interpret, and validate clues regarding the brothers as priests. Leviticus 8-9, 26 teaches that the priest's character qualified him or disqualified him from the altar. An encroacher, be he Israelite or non-Israelite, must be put to death. In this light, the statement in vv 4-5 that the LORD accepted one priest, Abel, and rejected the other, Cain, takes on new significance. Whereas the text explicitly characterizes Abel's offering, and more or less infers Cain's, it dwells on Cain's character, and more or less infers Abel's.

2. Cain's Characterization in the Text

Robert Alter refined our interpretation of narrative by analyzing and classifying the following techniques used by a story-teller for communicating his meaning: statements by the narrator himself, by God, by heroes or heroines; by verbal clues; by juxtaposition of material; by characterization; and by consequences of actions. We employed the techniques of verbal clues and juxtaposition of material to discover the blemish in Cain's gift. The other techniques expose the deformity in his character.

The LORD said he is unacceptable: "If you [Cain] do what is right, will you not be accepted?" (v 7). To this he added: "Sin is crouching at your door." After sin so dominated Cain that he killed Abel, the LORD cursed Cain even as he had earlier cursed his spiritual father, the Serpent: "You are under a curse" (v. 11; cf. 3:14).

Note too how the narrator characterizes the sulking Cain as a sinner unworthy to worship. Cain's visible behavior confirms the LORD's privileged assessment of his heart. Cain's anger against God is written

large on his face (vv 5-6; contrast Hab 2:4), and he progresses in sin from deficient worship to fratricide (v 8).

Cain's speech, disclosing his unregenerate heart, condemns him. His sarcastic question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" betrays both his callousness against God and his hate of his brother made in God's image (v 9). He calls into question God's wisdom, justice, and love and attempts to justify himself, claiming: "My punishment is more that I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence" (vv 13-14). Even after God mitigates his sentence (v 15), he fails to respond to God's grace (v 16).

As a consequence of his action Cain became a man without a place, an outcast from God's presence, from the ground, and from his fellow-man (vv 14-16).

3. Witness of the NT

The NT validates our conclusions drawn from the text. Jesus characterized Abel as righteous (Matt 23:35), and Hebrews added that Abel, in contrast to Cain, offered his gift in faith: "By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings" (Heb 11:4). According to John, Cain belonged to the evil one and was himself evil: "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1 John 3:12). According to Jude, Cain spoke abusively and thought like an unreasoning animal: "Yet these men speak abusively against whatever they do not understand; ... like unreasoning animals ... woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain" (Jude 11f.).

Conclusion

Although the narrative by repeating the preposition 'el with both the proper names, Abel and Cain, and with minha syntactically distinguishes the brothers and their offerings, yet theologically, as suggested above, the two are inseparable. Elsewhere Yahweh rejected the gifts of Korah (Num 16:15), Saul's men (1 Sam 26:19), and apostate Israel (Isa 1:13), not because of some blemish in their offering, but because of their deformed characters. Cain's flawed character led to his feigned worship. Had his mind been enlightened
to understand his dependence upon the Creator, who fructified the
ground, and the Redeemer, who atoned man's sin through Christ's
blood, providing a basis for man's reconciliation to God, he would
have offered not a token gift, but one from the heart, and along with
Abel both he and his gift would have been pleasing to God.

Westminster Theological Seminary
Philadelphia

This material is cited with gracious permission from:
Westminster Theological Seminary
Chestnut Hill
Philadelphia, PA 19118
www.wts.edu
Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu