

The Biblical Account of Origins

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Introduction

The basic elements in the biblical account of origins are summarized in the opening verse of the Bible, Gen 1:1:

- I. “In the beginning”—the “when” of origins;
- II. “God”—the “Who” of origins;
- III. “created”—the “how” of origins;
- IV. “the heavens and the earth”—the “what” of origins.

In this paper we will take up each of these elements in turn, with special emphasis upon the “when”¹ and aspects of the other elements that impinge upon the relationship between Scripture and science.

I. The “When”: “In the *Beginning*”

In discussing the “when” of creation, a number of questions arise for which an answer may be sought in the biblical text. Does Gen 1–2 describe an absolute or relative beginning? Does the Genesis account intend to present a literal, historical portrayal of origins, or is some kind of non-literal interpretation implied in the text? Does the biblical text of Gen 1 describe a single creation event (encompassed within the creation week), or is there a prior creation described in Gen 1:1, with some kind of gap implied between the description of Gen 1:1 and

¹ This emphasis upon the “when” of creation is in stark contrast with that of, e.g., Raymond F. Cottrell, “Inspiration and Authority of the Bible in Relation to Phenomena of the Natural World,” in *Creation Reconsidered: Scientific, Biblical, and Theological Perspectives*, ed. James L. Hayward (Roseville, CA: Association of Adventist Forums, 2000), 203, who claims that “The Bible writers have much to say about who created the universe [which according to Cottrell refers exclusively to ‘the atmospheric heavens, or sky, and to the surface of the earth,’ 197], some to say about why he created it, little to say about how he created it, and nothing to say about when he created it.” Likewise, this is contra Frederick E. J. Harder, “Theological Dimensions of the Doctrine of Creation,” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 282, who writes, “Indeed, there is total lack of concern in the biblical record with the question of ‘when’ [the ‘when’ of creation].”

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Gen 1:3ff.? Does the Genesis account of origins present a recent beginning (at least for the events described in Gen 1:3ff., including life on earth), or does it allow for long ages since creation week? Let us look at each of these questions.

A. An Absolute or Relative Beginning?

The answer to the question of an absolute vs. a relative beginning in Gen 1 depends to a large degree upon the translation of the first verse of the Bible, Gen 1:1. There are two major translations/interpretations.

1. Independent Clause. The standard translation until recently is as an independent clause—“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”² Such a translation implies that God existed before matter, and thus He created planet earth at some point “out of nothing” (*creatio ex nihilo*).

2. Dependent Clause. In recent decades, some modern versions have translated Gen 1:1 as a dependent clause, following the parallels in the ancient Near Eastern (hereafter abbreviated ANE) creation stories. So Gen 1:1 reads, “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, . . .” Then Gen 1:2 is taken as a parenthesis, describing the *state* of the earth when God began to create (“the earth being . . .”). Gen 1:3ff. resumes the sentence structure of v. 1 and describes the actual commencement of the work of creation (“And God said . . .”).³ A serious theological implication follows. If, according to the dependent clause translation, the earth already existed in the state described in Gen 1:2 when God began to create (Gen 1:1), then God and matter might be seen to be co-eternal principles. This conclusion would imply that Gen 1 does not address the absolute creation of planet earth, when, as we will see below, in fact it does.

Implications of these two views may be summarized in the following chart:

Independent Clause	Dependent Clause
a. <i>Creatio ex nihilo</i> is explicitly affirmed.	a. No <i>creatio ex nihilo</i> is mentioned.
b. God exists before matter.	b. Matter is already in existence when God begins to create.
c. God creates the heavens, earth, darkness, the deep, and water.	c. The heavens, earth, darkness, the deep, and water already exist at the beginning of God’s creative activity.
d. There is an absolute beginning of time for the cosmos.	d. No absolute beginning is indicated.

² Examples of modern English versions with this translation include: KJV, NIV, NJB, NLT, NASB, NKJV, REB, and RSV.

³ Recent translations with this reading include examples from the Jewish tradition (NJPS) and the Catholic (NAB); see also E. A. Speiser, *Anchor Bible: Genesis* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 3, 8–13. Medieval Jewish commentator Ibn Ezra (d. 1167) was an early advocate of this position. The Protestant versions NRSV and NEB also translate Gen 1:1 as a dependent clause, but then take v. 2 as the main clause of the sentence. Medieval Jewish commentator Rashi (d. 1105) advocated this position. For either alternative, the end result is the same, in that it gives a relative beginning to creation and may allow for pre-existing matter before God’s creative work described in Gen 1.

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Victor Hamilton, in his NICOT commentary on Genesis, summarizes the importance of the proper translation of the opening verse of Scripture:

The issue between these two options—“In the beginning when” and “In the beginning”—is not esoteric quibbling or an exercise in micrometry. The larger concern is this: Does Gen 1:1 teach an absolute beginning of creation as a direct act of God? Or does it affirm the existence of matter before the creation of the heavens and earth? To put the question differently, does Gen 1:1 suggest that in the beginning there was one—God; or does it suggest that in the beginning there were two—God and preexistent chaos?⁴

Evidence for the traditional view (independent clause) is weighty, and I have found it persuasive.⁵ This includes:

a. Grammar and Syntax. Although the Hebrew word *bʿrēšît* (“in the beginning”) does not have the article, and thus could theoretically be translated as the construct “In the beginning of . . .”, the normal way of expressing the construct or genitive relationship in Hebrew is for the word in its

⁴ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 105. We might note in passing another view which takes Gen 1:1 as a dependent clause “when . . .”, but still affirms an absolute beginning for creation. In this view the various terms in Gen 1:2—*tohû* “unformed” and *bohû* “unfilled,” and the terms for “darkness” and “deep”—are all meant by the author to imply “nothingness.” So verse 1 is a summary; verse 2 says that initially there was “nothingness,” and verse 3 describes the beginning of the creative process. See especially Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story: Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews UP, 1978), 63–73. Against the suggestion that all the words in Gen 1:2 simply imply “nothingness,” it must be observed that verses 3ff. do not describe the creation of water, but assume its prior existence. The word *têhôm* “deep,” combined with *tohû* and *bohû* together (as in Jeremiah 4:34), do not seem to refer to nothingness, but rather to the earth in an unformed-unfilled state. In Gen 1:2 this unformed-unfilled earth is covered by water. It should be noted that Doukhan’s recent thinking seems to be moving away from the “nothingness” position. This is apparent not only from personal conversations, but also, e.g., from his unpublished paper, “The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth,” presented at BRISCO, Loma Linda, CA, October 2001, 13 [referring to the “primeval water of Gen 1:2 as polemic against the ANE creation myths”]: “This does not mean, however, that the author [of Gen 1] is thinking of symbolic water. He may well be referring to real water, but his concern is not so much water *per se*; he is not dealing with the creation or the chemical description of water as such.”

⁵ For more detailed discussion, see especially Walter Eichrodt, “In the Beginning,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Studies in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962), 1–10; Hamilton, 106–108; Gerhard F. Hasel, “Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look,” *Bible Translator* 22 (1971): 154–168; idem, “The Meaning of Genesis 1:1,” *Ministry* (January 1976): 21–24; Hershel Shanks, “How the Bible Begins,” *Judaism* 21 (1972): 51–58; Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3; Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132 (1975): 222–228; and E. J. Young, “The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three,” in *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1976), 1–14.

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construct state to be followed by an absolute *noun*. In harmony with this normal function of Hebrew grammar, when the word *b^erēšît* occurs elsewhere in Scripture as a construct in a dependent clause, it is always followed by an absolute *noun* (with which it is in construct), not a finite *verb*, as in Gen 1:1.⁶ Furthermore, in Hebrew grammar there is regularly no article with temporal expressions like “beginning” when linked with a preposition. Thus “In the beginning” is the natural reading of this phrase. Isa 46:10 provides a precise parallel to Gen 1:1: the term *m^erēšît* (“from the beginning”), without the article, is clearly in the absolute, and not the construct. Grammatically, therefore, the natural reading of Gen 1:1 is as an independent clause: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

Syntactically, Umberto Cassuto points out that if Gen 1:1 were a dependent clause, the Hebrew of Gen 1:2 would have normally either omitted the verb altogether⁷ or placed the verb before the subject.⁸ The syntactical construction that begins Gen 1:2, with *waw* (“and”) plus a noun (“earth”), indicates “that v. 2 begins a new subject” and “therefore, that the first verse is an independent sentence” (independent clause).⁹

b. Short Stylistic Structure of Genesis 1. The traditional translation as an independent clause conforms to the pattern of brief, terse sentences throughout the first chapter of the Bible. As Hershel Shanks remarks, “Why adopt a translation that has been aptly described as a *verzweifelt geschmacklose* [hopelessly tasteless] construction, one which destroys a sublime opening to the world’s greatest book?”¹⁰

c. Theological Thrust. The account of creation throughout Gen 1 emphasizes the absolute transcendence of God over matter. This chapter describes One who is above and beyond His creation, implying *creatio ex nihilo* and thus the independent clause.¹¹

⁶ Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34; all part of the clause “in the beginning of the reign of X.”

⁷ If v. 2 constituted a parenthesis, as suggested by Ibn Ezra and his modern counterparts. A parallel situation is found in 1 Sam 3:2–4. See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part One: From Adam to Noah* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1978), 19–20.

⁸ If v. 2 constituted the main clause of the sentence, as suggested by Rashi and his modern counterparts. Parallels for this construction are found in Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; and Hos 1:2. See Cassuto, 19.

⁹ Ibid, 20. So Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Gen 1–15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 15: “‘And’ + noun (= earth) indicates that v 2 is a disjunctive clause.”

¹⁰ Shanks, 58.

¹¹ See Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology, no. 27 (London: SCM, 1962), 32: “This verse can be interpreted grammatically in two different ways. . . . While there is a choice grammatically, the theology of P [Gen 1] excludes the latter possibility [i.e., that Gen 1:1 is a dependent clause] . . . we have seen that the effort of the Priestly writer is to emphasize the absolute transcendence of God over his material.” Gerhard von Rad argues similarly: “Syntactically perhaps both translations are possible, but not theologically. . . . God, in the freedom of his will, creatively established for ‘heaven and earth,’ i.e., for absolutely everything, a beginning of its subsequent existence” (*Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library [Philadel-

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d. Ancient Versions. All the ancient versions (LXX, Vulgate, Symmachus, Aquila, Theodotion, Targum Onkelos, the Samaritan transliteration, Syriac, Vulgate, etc.) render Gen 1:1 as an independent clause.

e. Parallel with John 1:1. The prologue to the Gospel of John is clearly alluding to Gen 1:1 and commences with the same phrase that begins Gen 1:1 (LXX). In John 1:1, as in the LXX, this phrase “In the beginning [*En archē*]” has no article, but is unmistakably part of an independent clause: “In the beginning was the Word. . .”].

The recent¹² impetus for shifting to the dependent clause translation of Gen 1:1 is based ultimately on ANE parallel creation stories which start with a dependent clause.¹³ But ANE parallels cannot be the norm for interpreting Scripture. Furthermore, it is now widely recognized that Gen 1:1–3 does not constitute a close parallel with the ANE creation stories. For example, no ANE creation stories start with a word like “beginning”—the biblical account is unique! Already with Hermann Gunkel, the father of form criticism, we have the affirmation: “The cosmogonies of other people contain no word which would come close to the first word of the Bible.”¹⁴

phia: Westminster, 1972], 49). Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, The New American Commentary (Broadman and Holman, 1996), 139, rightly points out that the theological argument cannot be the sole basis for decision (contra Childs and von Rad), and yet at the same time, “there is no room in our author’s cosmology for co-eternal matter with God when we consider the theology of the creation account in its entirety.”

¹² The dependent clause view is not totally new to modern times. As noted above, it was proposed already in medieval times by the Jewish scholars Rashi and Ibn Ezra. However, John Sailhamer, “Genesis,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:21–22, shows that these scholars did not reject the traditional reading (independent clause) on grammatical grounds, but because of their pre-understanding of cosmology in which the heavens were created from fire and water, and thus the water of Gen 1:2 must have been in existence prior to v. 1. Hence v. 1 could not refer to an absolute beginning, and an independent clause reading was impossible. As with the biblical scholars of this last century, the worldview of these medieval interpreters became the external norm for interpreting the biblical text.

¹³ E.g., *Enuma elish* (“When on high . . .”). The Atrahasis Epic also begins with a dependent clause (the beginning of the Eridu Genesis is probably the same, but is not extant.) These are the three main ancient Mesopotamian versions of the creation story that have been discovered by archaeologists: the Sumerian Eridu Genesis (dating originally from ca. 1600 B.C.), the Old Babylonian Atrahasis Epic (dating from ca. 1600 B.C.), and the Assyrian *Enuma elish* (dating from ca. 1000 B.C.). The discovery of these ANE parallels with the biblical account led most critical biblical scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries to posit that the biblical account of origins in Genesis is borrowed from the older Mesopotamian stories, and thus many concluded that the biblical account, like its ANE counterparts, is to be read as a mythological text, not a literal, historical, factual portrayal of origins. For translations of these stories, see: Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis [Enuma elish]*, 2d ed. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1963, c1951); W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: University P, 1969); Thorkild Jacobsen, “The Eridu Genesis,” *JBL* 100 (1981): 513–529.

¹⁴ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 7th ed., Handkommentar zum Alten Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 101. The ANE stories consistently start out (literally) with the words

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Other evidence for the dependent clause interpretation is likewise equivocal. The alleged parallel with the introductory dependent clause of the Gen 2 creation account is not as strong as claimed, since Gen 2:4b–7, like the ANE stories, has no word like the “beginning” in Gen 1:1, and there are other major differences of terminology, syntax, and literary and theological function.¹⁵ The expression *b^erēšît* elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (all in Jeremiah: 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34–35) is indeed in the construct, but as noted above, these construct occurrences are consistently followed by an absolute *noun* (“in the beginning of the *reign* . . .”), as expected in construct chains, whereas Gen 1:1 is unique in being followed by a finite *verb*, which is not the normal syntax for a construct form. Furthermore, as we have seen above, the use of *m^erēšît* “from the beginning” without the article, but clearly in the absolute, in Isa 46:10, shows that *b^erēšît* does not need the article to be in the absolute.

In sum, I find the weight of evidence within Scripture decisive in pointing toward the traditional translation of Gen 1:1 as an independent clause: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”¹⁶ Here, in the opening verse

“in the day . . .”, which may be seen to parallel the introduction to the second creation account, Gen 2:4b, but not Gen 1:1.

¹⁵ See Hasel, “Recent Translations,” 161, for a listing of these crucial differences.

¹⁶ There are a few interpreters who affirm an independent clause as the best translation of Gen 1:1, and yet still find no absolute beginning of creation in this chapter. These interpreters take Gen 1:1 as an independent clause, but also as a summary statement, or formal introduction/title that is then elaborated in the rest of the chapter. See, for examples, Cottrell, 198–199; Hamilton, 117; von Rad, 49; and Waltke, 225–228. Gen 1:2 is seen as a circumstantial clause connected with verse 3: “Now the earth was unformed and unfilled . . . And God said, ‘Let there be light.’” The actual creating only starts with v. 3. Against the interpretation of v. 1 as a summary statement, John Sailhamer offers three weighty objections. First, “*The conjunction ‘and’ at the beginning of the second verse makes it highly unlikely that 1:1 is a title.*” Sailhamer elaborates: “If v. 1 were a title, the section following it would most certainly not begin with the conjunction ‘and’” (Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 163). In his accompanying note he further explains: “The conjunction ‘and’ (Hebrew: *waw*) at the beginning of 1:2 shows 1:2–2:4 is coordinated with 1:1, rather than appositional. If the first verse were intended as a summary of the rest of the chapter, it would be appositional and hence would not be followed by the conjunction, e.g., Genesis 2:4a; 5:1” (253). *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 455 (§142c) makes the same point as Sailhamer by indicating that v. 2 should be seen as a circumstantial clause contemporaneous with the main clause of v. 1, not of v. 3. See also C. F. Keil, *The Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1:46: “That this verse [Gen 1:1] is not a heading merely, is evident from the fact that the following account of the course of the creation commences with *waw* [in Hebrew in the original] (*and*), which connects the different acts of creation with the fact expressed in ver. 1, as the primary foundation upon which they rest.”

As a second argument against this view, Sailhamer points out that “*In the original the first verse is a complete sentence that makes a statement, but titles are not formed that way in Hebrew.* In Hebrew titles consist of simple phrases” (*Genesis Unbound*, 102). Sailhamer points to examples of titles later in Genesis (2:2a; 5:1) that confirm his point (*ibid*, 102–103). Thirdly, “*Genesis 1 has a summary title at its conclusion, making it unlikely it would have another at its beginning.* As would be expected, the closing summary comes in the form of a statement: ‘Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and all their hosts’ (Genesis 2:1). Such a clear summary statement *at the close of the*

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of the Bible, we have a distancing from the cosmology of the ANE, an emphasis upon an absolute beginning, in contrast to the cyclical view of reality in the ANE, and in contrast to the ANE view that matter is eternal.

B. A Literal or Non-literal Beginning?

The question of literal or non-literal interpretation of the creation accounts in Gen 1–2 is of major importance both for biblical theology and for contemporary concerns about origins. Many, including already at the turn of the twentieth century the critical scholar Gunkel, have recognized the intertextual linkage in Scripture between the opening chapters of the Old Testament and the closing chapters of the New Testament.¹⁷ In the overall canonical flow of Scripture, because of the inextricable connection between protology (Gen 1–3) and eschatology (Rev 20–22), without a literal beginning (protology), there is no literal end (eschatology). Furthermore, it may be argued that the doctrines of humanity, sin, salvation, judgment, Sabbath, etc., presented already in the opening chapters of Genesis, all hinge upon a literal interpretation of origins.¹⁸

Scholars who hold a non-literal interpretation of Genesis approach the issue in different ways. Some see Gen 1 as mythology,¹⁹ based upon ANE parallels as already noted. Others see it as literary framework,²⁰ theology,²¹ liturgy,²² (day-

narrative suggests that 1:1 has a purpose other than serving as a title or summary. We would not expect two summaries for one chapter” (ibid, 103). I find Sailhamer’s arguments persuasive, and therefore I conclude that Gen 1:1 is not simply a summary or title of the whole chapter.

¹⁷ Hermann Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1895). For recent discussion, see the unpublished paper by Michael Hasel, “In the Beginning—The Relationship between Protology and Eschatology,” presented at the South American Biblical-Theological Symposium, UNASP, Brazil, July 28, 2002.

¹⁸ The interconnection is often stated thus: If humans are only a product of time and chance from the same evolutionary tree as the animals, then they are no more morally accountable than the animals; if not morally accountable, then there is no sin; if no sin, then no need of a Saviour. If no literal seven-day creation, then no literal Sabbath. While this may be simplistically stated here, it does point toward a profound interrelationship between origins and the other biblical doctrines. See M. Hasel, who examines major elements that are affected by one’s understanding of origins, such as divine initiative and character; perfection; solution to sin; eternal life; worship; and time.

¹⁹ See, for example, Gunkel, *Schöpfung und Chaos*; Childs, 31–50.

²⁰ This “framework hypothesis” maintains that “the Bible’s use of the seven-day week in its narration of the creation is a literary (theological) framework and is not intended to indicate the chronology or duration of the acts of creation” (Mark Ross, “The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in *Did God Create in Six Days?* Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall, ed., [Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian, 1999], 113). This view was popularized especially by Meredith G. Kline, in his article “Because It Had Not Rained,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 20 (1958): 146–157, and in his commentary on Genesis in *The New Bible Commentary, Revised* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1970). For additional examples of the literary framework interpretation, see Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 49–59; Lee Irons with Meredith G. Kline, “The Framework View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, ed. David G. Hagopian (Mission Viejo, CA: Crux Press, 2001), 217–256; D. F. Payne, *Genesis One Reconsidered* (London: Tyndale, 1964), *passim*; Ross, 113–120; and Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

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age) symbolism,²³ metaphor/parable,²⁴ or vision.²⁵ Common to all these non-literal views is the assumption that the Genesis account of origins is not a literal, straightforward historical account of creation.

Is there any evidence within the text of Genesis itself that would indicate whether or not the creation account was intended to be taken as literal? Indeed, I find several lines of evidence. First, the literary genre of Gen 1–11 points to the literal historical nature of the creation account. Kenneth Mathews shows how

2001), 73–78. For these scholars, the “artistic, literary representation of creation” serves a theological purpose, i.e., “to fortify God’s covenant with creation” (ibid, 78). The framework hypothesis has become very popular among evangelical scholars in recent years.

²¹ See, for example, Conrad Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984); Davis Young, *Creation and the Flood: An Alternative to Flood Geology and Theistic Evolution* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 86–89. Larry G. Herr, “Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective,” *Spectrum* 13/2 (Dec 1982): 51–62, similarly separates between the cosmology (the ANE view of the universe) and the cosmogony (the theology of the writer) and suggests that “the chapter uses the common ancient Near Eastern cosmology in expressing what it takes to be the *theological* (or cosmogonic) truth” (61). The abiding cosmogonic or theological statement is that “God created the world miraculously in an orderly fashion,” but the erroneous details of the “common cosmology of antiquity” used by the author may be discarded (58). “Genesis 1 is theological in intent and scientists need not attempt to harmonize the ancient cosmology with the cosmology of modern science” (59). Frederick E. J. Harder, “Literary Structure of Genesis 1:1–2:3: An Overview,” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 243, asks, “May theological truth be transmitted within historical or scientific contexts that are not literal?” and the rest of his article implies that the answer is indeed “yes.” Harder’s views demonstrate a strong Kantian cleavage between faith and empirical knowledge; Harder, 242–243, also wonders in print (without committing himself) whether the Genesis creation account is poetry or myth, and therefore not literal.

²² Terence E. Fretheim, “Were the Days of Creation Twenty-Four Hours Long? YES,” in *The Genesis Debate: Persistent Questions about Creation and the Flood*, ed. Ronald F. Youngblood (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 26, suggests that “It is probable that the material in this chapter [Gen 1] had its origins in a liturgical celebration of the creation.”

²³ There two main “day-age” theories. A common evangelical symbolic interpretation, sometimes called the (broad) concordist theory, is that the seven days represent seven long ages, thus allowing for theistic evolution (although sometimes evolution is denied in favor of multiple step-by-step divine creation acts throughout the long ages); see, for example, Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 54–58; and Hugh Ross and Gleason L. Archer, “The Day-Age View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, 123–163. Another position, the “progressive-creationist” view, regards the six days as literal days that each open a new creative period of indeterminate length; see Robert C. Newman and Herman J. Eckelmann, Jr., *Genesis One and the Origin of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1977), 64–65. The effect of both these “day-age” views is to have the six days represent much longer periods of time for creation.

²⁴ See, e.g., John C. L. Gibson, *Genesis*, Daily Study Bible (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1981), 1:55–56.

²⁵ According to this “visionary” view the six days are “days of revelation,” a sequence of days on which God instructed Moses about creation, and not the six days of creation itself. See P. J. Wiseman, *Creation Revealed in Six Days* (London: Marshall, Morgan, and Scott, 1948), 33–34; and Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authority of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 192–194. This view was popularized in the nineteenth century by the Scottish geologist Hugh Miller (1802–1856).

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the suggestion of “parable” genre—an illustration drawn from everyday experience—does not fit the contents of Gen 1, nor does the “vision” genre, since it does not contain the typical preamble and other elements that accompany biblical visions.²⁶ Terence Fretheim, although himself suggesting a liturgical origin for what he considers the pre-canonical Gen 1 material, acknowledges that the narrative as it now stands in Gen 1 has been freed from these cultic/liturgical settings and in its present context is to be interpreted literally as describing the temporal order of creation.²⁷

Walter Kaiser has surveyed and found wanting the evidence for the mythological literary genre of these opening chapters of Genesis and shows how the best genre designation is “historical narrative prose.”²⁸ More recently, John Sailhamer has come to the same conclusion, pointing out the major differences between the style of the ANE myths and biblical creation narratives of Gen 1–2, prominent among which is that the ANE myths were all written in poetry, while the biblical creation stories are not poetry, but prose narratives.²⁹ Furthermore, Sailhamer argues that the narratives of Gen 1–2 lack any clues that they are to be taken as some kind of non-literal, symbolic/metaphorical “meta-historical”

²⁶ Mathews, 109. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation,” 48, also shows how the visionary view rests largely on mistranslating the word *‘asah* “made” in Exod 20:11 as “showed,” a meaning which is not within the semantic range of this Hebrew word. Garrett’s suggested parallel with the 6+1 structures of the book of Revelation is far from convincing (Garrett, 192–194), since the apocalyptic genre of Revelation is filled with explicitly symbolic language and imagery which are totally absent in Gen 1.

²⁷ Fretheim, 28. I do not concur with Fretheim’s suggestion that the origins of Gen 1 are in the cultus. Fretheim is apparently unduly influenced by von Rad and others who saw the creation accounts as subservient to salvation history. The scholarly paradigm has recently shifted toward recognizing creation theology in the Hebrew Bible as important in its own right and not to be subsumed under salvation history. See, e.g., William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, Jr., “Preface,” in *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), xi: “The title of this volume, *God Who Creates*, identifies a tectonic shift in emphasis that has taken place in the theological study of the Bible over the past several decades. . . . In a nutshell, this change marks nothing short of a paradigm shift from a once exclusive stress upon the mighty interventions of God in history to God’s formative and sustaining ways in creation.”

²⁸ See Walter Kaiser, “The Literary Form of Genesis 1–11,” in *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, ed. J. Barton Payne (Waco: Word, 1970), 48–65.

²⁹ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 227–234. Sailhamer points out that unlike the ANE myths of creation, which were (as far as we have record) all in poetry, Gen 1–2 is written as narrative. “The fact that they [the biblical stories of creation] are written in narrative form rather than in poetry shows that at least their author understood them as real accounts of God’s work in creation. Judging from what we know about ancient creation myths, the biblical texts give every impression of having been written and understood as realistic depictions of actual events. It simply will not do to say that the Genesis creation accounts are merely ancient myths and thus should not be taken literally. If we are to respect the form in which we now have them—as narrative—we must reckon with the fact that they are intended to be read as literal accounts of God’s activity in creation. . . . As we now have them, Genesis 1 and 2 have all the appearances of a literal, historical account of creation” (230–231). This is not to deny that there are isolated verses of poetry in Gen 1–2, including what some have seen as a poetic summary of God’s creation of humanity (Gen 1:27), and the record of the clearly poetic, ecstatic utterance of the first man after the creation of woman (Gen 2:23).

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narrative, as some recent evangelicals have maintained.³⁰ Sailhamer acknowledges that the creation narratives are different than later biblical narratives, but this is because of their subject matter (creation) and not their literary form (narrative). He suggests that perhaps we should call Gen 1 and 2 “mega-history,” describing “literally and realistically aspects of our world known only to its Creator.”³¹ As mega-history, “That first week was a real and literal week—one like we ourselves experience every seven days—but that first week was not like any other week. God did an extraordinary work in that week, causing its events to transcend by far anything that has occurred since.”³²

Second, the literary structure of Genesis as a whole indicates the intended literal nature of the creation narratives. It is widely recognized that the whole book of Genesis is structured by the word “generations” (*tôlēdôt*) in connection with each section of the book (13x). This is a word used in the setting of genealogies concerned with the accurate account of time and history. It means literally “begettings” or “bringings-forth” (from the verb *yālad* “to bring forth, beget”) and implies that Genesis is the “history of beginnings.” The use of *tôlēdôt* in Gen 2:4 shows that the author intends the account of creation to be considered just as literal as the rest of the Genesis narratives.³³ As Mathews puts it,

The recurring formulaic *toledôth* device shows that the composition was arranged to join the historical moorings of Israel with the beginnings of the cosmos. In this way the composition forms an Adam-Noah-Abraham continuum that loops the patriarchal promissory blessings with the God of cosmos and all human history. The text does not welcome a different reading for Genesis 1–11 as myth versus the patriarchal narratives.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid, 234–245. According to the “meta-history” view advanced by some contemporary evangelical scholars, Gen 1–2 do describe creation as a historical fact, but “the account we have of it, however, is cast in a realistic but non-literal narrative” (237). Sailhamer points out how this view is not supported by the text itself. “A straightforward reading of Genesis 1 and 2 gives every impression that the events happened just as they are described. It is intended to be read both realistically and literally” (237). Sailhamer shows how this is in contrast to, e.g., the story Nathan told David (1 Sam 1:1–3), which has internal clues that the story should not be taken literally (the men and the town in the story are not specifically identified, as they would be in an actual historical account) (237–238). Sailhamer also points out that the narrative form of Gen 1–2 is the same as the form of the narrative texts in the remainder of the Pentateuch and the historical books. “The patterns and narrative structures that are so evident in Genesis 1 are found with equal frequency in the narratives which deal with Israel’s sojourn in Egypt and their wilderness wandering. They are, in fact, the same as those in the later biblical narratives dealing with the lives of David and Solomon and the kings of Israel and Judah. If we take those narratives as realistic and literal—which most evangelicals do—then there is little basis for not doing so in Genesis 1” (238).

³¹ Ibid, 239.

³² Ibid, 244.

³³ See Jacques Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 167–220; and Mathews, 26–41, for detailed discussion.

³⁴ Mathews, 41.

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Later in his commentary, Mathews insightfully points out how the *tôlêdôt* structuring of Genesis precludes taking the Genesis accounts as only theological and not historical:

[I]f we interpret early Genesis as theological parable or story, we have a theology of creation that is grounded neither in history nor the cosmos . . . The *toledôth* structure of Genesis requires us to read chap. 1 as relating real events that are presupposed by later Israel. . . . [I]f taken as theological story alone, the interpreter is at odds with the historical intentionality of Genesis.³⁵

For critical scholars who reject the historical reliability of all or most of the book of Genesis, this literary evidence will only illuminate the intention of the final editor of Genesis, without any compelling force for their own belief system. But for those who claim to believe in the historicity of the patriarchal narratives, the *tôlêdôt* structure of Genesis, including its appearance *six* times within the first eleven chapters of Genesis, is a powerful internal testimony within the book itself that the account of origins is to be accepted as literally historical like the rest of the book.

Other internal evidence within Genesis that the Creation account is to be taken literally, rather than as symbolic of seven long ages conforming to the evolutionary model—as suggested by some scholars—involves the use of specific temporal terms. The phrase “evening and morning,” appearing at the conclusion of each of the six days of creation, is used by the author to clearly define the nature of the “days” of creation as literal twenty-four-hour days. The references to “evening” and “morning” together outside of Gen 1, invariably, without exception in the OT (57 times, 19 times with *yôm* “day” and 38 without *yôm*), indicate a literal solar day. Again, the occurrences of *yôm* “day” at the conclusion of each of the six “days” of creation in Gen 1 are all connected with a numeric adjective (“one [first] day,” “second day,” “third day,” etc.), and a comparison with occurrences of the term elsewhere in Scripture reveals that such usage always refers to literal days.³⁶ Furthermore, references to the function of the sun and moon for signs, seasons, days, and years (Gen 1:14) indicates literal time, not symbolic ages.

³⁵ Ibid, 110–111.

³⁶ In the 359 times outside of Gen 1 where *yôm* appears in the OT with a number (i.e., a numerical adjective), it always has a literal meaning. Similarly, when used with a numbered series (as in Gen 1, Num 7, 29), *yôm* always refers to a normal day. Three alleged exceptions (Hos 6:2; Zech 3:9; 14:7) turn out upon closer inspection not to be exceptions to this rule: in these prophetic sections a *literal* day is applied in prophecy to a longer period of time (see discussion in Henry M. Morris, *Studies in the Bible and Science* [Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1966], 36). Cf. Andrew E. Steinmann, “אָהַר as an Ordinal Number and the Meaning of Genesis 1:5,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002): 577–584, who shows how “the use of אָהַר in Gen 1:5 and the following unique uses of the ordinal numbers on the other days demonstrates that the text itself indicates that these are regular solar days” (584).

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Intertextual references to the creation account elsewhere in Scripture confirm that the biblical writers understood the six days of creation as six literal, historical, contiguous, creative, natural twenty-four-hour days. If the six days of creation week were to be taken as symbolic of long ages, of six visionary days of revelation, or anything less than the six days of a literal week, then the reference to creation in the fourth commandment of Exod 20:8–11 commemorating a literal Sabbath would make no sense.³⁷ The Sabbath commandment explicitly equates the six days of man’s work followed by the seventh-day Sabbath with the six days of God’s work followed by the Sabbath. By equating man’s six-day work week with God’s six-day work week at creation, and further equating the Sabbath to be kept by humankind each week with the first Sabbath after creation week blessed and sanctified by God, the divine Lawgiver unequivocally interprets the first week as a literal week, consisting of seven consecutive, contiguous twenty-four-hour days.

In penetrating articles, Gerhard F. Hasel,³⁸ Terence Fretheim,³⁹ and James Stambaugh,⁴⁰ among others,⁴¹ set forth in detail various lines of evidence (including evidence not mentioned here for lack of space), based on comparative, literary, linguistic, intertextual, and other considerations, which lead me to the “inescapable conclusion” that “The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal ‘day’ than the one chosen,” and that “the designation *yôm*, ‘day,’ in Genesis 1 means

³⁷ This is a major argument made not only by Seventh-day Adventists and other Saturday-sabbath keepers! See, e.g., Henry Morris, *Biblical Cosmology and Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 59: “Thus, in Exodus 20:11, when the Scripture says that ‘in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is,’ there can be no doubt whatever that six literal days are meant. This passage also equates the week of God’s creative work with the week of man’s work, and is without force if the two are not of the same duration.”

Again, Fretheim, 19–20: “*The references to the days of creation in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 in connection with the Sabbath law make sense only if understood in terms of a normal seven-day week.* It should be noted that the references to creation in Exodus are not used as an analogy—that is, your rest on the seventh day ought to be like God’s rest in creation. It is, rather, stated in terms of the imitation of God or a divine precedent that is to be followed; God worked for six days and rested on the seventh, and therefore you should do the same. Unless there is an exactitude of reference, the argument of Exodus does not work” (Italics original).

³⁸ Gerhard F. Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal ‘Days’ or Figurative ‘Periods/EPOCHS’ of time?” *Origins* 21/1 (1994): 5–38; reprint, *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 40–68.

³⁹ Fretheim, 12–35.

⁴⁰ James Stambaugh, “The Days of Creation: A Semantic Approach,” *CEN Tech. J.* 5/1 (1991): 70–78.

⁴¹ See especially J. Ligon Duncan III and David W. Hall, “The 24-Hour View,” in *The Genesis Debate: Three Views on the Days of Creation*, 21–66; Robert V. McCabe, “A Defense of Literal Days in the Creation Week,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (2000): 97–123; Joseph A. Pipa, Jr., “From Chaos to Cosmos: A Critique of the Non-Literal Interpretations of Genesis 1:1–2:3,” in Pipa and Hall, 153–198; and Benjamin Shaw, “The Literal Day Interpretation,” in Pipa and Hall, 199–220. See also Walter Booth’s “Days of Genesis 1: Literal or Nonliteral?” in this issue of *JATS*.

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consistently a literal twenty-four-hour period,⁴² and that “God created in a series of six consecutive twenty-four days.”⁴³

As a broader intertextual evidence for the literal nature of the creation accounts, as well as the historicity of the other accounts of Gen 1–11, it is important to point out that Jesus and *all* New Testament writers refer to Gen 1–11 with the underlying assumption that it is literal, reliable history.⁴⁴ Every chapter of Gen 1–11 is referred to somewhere in the New Testament, and Jesus Himself refers to Gen 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

While the non-literal interpretations of biblical origins must be rejected in what they deny (namely, the literal, historical nature of the Genesis accounts), nevertheless they have an element of truth in what they affirm. Gen 1–2 is concerned with mythology—not to affirm a mythological interpretation but as a polemic against ANE mythology.⁴⁵ Gen 1:1–2:4a is structured in a literary, symmetrical form.⁴⁶ However, the parallelism of days in Gen 1 is not a literary artifice created by the human author, but is explicitly described as part of the successive creative acts of God Himself, who as the Master Designer created aesthetically. The divine artistry of creation within the structure of space and time certainly does not negate the historicity of the creation narrative.

Genesis 1–2 does present a profound theology: doctrines of God, Creation, humanity, Sabbath, etc., but theology in Scripture is not opposed to history. To the contrary, biblical theology is always *rooted* in history. There is no criterion within the creation accounts of Gen 1–2 that allows one to separate between cosmogony and cosmology, as some have claimed, in order to reject the details of a literal six-day creation while retaining the theological truth that the world depends upon God. Likewise there is profound symbolism in Gen 1. For example, the language describing the Garden of Eden and the occupation of Adam and Eve clearly allude to the sanctuary imagery and the work of the priests and

⁴² Hasel, “The ‘Days’ of Creation in Genesis 1,” 62.

⁴³ Stambaugh, 75.

⁴⁴ Matt 19:4, 5; 23:35; 24:37–39; Mark 10:6–9; 13:19; Luke 1:70; 3:34–38; 11:50–51; 17:26, 27; John 1:1–3, 10; 8:44; Acts 3:21; 4:25; 14:15; 17:24, 26; Rom 1:20; 5:12, 14–19; 8:20–22; 16:20; 1 Cor 6:16; 11:3, 7, 8, 9, 12; 15:21, 22, 38–39, 45, 47; 2 Cor 4:6; 11:3; Gal 4:4, 26; Eph 3:9; 5:30–31; Col 1:16; 3:10; 1 Tim 2:13–15; Heb 1:10; 2:7–8; 4:3, 4, 10; 11:4, 5, 7; 12:24; James 3:9; 1 Pet 3:20; 2 Pet 2:4–5; 3:4–6; 1 John 3:8, 12; Jude 6, 11, 14–15; Rev 2:7; 3:14; 4:11; 10:6; 12:1–4, 9, 13–17; 14:7; 17:5, 18; 20:2; 21:1, 4; 22:2, 3). For the identification of the person or event in Gen 1–11 indicated by these passages, see Henry Morris, *The Remarkable Birth of Planet Earth* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1972), Appendix B: “New Testament References to Genesis 1–11” (99–101).

⁴⁵ See Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81–102; idem, “The Significance of the Cosmology in Genesis 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels,” *AUSS* 10 (1972): 1–20.

⁴⁶ See Cassuto, 17, Wenham, 6–7, and our discussion in section III below, for diagrams of the symmetrical matching of the days of creation. As the Master Artist, God created artistically, building symmetry into the very structure of the creation week.

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Levites (see Exod 25–40).⁴⁷ Thus the sanctuary of Eden is a symbol or type of the heavenly sanctuary (cf. Exod 25:9, 40). But its pointing beyond itself does not detract from its own literal reality.

I find it fascinating to note that critical scholars who do not take the authority of the early chapters of Genesis seriously, and thus have nothing to lose with regard to their personal faith, have often acknowledged that the intent of the one who wrote Gen 1 was to indicate a regular week of six literal days. Against those who would contend that the writer(s) of the early chapters of Genesis are not intending literal history, and that this is the view of “the great majority of contemporary Scripture scholars,” the Concordist Alvin Plantinga collects samples of these statements.⁴⁸ For example, Julius Wellhausen, a giant in critical biblical scholarship, popularizer of the Documentary Hypothesis for the Pentateuch, wrote, concerning the author of Genesis: “He undoubtedly wants to depict faithfully the factual course of events in the coming-to-be of the world, he wants to give a cosmogonic theory. Anyone who denies that is confusing the value of the story for us with the intention of the author.”⁴⁹ Again, Hermann Gunkel, father of form criticism, says, “People should never have denied that Genesis 1 wants to recount how the coming-to-be of the world actually happened.”⁵⁰

Plantinga also cites James Barr, whom he describes as “Regius Professor of Hebrew in the University of Oxford until he joined the brain-drain to the US, and an Old Testament scholar than whom there is none more distinguished.” Barr writes: “To take a well-known instance, most conservative evangelical opinion today does not pursue a literal interpretation of the creation story in Genesis. A literal interpretation would hold that the world was created in six days, these days being the first of the series which we still experience as days and nights.” Then, after substantiating that evangelical scholars do not generally hold to a literal interpretation of the creation account, Barr continues: “In fact the only natural exegesis is a literal one, in the sense that this is what the author meant.”⁵¹ Elsewhere, Barr goes even further:

. . . so far as I know there is no professor of Hebrew or Old Testament at any world-class university who does not believe that the writer(s) of Genesis 1–11 intended to convey to their readers the ideas that: (a) creation took place in a series of six days which were

⁴⁷ See Richard M. Davidson, “Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium,” *JATS* 11 (2000):108–111, for the biblical evidence and secondary literature there cited. Even more recently (2001), see Waltke, *Genesis*, 85–88.

⁴⁸ Alvin Plantinga, “Evolution, Neutrality, and Antecedent Probability: A Reply to McMullin and Van Till,” in *Intelligent Design Creationism and Its Critics: Philosophical, Theological, and Scientific Perspectives*, ed. Robert T. Pennock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 216–217.

⁴⁹ Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, 6th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1927), 296, trans. Albert Wolters, cited in Plantinga, 216.

⁵⁰ Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Albert Wolters, cited in Plantinga, 216. See also Gunkel’s statement regarding the days of Gen 1: “the ‘days’ are of course days and nothing else” (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 97).

⁵¹ James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM Press, 1981), 40.

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the same as the days of 24 hours we now experience; (b) the figures contained in the Genesis genealogies provide by simple addition a chronology from the beginning of the world up to the later stages of the Biblical story, and (c) Noah's flood was understood to be worldwide, and to have extinguished all human and land animal life except for those in the ark.⁵²

Another giant in Old Testament scholarship not cited by Plantinga, Gerhard von Rad, probably the foremost OT theologian of the 20th century, another critical scholar who refuses to accept as factual what Gen 1 asserts, nonetheless honestly confesses, "What is said here [Gen 1] is intended to hold true entirely and exactly as it stands."⁵³ "Everything that is said here [in Gen 1] is to be accepted exactly as it is written; nothing is to be interpreted symbolically or metaphorically."⁵⁴ Von Rad is even more specific regarding the literal creation week: "The seven days [of creation week] are unquestionably to be understood as actual days and as a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in the world."⁵⁵

We could add to this list of critical scholars the preponderance of major interpreters of Genesis down through the history of the Christian church,⁵⁶ and in modern times "whole coveys or phalanxes" (to use Plantinga's expression) of conservative-evangelical scholars, who support a literal six-day creation as the intention of the author of Genesis. This includes numerous recent evangelical commentators. For example, John Hartley: "Ancient readers would have taken 'day' to be an ordinary day. . . . A seven-day week of creation anchors the weekly pattern in the created order."⁵⁷ Again, John Walton writes concerning the Hebrew word for "day": "We cannot be content to ask, 'Can the word bear the meaning I would like it to have?' We must instead try to determine what the

⁵² Idem, personal letter to David C. K. Watson, April 23, 1984, published in the *Newsletter* of the Creation Science Association of Ontario, 3/4 (1990/91), cited in Plantinga, 217.

⁵³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, 47.

⁵⁴ Gerhard von Rad, "The Biblical Story of Creation," in *God at Work in Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 99. Von Rad's next sentence is intriguing: "The language [of Gen 1] is actually scientific, though not in the modern sense of the word." Von Rad argues that Gen 1 combines theological and scientific knowledge into a wholistic picture of creation.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁵⁶ See especially Duncan and Hall, 47–52, for a survey of the history of interpretation, which "confirms that the cumulative testimony of the Church favored normal creation days until the onslaught of certain scientific theories" (47). In another article, David W. Hall, "The Evolution of Mythology: Classic Creation Survives As the Fittest Among Its Critics and Revisers," in Pipa and Hall, 267–305, demonstrates that "the long history of biblical interpretation, and specifically the Westminster divines' written comments, endorse only one of the major cosmological views considered today: *They thought creation happened neither in an instant nor over a long period, but in the space of six normally understood days*" (267, italics his). Hall shows how modern proponents of non-literal days for creation have distorted the views of various interpreters of Genesis in the history of the Christian church in order to try to make their writings support a long age interpretation when in fact they do not.

⁵⁷ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, The New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 52.

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author and audience would have understood from the usage in the context. With the latter issue before us, it is extremely difficult to conclude that anything other than a twenty-four hour day was intended. It is not the text that causes people to think otherwise, only the demands of trying to harmonize with modern science.”⁵⁸

Based upon the testimony of the Genesis account and later intertextual allusions to this account, I must join the host of scholars, ancient and modern—both critical and evangelical—who affirm the literal, historical nature of Gen 1 and 2, with a literal creation week consisting of six historical, contiguous, creative, natural twenty-four-hour days, followed immediately by a literal twenty-four-hour seventh day, during which God rested, blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath as a memorial of creation.

But this leads us to our next point, concerning whether all of creation described in Gen 1–2 is confined to that literal creation week, or whether there is a creation prior to the creation week

C. Multiple or Single Beginning?

Does the opening chapter of the Bible depict a single week of creation for all that is encompassed in Gen 1, or does it imply a prior creation before creation week and some kind of time gap between Gen 1:1 and Gen 1:3ff.? This issue focuses upon the relationship among Gen 1:1, 1:2, and 1:3ff.? Several different interpretations of this relationship have been advanced.

⁵⁸ John Walton, “Genesis,” *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 81. The testimonies of various other interpreters who employ the grammatical-historical method may be multiplied. Already with Martin Luther (representing the unanimous view of the Reformers), there was a break from the allegorical method of medieval exegesis: “We assert that Moses spoke in the literal sense, not allegorically or figuratively, i.e., that the world, with all its creatures, was created within six day, as the words read”; Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 1–5, Luther’s Works* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 1:5. This view can be traced in numerous conservative-evangelical commentators. Nineteenth-century commentator C. F. Keil writes: “the six creation-days, according to the words of the text, were earthly days of ordinary duration” (Keil, 1:69). H. Leupold counters various arguments for a non-literal interpretation and concludes that only “six twenty-four hour days followed by one such day of rest” fits the context of Gen 1 and the fourth commandment (*Exposition of Genesis* [Columbus: Wartburg, 1942], 58. John Sailhamer writes: “That week [Gen 1:3ff.], as far as we can gather from the text itself, was a normal week of six twenty-four hour days and a seventh day in which God rested.” (*Genesis Unbound*, 95.) Terence Fretheim concludes: “It is my opinion that those who defend the literal meaning of the word [“day” in Gen 1] have the preponderance of the evidence on their side” (14). Victor Hamilton is clear: “whoever wrote Genesis 1 believed he was talking about literal days” (53). John Stek concurs: “Surely there is no sign or hint within the narrative [of Gen 1] itself that the author thought his ‘days’ to be irregular designations—first a series of undefined periods, than a series of solar days—or that the ‘days’ he bounded with ‘evening and morning’ could possibly be understood as long aeons of time.” (John H. Stek, “What Says Scripture?” in Howard J. Van Till, et al., *Portraits of Creation: Biblical and Scientific Perspectives on the World’s Formation*, [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 236).

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Active Gap Theory. A first interpretation is often labeled as the “ruin-restoration” or the “active gap” view. According to this understanding,⁵⁹ Gen 1:1 describes an originally perfect creation some unknown time ago [millions, billions of years ago]. Satan was ruler of this world, but because of his rebellion (described in Isa 14:12–17), sin entered the universe. Some proponents of the active gap position hold that God judged this rebellion and reduced it to the ruined, chaotic state described in Gen 1:2. Others claim that Satan was allowed by God to experiment with this world, and the chaos described in Gen 1:2 is the direct result of satanic experimentation. In any case, those holding this view translate Gen 1:2: “the earth *became* without form and void.”

Genesis 1:3ff. then presents an account of a later creation in which God restores what had been ruined. The geological column is usually fitted into the period of time of the first creation (Gen 1:1) and the succeeding chaos, and not in connection with the biblical Flood.

The ruin-restoration or active gap theory flounders purely on grammatical grounds: it simply cannot stand the test of close grammatical analysis. Gen 1:2 clearly contains three noun clauses, and the fundamental meaning of noun clauses in Hebrew is something fixed, a state or condition, not a sequence or action.⁶⁰ According to the laws of Hebrew grammar, one must translate “the earth *was* unformed and unfilled,” not “the earth *became* unformed and unfilled.” Thus Hebrew grammar leaves no room for the active gap theory.

No Gap and Passive Gap Theories. The “no gap” and “passive gap” theories are sub-headings of an interpretation of biblical cosmogony in Gen 1 that may be termed the *initial “unformed-unfilled”* view. This is the traditional view, having the support of the majority of Jewish and Christian interpreters through history.⁶¹ According to this initial “unformed-unfilled” view (and common to both the “no gap” and “passive gap” theories), Gen 1:1 declares that God created “the heavens and earth” out of nothing at the time of their absolute beginning.

⁵⁹ See, for examples, Arthur Custance, *Without Form and Void* (Brockville, Canada: By the Author, 1970); the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1917, 1967); and Jack W. Provonsha, “The Creation/Evolution Debate in the Light of the Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan,” in *Creation Reconsidered*, 310–311.

⁶⁰ Gesenius’ *Hebrew Grammar*, 454 [¶141i]. For analysis and refutation of the “ruin-restoration” theory both on philological and theological grounds, with particular focus upon the grammatical impossibility of this view’s interpretation of Gen 1:2, see especially F. F. Bruce, “And the Earth was Without Form and Void,” *Journal of the Transactions of the Victoria Institute* 78 (1946): 21–23; W. W. Fields, *Unformed and Unfilled: A Critique of the Gap Theory of Genesis 1:1, 2* (Winona Lake, IN: Light and Life, 1973); R. L. Reymond, “Does Genesis 1:1–3 Teach Creation Out of Nothing?” *Scientific Studies in Special Creation*, ed. W. E. Lammerts (Grand Rapids, 1971), 14–17; and Bruce Waltke, “The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3”: 136–143.

⁶¹ For a list (with bibliographical references) of major supporters, see especially Hasel, “Recent Translations,” 163, and Waltke, “The Genesis Creation Account, III,” 216–217. These include, e.g., Martin Luther, John Calvin, C. F. Keil, F. Delitzsch, J. Wellhausen, E. König, G. Ch. Aalders, H. Leupold, Alexander Heidel, B. S. Childs, Derek Kidner, N. H. Ridderbos, E. J. Young, E. Maly, and G. Henton, Gordon Wenham, and Nahum Sarna.

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Verse 2 clarifies that when (at least) the earth was first created, it was in a state of *tohû* “unformed” and *bohû* “unfilled.” Verse 3ff. then describes the divine process of forming the unformed and filling the unfilled.

I concur with this view, because I find that only this interpretation cohesively follows the natural flow of these verses, without contradiction or omission of any element of the text.

The flow of thought in Gen 1–2:4a, according to this view, is as follows:

(a) God is before all creation (v. 1).

(b) There is an absolute beginning of time with regard to “the heavens and the earth” (v. 1).

(c) God creates “the heavens and earth” (v. 1), but (at least) the earth is at first different than now—it is “unformed” and “unfilled” (*tohû* and *bohû*; v. 2).

(d) On the first day of the seven-day creation week, God begins to form and fill the *tohû* and *bohû* (vv. 3ff.).

(e) The “forming and filling” creative activity of God is accomplished in six successive literal twenty-four-hour days.

(f) At the end of creation week, the heavens and earth are finally finished (Gen 2:1). What God began in v. 1 is now completed.

(g) God rests on the seventh day, blessing and sanctifying it as a memorial of creation (2:1–4).

The above points seem clear in the flow of thought of Gen 1–2:4a. However, there is one crucial aspect in this creation process about which it may not be possible to be dogmatic. This concerns *when* the absolute beginning of the heavens and earth in v. 1 occurred: either at the commencement of the seven days of creation or sometime before. Some see vv. 1–2 all as part of the first day of the seven-day creation week. The “raw materials” described in Gen 1:1–2 are here included in the first day of the seven-day creation week. This may be termed the “*no gap*” interpretation.⁶² Others see vv. 1–2 as a chronological unity separated by a gap in time from the first day of creation described in v. 3. The “raw materials” of the earth in their unformed-unfilled state were created before—perhaps long before—the seven days of creation week. This view is usually termed the “*passive gap*.”⁶³

Several considerations lead me to prefer the “passive gap” to the “no gap” theory. First, as John Hartley points out in his NIB commentary, “The consistent pattern used for each day of creation tells us that verses 1–2 are not an integral part of the first day of creation (vv. 3–5). That is, these first two verses stand apart from the report of what God did on the first day of creation.”⁶⁴ Hartley is referring to the fact that each of the six days of creation begins with the words,

⁶² See, for example, Henry Morris, *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984); and idem, *The Genesis Record* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 17–104.

⁶³ See, for example, Harold G. Coffin, *Origin by Design* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1983), 292–293, who allows for this possibility.

⁶⁴ John E. Hartley, *Genesis*, 41.

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“And God said . . .” and ends with the formula “and there was evening and there was morning, day x.” If the description of the first day is consistent with the other five, this would place vv. 1–2 outside of, and therefore before, the first day of creation.

Secondly, as we will argue under the section of the “what” of creation, the phrase “the heavens and earth” in Gen 1:1 is most probably to be taken here, as elsewhere in Scripture, as a merism (*merismus*) that includes the entire universe.⁶⁵ If “heavens and earth” refers to the whole universe, this “beginning” (at least for part of the “heavens”) must have been *before* the first day of earth’s creation week, since the “sons of God” (unfallen created beings) were already created and sang for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid (Job 38:7).

Thirdly, we will also argue in the “what” section that the dyad “heavens and earth” (entire universe) of Gen 1:1 are to be distinguished from the triad “heaven, earth, and sea” (the three earth habitats) of Gen 1:3ff. and Exod 20:11. This means that the creation action of Gen 1:1 is outside or before the six-day creation of Exod 20:11, and of Gen 1:3ff.

Fourthly, the text of Gen 1:1 does not indicate how long before creation week the universe (“heavens and earth”) was created. It could have been millions or billions of years. John Sailhamer points out that the Hebrew word for “beginning” used in Gen 1:1, *rēšît*, “does not refer to a point in time, but to a *period* or *duration* of time which falls before a series of events.”⁶⁶ So in the first verse of the Bible we are taken back to the process of time in which God created the universe. Sometime during that process, this earth⁶⁷ was created, but it was initially in an “unformed-unfilled” (*tohû-bohû*) state.⁶⁸ As a potter or architect first gathers his materials, and then at some point later begins shaping the pot on

⁶⁵ This is not to imply that the writer of Genesis (whom I take as Moses) necessarily understood the nature and extent of the universe in exactly the same way as we do today. (In fact, he may have known *more* about some phenomena of the universe than modern science has been able to determine: if Moses also wrote the book of Job, then he knew of other worlds with intelligent life forms—see Job 38:7—while science today can only guess that this might be the case.) What I am suggesting is that the merism “heavens and earth” used by Moses in Gen 1:1 implies that God created “all that is out there,” whatever and wherever it may be, paralleling the expression in John 1:3: “All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.”

⁶⁶ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 38. Sailhamer (*ibid*, 38–44) refers to other biblical examples of this usage of the word *rēšît* (e.g., Jer 28:1) and contrasts it with other Hebrew words for “beginning” that refer specifically to a beginning point of time.

⁶⁷ I take the Hebrew word *hā’āreṣ* “the earth” in Gen 1:2 to refer to our entire globe, and not just to the localized land of promise for Israel, as Sailhamer interprets it. See below under section IV, the “what” of creation, for further discussion.

⁶⁸ I deliberately avoid using the word “chaos” to describe this condition of the planet before creation week. Some have claimed that the terms *tohû-bohû* refer to a “chaotic, unorganized universe.” But the careful study of these terms by David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Study*, JSOT Supplementary Series, 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), esp. 155–156, shows that these terms refer not to chaos, but to a state of “unproductiveness and emptiness” in Gen 1:2. See also Rooker, 320–323.

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the potter's wheel or constructing the building, so God, the Master Artist—Potter and Architect—first created the “raw materials” of the earth, and then at the appropriate creative moment, began to form and fill the earth in the six literal days of creation week.

Fifthly, already in the creation account of Gen 1:3ff., there is an emphasis upon God's creating by differentiation or separation involving previously-created materials. On the second day, God divided what was already present—the waters from the waters (Gen 1:6–8). On the third day the dry land *appeared* (which seems to imply it was already present under the water), and the previously-existing earth brought forth vegetation (Gen 1:9–12). On the fifth day the waters brought forth the fish (Gen 1:20), and on the sixth day the earth brought forth land creatures (Gen 1:24), implying God's use of pre-existing elements. As we will note below in section IV under the “what” of creation, this same pattern seems to be true with the creation of the “greater” and “lesser” lights of the fourth day and the light of day one.

Sixthly, such a two-stage process of creation in Gen 1, like the work of a potter or architect, is supported by the complementary creation account of Gen 2, describing the way God created man and woman. In Gen 2:7, it is evident that God began with the previously-created ground or clay, and from this “formed” the man. There is a two-stage process, beginning with the “raw materials”—the clay—and proceeding to the “forming” of man and breathing into His nostrils the breath of life. It is probably not accidental that the narrator here uses the verb “to form” (*yṣr*), describing what a potter does with the clay on his potter's wheel. The participial form of *yṣr* actually means “potter,” and Moses may here be alluding to God's artistic work as a Master Potter.

Similarly, in God's creation of the woman, He follows a two-stage process. He starts with the raw materials that are already created—the “side” or “rib” of the man—and from this God “builds” (*bnh*) the woman. Again, it is certainly not accidental that only here in Gen 1–2 is the verb *bnh* “to architecturally design and build” used of God's creation. He is a Master Designer/Architect as He creates woman!

Finally, other parallels besides God's artistic work in Gen 2 seem to point toward a two-stage creation for this earth. We have already mentioned in passing that the work of creation in Gen 1–2 is described in technical language that specifically parallels the building of Moses' sanctuary and Solomon's temple. Such intertextual linkages have led me to join numerous OT interpreters in recognizing that according to the narrative clues, the whole earth is to be seen as the original courtyard and the Garden of Eden as the original sanctuary/temple on this planet. What is significant to note for our purposes at this point is that the construction of both Mosaic sanctuary and Solomonic temple took place in two stages. First came the gathering of the materials, according to the divine plans and command (Exod 25:1–9; 35:4–9, 20–29; 36:1–7; 1 Chron 28:1–29:9; 2 Chron 2), and then came the building process utilizing the previously-gathered

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materials (Exod 36:8–39:43; 2 Chron 3–4). A pattern of two-stage divine creative activity seems to emerge from these intertextual parallels that gives further impetus to accepting the “passive gap” interpretation of Gen 1.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Marco T. Terreros, “What is an Adventist? Someone Who Upholds Creation,” *JATS* 7/2 (Autumn 1996): 147–149, summarizes some of the major philosophical/theological arguments that could be raised against the “passive gap” view. First, he points out that while Gen 1:2 states the earth was “without form and empty,” Isa 45:18 indicates that God “did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited.” It does not seem consistent that God would have left the earth in an “unformed-unfilled” state for billions of years, then have it inhabited for only a few thousands of years, if the divine goal was for the earth to be inhabited. My response to this is that God’s design is not only for the earth to be inhabited for a few thousand years, but forever! Though this original purpose was thwarted temporarily because of sin, after the millennium the ultimate goal will be achieved. In light of eternity (endless time!), a period of a few billion years (or however long a period from the initial creation of earth’s raw materials to creation week) is minimal!

Second, is it consistent for one to accept the evolutionary dating for the rock (“raw materials”) of the earth and not for the age of the fossils in the rocks? A third question is related: is not the “passive gap” theory a “concordist endeavor to harmonize Scripture and Science?” Or in other words, “we are being forced to accept the gap by science not by Scripture.” (Terreros, 148). My answer to these points is that I have come to this conclusion regarding the “passive gap” by exegesis of Scripture, and not due to pressure from science. Philosophically and cosmologically, I could be just as happy believing in a creation of both “raw materials” and the life forms of earth within a period of six literal contiguous days, all with an appearance of old (mature) age. (I used to hold this position.) But it is the text of Gen 1, not science, that drives me to conclude that Gen 1:1–2 is structurally outside of the parameters of the six days (see arguments above in the text of this article). Likewise, if “heavens and earth” in Gen 1:1 refers to the whole universe, then in light of Job 38:7 some of the creation described in the first verse of the Bible must of necessity be before the six-day creation week. Genesis 1 does not indicate how long before creation week the “raw materials” of earth were created: Maybe billions of years, maybe more or less. The evolutionary radiometric time clocks for the rocks may or may not be accurate. The “passive gap” is not dependent upon their accuracy, nor (at least in my understanding) is it an attempt to harmonize Scripture and Science. It is an attempt to be faithful to Scripture, and if some scientific data are harmonized in the process, then all the better.

As part of the third question, Terreros asks why—if one accepts the long period of time (a gap) between Gen 1:1 and Gen 1:2, as does the “active gap” view—one does not accept the other suggestions of the “active gap” theory regarding what happened during that time—i.e., the three stages of creation, ruin, and restoration of the earth. I’ve given the answer to this point already in the critique of the “active gap” theory: the reading “the earth *became* without form and empty” of vs. 2 simply cannot be sustained by Hebrew grammar.

Finally, Terreros raises the question regarding the relationship of Gen 1:2 to vs. 1 and vs. 3. If vs. 2 is a thought unit with vs. 1, then we have the Spirit of God hovering over the waters “for millions or billions of years to no effect” (Terreros, 148), unlike the typical result of the Spirit’s action, in which something creative happens (see Ps 104:30). Similarly, if vs. 2 is a thought unit with vs. 3, then the grammar of the nominal clauses in vs. 2 still requires that the Spirit of God hover for the whole period of time of the gap when the earth is unformed and unfilled. I have already argued above that vs. 2 is to be seen as a thought unit with vs. 1 and not with vs. 3. But the issue of the Holy Spirit’s long-term activity of hovering over the earth is illuminated by the only other occurrence of the Hebrew word for “hover” in the Pentateuch, i.e., Deut 32:11. In this verse God is compared to an eagle that “hovers over its young,” tenderly watching over them and protecting them from harm. Likewise, the Spirit’s function in Gen 1:2 is that of Protector/Care-giver, personally watching over, caring for, the “raw materials” of this earth until such time as they are formed and filled during the

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Despite my preference for the passive gap over the no gap theory, I acknowledge a possible openness of Gen 1:1–2 that allows for either option. This possible openness in the Hebrew text has implications for interpreting the pre-fossil layers of the geological column. If one accepts the “no gap” option, there is a possibility of relatively young pre-fossil rocks, created as part of the seven-day creation week (perhaps with the appearance of old age). If one accepts the “passive gap” option (my preference), there is the alternate possibility of the pre-fossil “raw materials” being created at a time of absolute beginning of this earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres, perhaps millions or billions of years ago. This initial unformed-unfilled state is described in v. 2. Verses 3ff. then describes the process of forming and filling during the seven-day creation week.

I conclude that the biblical text of Gen 1 leaves room for either (a) young pre-fossil rock, created as part of the seven days of creation (with appearance of old age), or (b) much older pre-fossil earth rocks, with a long interval between the creation of the inanimate “raw materials” on earth described in Gen 1:1–2 and the seven days of creation week described in Gen 1:3ff. (which I find the preferable interpretation). But in either case, the biblical text calls for a *short* chronology for the creation of *life* on earth. According to Gen 1, there is no room for any gap of time in the creation of life on this earth: it came during the third through the sixth of the literal, contiguous twenty-four-hour days of creation week. That leads us to our next point.

D. A Recent or Remote Beginning?

We have no information in Scripture as to how long ago God created the universe as a whole. But there is evidence strongly suggesting that the creation week described in Gen 1:3–2:4 was recent, some time in the last several thousand years, and not hundreds of thousands, millions, or billions of years ago. The evidence for this is found primarily in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11. These genealogies are unique, with no parallel among the other genealogies of the Bible or other ANE literature.⁷⁰ Unlike the other genealogies, which may

creation week. Such a protective/caring function is effect enough, and whether the period of time is long or short, the effect is the same.

⁷⁰ For other biblical genealogies, see especially Gen 4:16–24; 22:20–24; 25:1–4, 12–18; 29:31–30:24; 35:16–20, 22–26; 39:9–14, 40–43; 46:8–12; 1 Sam 14:50–51; 1 Chr 1–9; Ruth 4:18–22; Matt 1:1–17; Luke 3:23–28. For comparison with ANE genealogies, see, e.g., Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Genealogies of Gen 5 and 11 and their Alleged Babylonian Background,” *AUSS* 16 (1978): 361–374; and Richard S. Hess, “The Genealogies of Genesis 1–11 and Comparative Literature,” in “*I Studied Inscriptions Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Genesis 1–11*,” ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 58–72. Hess has shown that there are various sub-genres of genealogies, and the genre of the genealogies in Gen 5 and 11 is very different than the ANE genealogies, with very different formal characteristics, functions, and orientation. According to Hess, the genealogies in Gen 5 and 11 seem to reveal a different view of history than the ANE parallels, tending to emphasize the forward thrust of history, with attention to specific historical-chronological data concerning each

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(and in fact often do) contain gaps, the “chronogenealogies” of Gen 5 and 11 have indicators that they are to be taken as complete genealogies without gaps. These unique interlocking features indicate a specific focus on chronological time and reveal an intention to make clear that there are no gaps between the individual patriarchs mentioned. A patriarch lived x years, then begat a son; after he begat this son, he lived y more years, and begat more sons and daughters; and all the years of this patriarch were z years. These tight interlocking features make it virtually impossible to argue that there are significant generational gaps. Rather, they purport to present the complete time sequence from father to direct biological son throughout the genealogical sequence from Adam to Abraham.

To further substantiate the absence of major gaps⁷¹ in the genealogies of Gen 5 and 11, the Hebrew grammatical form of the verb “begat” (*yālad* in the *Hifil*) used throughout these chapters is the special causative form that always elsewhere in the OT refers to actual direct physical offspring, i.e., biological father-son relationship (Gen 6:10; Judg 11:1; 1 Chr 8:9; 14:3; 2 Chr 11:21; 13:21; 24:3). This is in contrast to the use of *yālad* in the simple *Qal* in many of the other biblical genealogies, in which cases it can refer to other than direct physical fathering of immediately succeeding offspring. In Gen 5 and 11, there is clearly a concern for completeness, accuracy, and precise length of time.⁷²

There are several different textual versions of the chronological data in these two chapters: MT (Hebrew text) LXX (Greek translation), and Samaritan Pentateuch. The scholarly consensus is that the MT has preserved the original figures in their purest form, while the LXX and Samaritan versions have intentionally schematized the figures for theological reasons. But regardless of which text is chosen, it only represents a difference of about a thousand years or so.⁷³

Regarding the chronology from Abraham to the present, there is disagreement among Bible-believing scholars whether the Israelite sojourn in Egypt was 215 years or 430 years, and thus whether to put Abraham in the early second millennium or the late third millennium B.C.; but other than this minor differ-

person mentioned in the genealogy (life span and age at which the next name bearer is begotten) which is never given in other ANE genealogies.

⁷¹ I do acknowledge the possibility of minor gaps (or duplications) in Gen 5 and 11, due to such factors as scribal omissions or additions. An example is the mention of a second Canaan in the LXX of Gen 5 and in Luke 3, as opposed to only one Canaan in the MT. In light of the scholarly consensus that the MT more likely approximates the original, the second Canaan is probably a secondary addition, although there is the possibility that a second Canaan has been inadvertently dropped out of the Hebrew text.

⁷² This is contra, e.g., Cottrell, 203; and Lawrence Geraty, “The Genealogies as an Index of Time,” *Spectrum* 6 (1974): 5–18, who both fail to recognize the differences between the genealogies of the Bible and other ANE literature, on one hand, and the unique chronogenealogies of Gen 5 and 11 on the other.

⁷³ If following the MT, the period of history from Adam to the Flood is 1656 years and from the Flood to Abraham 352 years, for a total of 2008 years. For the LXX, the total from Adam to Abraham is 3184 years, and for the Samaritan Pentateuch the total is 2249 years.

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ence, the basic chronology from Abraham to the present is clear from Scripture, and the total is only some 4000 (+/- 200) years.⁷⁴

Thus the Bible presents a relatively recent creation (of life on this earth) a few thousand years ago, not hundreds of thousands or millions/billions. While minor ambiguities do not allow us to pin down the exact date, according to Scripture the six-day creation week unambiguously occurred *recently*. This recent creation becomes significant in light of the character of God, the next point in our outline. We can already say here that a God of love surely would not allow pain and suffering to continue any longer than necessary to make clear the issues in the Great Controversy. He wants to bring an end to suffering and death as soon as possible; it is totally out of character with the God of the Bible to allow a history of cruelty and pain to go on for long periods of time—millions of years—when it would serve no purpose in the cosmic controversy against Satan. Thus the genealogies, pointing to a recent creation, are a window into the heart of a loving, compassionate God.

II. The “Who”: “In the Beginning God”

The Creation accounts of Gen 1–2 emphasize the character of God. While accurately presenting the facts of creation, the emphasis is undoubtedly not so much upon *crea-tion* as upon the *Creat-or*. As Mathews puts it, “‘God’ is the *grammatical* subject of the first sentence (1:1) and continues as the *thematic* subject throughout the account.”⁷⁵

A. Elohim and Yahweh—the Character of God

In Gen 1–2, two different names for God appear, not as supports for the Documentary Hypothesis, but in order to emphasize the two major character qualities of the Creator.⁷⁶ In Gen 1:1–2:4a, He is Elohim, which is the generic name for God, meaning “All-powerful One,” and emphasizing His transcendence as the universal, cosmic, self-existent, almighty, infinite God. This emphasis upon God’s transcendence is in accord with the universal framework of the first creation account, in which God is before and above creation and creates effortlessly by His divine Word. In the supplementary creation account of Gen 2:4b–25, another name for the deity is introduced along with Elohim. He is here also Yahweh, which is the biblical God’s covenant name; He is the immanent, personal God who enters into intimate relationship with His creatures. Just such a God is depicted in this second creation account: One who bends down as a Potter over a lifeless lump of clay to “shape” (*yāṣar*) the man and breathes into

⁷⁴ See SDABC (1953 ed.), “The Chronology of Early Bible History,” 1:174–196. For the date of the Exodus as ca. 1450 B.C., see especially, William Shea, “Exodus, Date of,” *ISBE* (rev. 1982 ed), 2:230–238.

⁷⁵ Mathews, 113.

⁷⁶ See below, in our discussion of the “what” of creation, for bibliography supporting the unity and complementarity of Gen 1 and 2.

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his nostrils the breath of life (2:7); who plants a garden (2:8); who “architecturally designs/builds” (*bānah*) the woman (2:22) and officiates at the first wedding (2:22–24). Only the Judeo-Christian God is both infinite and personal to meet the human need of an infinite reference point and personal relationship.

Any interpretation of the biblical account of origins must recognize the necessity of remaining faithful to this two-fold portrayal of the character of God in the opening chapters of Scripture. Interpretations of these chapters which present God as an accomplice, active or passive, in an evolutionary process of survival of the fittest, millions of years of predation, prior to the fall of humans, must seriously reckon with how these views impinge upon the character of God. I would argue that perhaps the greatest reason to reject (theistic) evolution or progressive creation is that it maligns the character of God, making Him responsible for millions of years of death/suffering, natural selection, survival of the fittest, even *before* sin.

B. Other Considerations

There are a number of other considerations related to the “who” of creation, including, among others, the following points, which we can only summarize here:

1. No proof of God is provided, but rather from the outset comes the bold assertion of His existence.

2. God is the ultimate foundation of reality. As Ellen White expresses it: “‘In the beginning God.’ Here alone can the mind in its eager questioning, fleeing as the dove to the ark, find rest.”⁷⁷

3. The portrayal of God in the creation account provides a polemic against the polytheism of the ANE with its many gods, their mankind-like moral decadence, the rivalry and struggle between the deities, their mortality, and their pantheism (the gods are part of the uncreated world-matter).

4. There are intimations of the plurality of the Godhead in Creation, with mention of the “Spirit of God” (*rûah ’elohîm*) in Gen 1:2;⁷⁸ the creative Word throughout the creation account (ten times in Gen 1); and the “let us” of Gen 1:26, most probably a “a plural of fullness,” implying “within the divine Being a distinction of personalities, a plurality within the deity, a ‘unanimity of intention

⁷⁷ Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1903), 134.

⁷⁸ Elsewhere in Scripture this Hebrew phrase always (18x) refers to “Spirit of God,” not “mighty wind.” Further, in the rest of Gen 1, Elohim always refers to God, and is not used as a marker for the superlative. Also, note the adverb describing the Spirit’s work of *m’rahepet* “hovering,” which in the only other occurrence of the word in the Pentateuch refers to the protective hovering of the eagle over its young (Deut 32:11). For full canvassing of the options and argumentation supporting the translation “Spirit of God,” see especially Hamilton, 111–115.

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and plan'. . . ; [the] germinal idea . . . [of] intra-divine deliberation among 'persons' within the divine Being."⁷⁹

5. The "who" of creation also helps us answer the "why" of creation. With intimations of a plurality of persons within the deity (point 4 above), and the character of God being one of covenant love (as Yahweh), it would be only natural for Him to wish to create other beings with whom He could share fellowship. This is implicit in the creation account of Prov 8, where Wisdom is "rejoicing" (literally, "playing, sporting"!) both with Yahweh and with the humans that have been created (vv. 30–31). It is explicit in Isa 45:18: "He created it [the earth] not to be empty [*tohu*], He formed it to be inhabited."

III. The "How": "In the Beginning God Created"

Many would claim that the biblical creation accounts are not concerned with the "how" of creation, but only with the theological point that God created. It is true that Gen 1–2 provide no technical scientific explanation of the divine creative process. But there is a great deal of attention to the "how" of divine creation,⁸⁰ and this cannot be discarded as the husk of the creation accounts in order to get at the theological kernel of truth that God was the Creator. It seems that the six days of creation "are told from the perspective of one who is standing on the earth's surface observing the universe with the naked eye."⁸¹

A. By Divine *bārā*

According to Gen 1, God creates by divine *bārā* (= "create" Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:4a). This Hebrew verb in the *Qal* describes exclusively God's action; it is never used of human activity. It is also never used with the accusative of matter: what is created is something totally new⁸² and effortlessly produced. By employing this term, the Genesis account provides an implicit polemic against the common ANE views of creation by sexual procreation and by a struggle with the forces of chaos.

⁷⁹ Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let Us' in Gen 1:26," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 65; see 58–66 for further discussion and critique of other views. Cf. Kidner, *Genesis*, 33; Hamilton, 133–134; Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 146–147; and the "Angel of the Lord" passages later in Genesis: Gen 16:7–13; 18:1–2 & 19:1; Gen 31:11–13; 32:24, 30; 48:15–16; Hosea 12:3–6 (on the latter, see Kidner, *Genesis*, 33).

⁸⁰ So Freitheim, 32: "While the central concern [in Gen 1] is in questions of 'why,' Israel is also interested in questions of 'how' the world came into being, and herein the ancient author integrates them into one holistic statement of the truth about the world."

⁸¹ Mathews, 144. The description of the earth's luminaries as light bearers for the earth (Gen 1:15–16) illustrates this geocentric perspective.

⁸² However, by itself the term does not indicate *creatio ex nihilo* (see Ps 51:12 [10 Eng.]), as has been sometimes claimed.

B. By Divine Fiat

Creation in Gen 1 is also by divine fiat—“And God said, Let there be . . .” (Gen 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26). The Psalmist summarizes this aspect of how God created: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth . . . For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast” (Ps 33:6, 9). According to Gen 1, the universe and this earth are not self-existent, random, or struggled over. The Genesis account is in stark contrast with the Mesopotamian concept of creation resulting from the cosmogonic struggle between rival deities or the sexual activity of the gods, and also in contrast with Egyptian Memphite theology, where the creative speech of the god Ptah is a magical utterance.⁸³ In biblical theology, the “word” of God is concrete; it is the embodiment of power. When God speaks, there is an immediate response in creative action. Part of God’s word is His blessing, and in Hebrew thought God’s blessing is the empowering of the one/thing blessed to fulfill the intended function for which (s)he/it was made. God’s creation by divine fiat underscores the centrality of the Word in the creation process.

C. As a Polemic

Specific terminology is used (or avoided) by Moses that appears to be an intentional polemic against the mythological struggle with a chaos monster and the prevalence of polytheistic deities found in the Mesopotamian creation texts.⁸⁴ We have noted some examples of these already above. As an additional example, the word *tēhôm* “deep” in Gen 1:2 is an “unmythologized” masculine rather than the mythological feminine sea monster Tiamat. Again, the names “sun” and “moon” are (vv. 14–19) replaced by the generic terms “greater light” and “lesser light” because the Hebrew names for these luminaries are also the names of deities. As a final example, the term *tannînim* (“sea monsters,” vv. 21–22), the name for both mythological creatures and natural sea creatures/serpents, is retained (as the only vocabulary available to express this kind of animal), but this usage is coupled with the strongest term for creation *bārā* (implying something totally new, no struggle), a term not employed in Gen 1 since v. 1, to dispel any thought of a rival god.⁸⁵

The “how” of creation was no doubt penned by Moses under inspiration with a view toward exposing and warning against the polytheistic Canaanite environment in which Israel would soon find themselves. But the omniscient Divine Author certainly also inspired this creation account in order to be a polemic for all time against views of creation that might violate or distort the true

⁸³ See Mathews, 117.

⁸⁴ See especially, Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974): 81–102.

⁸⁵ The term *bārā* is reserved for the pivotal moments in the first creation accounts when God’s effortless transcendence are to be emphasized (Gen 1:1, 21, 27; 2:4a); the normal word for “make” (*‘āśah*) is used elsewhere in the narrative (Gen 1:7, 16, 25, 26; 2:2, 4b).

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picture of God’s creative work. Does the inspired description of God’s effortless, personal, rapid creation by divine fiat protect modern humanity from accepting naturalistic, violent, random components into one’s picture of creation?

D. Dramatically and Aesthetically

God is portrayed in Gen 1–2 as a Master Designer, creating dramatically and aesthetically. We have already noted in the previous section how God “formed” the man like a potter and “designed/built” the woman like an architect. When He made this world, He surely could have created it completed in an instant if He had chosen to do so, but He instead dramatically choreographed the creation pageant over six days. Note the aesthetic symmetry of the very structure of God’s creation in space and time, similar to the Hebrew aesthetic technique of synthetic parallelism, in which a series of words/acts/scenes are completed by a matching series.

Introduction (Gen 1:1)

Gen 1:2	<i>tohû</i> (“unformed”)	<i>bohû</i> (“unfilled”)
Gen 1:3ff.	Forming	Filling
	a. light	a ¹ . luminaries
	b. sky and waters separated	b ¹ . inhabitants of sky and water
	c. dry land and vegetation	c ¹ . inhabitants of land, animals and man

Conclusion (Gen 2:2–3):
The Sabbath—A Palace in Time!

God is both scientist and artist!

E. In the Span of Six Days

We have already discussed the literal six-day creation week under the section of the “when” of creation, but this concept is also an important component of the “how” of creation. On one hand, according to Gen 1, God’s method of creation is not an instantaneous “timeless” act in which all things described in Gen 1–2 in one momentary flash suddenly appeared. Contrary to the suppositions of Greek dualistic philosophy, which controlled the worldview of early Christian thinkers such as Origen and Augustine (and still underlies the methodology of Catholic, Protestant, and modern thought), God is not essentially “timeless” and unable to enter into spatio-temporal reality.⁸⁶ Gen 1–2 underscores that God actually created in time as well as in space, creating the raw materials of the earth during a period of time before creation week, and then deliberately and dramatically forming and filling these inorganic, pre-fossil materials throughout the six-day creation week. Thus Gen 1–2 serves as a strong bulwark against Greek dualistic thought and calls the contemporary interpreter

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Fernando L. Canale, “Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary,” *AUSS* 36 (1998): 183–206, for further elaboration.

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back to radical biblical realism in which God actually enters time and space, creates in time and space, and calls it “very good.”

On the other hand, the method of creation in Gen 1–2 is also a powerful witness against accepting the creation week as occupying long ages of indefinite time, as claimed by proponents of progressive creationism. We have found that Gen 1:3ff. clearly refers to the creation week as six literal, historical, contiguous, creative, natural twenty-four-hour days. We have further concluded that all life on planet earth was created during this creation week (days three through six), and not before. Any attempt to bring long ages into the creation week, either through some kind of progressive creation or some other non-literal, non-historical interpretation of the creation week of Gen 1, is out of harmony with the original intention of the text. We have cited numerous quotations from both critical and conservative scholars that acknowledge this fact. Likewise, we have seen that Gen 1 demands an interpretation of rapid creation for the life forms on this planet—plants on day three, fish and fowl on day five, and the other animals and humans on day six. There is no room in the biblical text for the drawn-out process of evolution (even so-called “rapid evolution”!) to operate as a methodology to explain the origin of life during creation week.

**IV. The “What”: “In the Beginning
God Created *the Heavens and the Earth*”**

A. “The Heavens and the Earth”—The Universe: Gen 1:1

Some have taken the phrase in Gen 1:1 “the heavens and the earth” to refer to this earth and its surrounding heavenly spheres (i.e., the atmosphere and beyond to include the solar system). This interpretation is following the contextual lead of the usages of the terms “heaven” and “earth” later in Gen 1, and cannot be absolutely ruled out as a possible way of understanding this phrase.⁸⁷ However, significant differences may be noted between the use of the phrase “the heavens and the earth” in the opening verse of Gen 1 compared to the use of the two terms “heavens” and “earth” separately later in the chapter. In Gen 1:1, both “the heavens” and “the earth” contain the article, whereas when these are named in Gen 1 (vv. 8 and 10), they do not have the article. More importantly, in Gen 1:1 one encounters a dyad of terms (“the heavens and the earth”), whereas later in Gen 1 one finds a triad: “heavens,” “earth,” and “sea” (vv. 8, 10).

There is wide recognition among Genesis commentators that when used together as a pair in the Hebrew Bible, the dyad of terms “the heavens and the earth” constitute a merism for the totality of all creation, i.e., the entire universe, and that such is the case also in Gen 1:1.⁸⁸ As Sailhamer puts it, “By linking

⁸⁷ Until recently, I have interpreted the phrase in this way. See e.g., William Shea, “Creation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 420.

⁸⁸ A merism (or merismus) is a statement of opposites denoting totality. The usage of this compound phrase to indicate “the all” of the universe is explicit in such OT texts as Isa 44:24 and

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these two extremes into a single expression [‘the heavens and the earth’], the Hebrew language expresses the totality of all that exists.”⁸⁹ I am persuaded that this observation is valid. Thus Gen 1:1, as we have already intimated in an earlier section of this paper, refers to the creation of the entire universe, which took place “in the beginning” prior to the six-day creation week of Gen 1:3ff.

We repeat here, for emphasis, that this implies *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing; God is not indebted to pre-existing matter. We also repeat here for emphasis that the whole universe was not created in six days, as some ardent creationists have mistakenly claimed. Furthermore, if the “passive gap” interpretation is correct (as I have argued above), then the creation of “the heavens and the earth” during the span of time termed “in the beginning,” encompassed the whole galactic universe, *including* the planet earth in its “unformed and unfilled” condition (Gen 1:2).⁹⁰

The whole process of creating “the heavens and the earth” is finished or completed at the end of the creation week. This is indicated by the author by repeating the merism “the heavens and earth” twice again at the conclusion to the first creation account: “Thus the heavens and the earth and all their host were finished” (Gen 2:1). “This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created” (Gen 2:4a). The creation of the whole universe is finally completed when the creation week of this earth is finished! The fact that the creation

Joel 3:15–16; and implicit in such passages as Gen 14:19, 22; 2 Kgs 19:15; 1 Chr 29:11; 2 Chr 2:12; Ps 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; Jer 23:24; 32:17; 51:48. Cf. the precise parallel to Gen 1:1 in John 1:1–3, where it seems to clearly refer to all created things in the universe. Among the preponderance of commentators who see “the heavens and the earth” as a merism for “universe” in Gen 1:1, see, e.g., G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis*, Bible Student’s Commentary, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 1:52; Cassuto, 20; Hamilton, 103; Keil, 1:47; Leupold, 41; Mathews, 140, 142; Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 55–56; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5; von Rad, *Genesis*, 48; Waltke, *Genesis*, 59; and Wenham, 15. This is contra, e.g., Cottrell, 197, who claims that the phrase “the heavens and the earth” refer only to “the atmospheric heavens, or sky, and to the surface of the earth” and never to “the universe beyond our solar system or to the earth as a planet as we understand them today.”

⁸⁹ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 56.

⁹⁰ It has been widely suggested that the term “the heavens and earth” always refers to a *completed* and *organized* universe in Scripture, and thus cannot include the creation of an “unformed and unfilled” earth (so, e.g., Waltke, *Genesis*, 60). But several recent studies have shown that the essential meaning of “the heavens and earth” is not completion and organization, but totality. See, e.g., Wenham, 12–15; Rooker, 319–320. Thus, while the term “heavens and earth” may indeed refer to an organized, finished universe elsewhere in Scripture, this need not control the unique nuance here in Gen 1:1. Mathews, 142, clarifies: “Although the phrase ‘heavens and earth’ surely points to a finished universe where it is found elsewhere in the Old Testament, we cannot disregard the fundamental difference between those passages and the context presented in Genesis 1 before us, namely, that the expression may be used uniquely here since it concerns the exceptional event of creation itself. To insist on its meaning as a finished universe is to enslave the expression to its uses elsewhere and ignore the contextual requirements of Genesis 1. ‘Heavens and earth’ here indicates the totality of the universe, not foremostly an organized, completed universe.”

week is depicted as the “finishing touch,” as it were, of the process of creating the whole universe, may hint at the special significance attached by God to the creation of this particular planet. This would further illuminate the special attention given to the creation of this planet by all the onlooking “sons of God” and “morning stars” (unfallen inhabitants of the universe, Job 38:7).

**B. “Heaven, Earth, and Sea”—The Global Habitats of Our Planet:
Gen 1:8–11; Exod 20:11**

By contrast to the spotlight on the entire universe in Gen 1:1 (and again in Gen 2:1, 4a), using the dyad “the heavens and the earth,” in v. 2 the reference to “the earth” by itself (in fact, placing the noun “the earth” in the emphatic position of first word in the Hebrew clause) moves the focus of this verse and the rest of the chapter to this planet.⁹¹ The use of the triad “heavens,” “earth,” and “seas” in Gen 1:8–11 describes the basic three-fold habitat of our planet: sky, water, and land. This three-fold habitat was the object of God’s creative power during the six days of creation. Likewise, Exod 20:11 indicates that in six days God created “the heavens and earth and the sea”—the habitats of this planet, not the galactic universe.⁹² Thus Gen 1:1 refers to God’s creation of the whole universe, while the remainder of Gen 1 and Exod 20:11 describe the creation of the three habitats of Planet Earth.

Sailhamer insightfully points out the distinction between Gen 1:1 (where the dyad “heavens and earth” refers to the entire universe) and the shift to this earth in the remainder of Gen 1. Unfortunately, however, he then goes astray when he suggests that the term *hā’āreṣ* “the earth” in Gen 1:2 and throughout the account of the six-day creation (some 20 times in Gen 1:2–2:1) and the fourth commandment (Exod 20:11) be translated “the land,” and that it refers only to the localized promised land for Israel, and not to the whole planet’s land

⁹¹ So Mathews, 142: “The term ‘earth’ (*ereṣ*) in v. 1 used in concert with ‘heaven,’ thereby indicating the whole universe, distinguishes its meaning from ‘earth’ (*ereṣ*) in v. 2, where it has its typical sense of ‘terrestrial earth.’”

⁹² Sailhamer is to be credited with highlighting the difference between the dyad (“the heavens and the earth”) in Gen 1:1 and the triad “heavens, earth, seas” in the remainder of Gen 1, and pointing out that the former has reference to the whole universe. (See, Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 47–59.) However, as noted below, Sailhamer takes a restricted, localized view of the meaning of the triad (which he translates as “sky, land, and seas”), a view which I argue is not supported by the context. In a private conversation, Randy Younker first pointed me to this distinction between the dyad and triad of terms and suggested (with Sailhamer) that the dyad (“heavens and earth”) of Gen 1:1 refers to the entire universe, but (against Sailhamer) that the triad (“heavens,” “earth,” and seas,”) mentioned later in Gen 1 refers to the world-wide creation of Planet Earth’s three habitats during creation week. He further pointed out that Exod 20:11 utilizes the triad, not the dyad, and thus refers to the creation of the habitats on this planet, and not to the creation of the whole universe. See now, Randall W. Younker, *God’s Creation: Exploring the Genesis Story* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1999), 33–35. I would add that Exod 31:17, which only contains the two terms “the heavens and the earth,” is undoubtedly to be taken as a shortened form of the full triad in the fourth commandment to which this passage clearly alludes.

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surface. Likewise, he strays when he maintains that the term *haššāmayim* “the heavens” in the Gen 1 account of creation week should be translated “the sky” and refer only to the region above the localized promised land.⁹³

I am convinced that the context, replete with global (i.e., planet-wide) terms throughout Gen 1, makes Sailhamer’s restricted interpretation of this chapter highly unlikely. It seems extremely arbitrary, and in fact virtually impossible, to limit the descriptions of creation week in Gen 1:3ff. to the land between the Euphrates and the River of Egypt. How can the dividing of the light from the darkness (v. 3) occur only in the promised land? How can the waters be divided from the waters (v. 6) only over the land promised to Israel? How can the waters be gathered into one place called “Seas” (v. 10) in the promised land? How can the greater light rule the day and the lesser light the night only in a localized area? How can the birds fly across the sky (v. 17) only above the promised land? How can the creation of the sea creatures be for the localized area of the future boundaries of Israel? How can the command given to humans to “fill the earth” and their charge to have dominion over “all the earth” be limited only to one localized area? All of this language is clearly global, not just limited to a small geographical area.

That the language of creation in Gen 1:3ff. is global in extent is confirmed in succeeding chapters of Gen 1–11. The trajectory of major themes throughout Gen 1–11—creation, Fall, plan of salvation, spread of sin, judgment by Flood, God’s covenant with the earth—are all global in their scope. Elsewhere I have shown the many occurrences of global terms in the Flood narrative, including several intertextual linkages with Gen 1.⁹⁴ Moreover, after the Flood, the precise command given to Adam is repeated to Noah: “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Gen 9:1, 7; cf. Gen 1:28). Noah was not even in the promised land when this command was given, and the following chapter of the Table of Nations (Gen 10) indicates that this command was to be fulfilled globally, not just in a localized area (see especially 10:32, “the nations were divided *on the earth* after the flood”). This global language continues in Gen 11, where the “whole earth” involves all the languages of the earth (11:8–9). There can be little doubt that throughout Gen 1–11 these references, and many others, involve global, not localized language, and the creation of “the earth” in Gen 1:3ff. must perforce also be global in extent.

This conclusion is also substantiated by comparing the creation account of Gen 1 to its parallel account in Prov 8:22–31. References to *hāʾāreṣ* (“the earth”) in Prov 8:23, 26, 29 are in context clearly global in extent (e.g., “foundations of the earth,” v. 29), and this is demonstrated by the parallelism between

⁹³ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 47–59.

⁹⁴ Richard M. Davidson, “Biblical Evidence for the Universality of the Genesis Flood,” *Origins* 22/2 (1995): 58–73; revised edition, in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary: Why a Global Flood is Vital to the Doctrine of Atonement*, ed. John T. Baldwin (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 79–92.

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hā'āreš (“the earth”) and the indisputably global term (*tēbēl*) “globe” in v. 26. Thus, we cannot accept Sailhamer’s suggestion that “the earth” and “the heavens” should be translated “land” and “sky” in Gen 1:2ff. and refer to less than a global creation.

**C. The Two Creation Accounts in Gen 1–2:
Identical, Contradictory, or Complementary?**

Sailhamer has also mistakenly identified the global creation week of Gen 1 with the creation of the localized Garden of Eden in Gen 2:4bff.⁹⁵ Contra Sailhamer, it should be recognized that in the complementary creation account of Gen 2:4b–25, the introductory “not yet” verses (5 and 6) continue the global usage of “the earth” of the Gen 1 account in describing the four things that had not yet appeared on the surface of the planet before the entrance of sin (thorns, agriculture, cultivation/irrigation, and rain). Then Gen 2:7, describing the creation of the man, gives the time frame of the Gen 2 creation account, i.e., corresponding with the sixth day of the creation week of Gen 1. The rest of Gen 2 depicts in more detail the activities of God on the sixth day of creation week.

Others have gone to the opposite extreme from Sailhamer and have posited that Gen 1–2 present radically different and contradictory accounts. Such a position often betrays a belief in the Documentary Hypothesis and two different redactors at work in the two accounts. Jacques Doukhan’s dissertation and William Shea’s literary analysis, among other important studies, provide evidence that Gen 1 and 2 are the product of a single author and present complementary theological perspectives on the creation of this world, with Gen 1 providing a portrayal of the global creation as such, and Gen 2 focusing attention on humanity’s personal needs.⁹⁶ Randy Younker discusses in detail alleged contradictions between the Gen 1 and Gen 2 creation accounts and shows how the supposed contradictions actually constitute complementarity in presenting a unified and integrated portrayal of creation.⁹⁷

D. Light, the “Greater” and “Lesser” Lights, and the Stars

On the first day of Creation God said, “Let there be light,’ and there was light” (1:3). However, on the fourth day of Creation week God ordered into existence “lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth . . . to rule over the day and over night, and to divide the light from the darkness” (1:15, 18). What was the source of the light that illumined our planet before the fourth day?

⁹⁵ Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*, 69–77.

⁹⁶ Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, *passim*. See also William H. Shea, “The Unity of the Creation Account,” *Origins* 5 (1978): 9–38; idem, “Literary Structural Parallels between Genesis 1 and 2,” *Origins* 16 (1989): 49–68.

⁹⁷ See Randy Younker, “Genesis 2: A Second Creation Account?” in *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*, 69–78.

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One possibility is that God's presence was the source of light on the first day of Creation. This is already hinted at in the literary linkage between Gen 1:4 and Gen 1:18. In v. 4 God Himself is the One who "divided the light from the darkness," while in v. 18 it is the luminaries that are "to divide the light from the darkness." By juxtaposing these two clauses with exactly the same Hebrew words and word order, the reader is invited to conclude that God Himself was the light source of the first three days, performing the function which He gave to the sun and moon on the fourth day. Another implicit indicator of this interpretation is found in comparing Gen 1 with Ps 104, a stylized account of the creation story following the same order of description as in the creation week of Gen 1. In the section of Ps 104 paralleling the first day of creation (v. 2), God is depicted as covering Himself "with light as with a garment," thus implying that God is the light source of the first days of creation week.⁹⁸ During the first three days, God Himself could have separated the light from the darkness, just as He did at the Red Sea (Exod 14:19–20). God Himself being the light source for the first part of the week emphasizes the theocentric (God-centered), not heliocentric (sun-centered) nature of creation, thus forestalling any temptation to worship the sun or moon that might have been encouraged if the luminaries were the first object created during the Creation week.

A second option suggests that the sun was created before the fourth day, but became visible on that day (perhaps as a vapor cover was removed). This would explain the evening/morning cycle before day four. John Sailhamer argues that the Hebrew syntax of Gen 1:14 differs from the syntactical pattern of the other days of creation, in that it contains the verb "to be" (in the jussive) plus the infinitive, whereas other days have only the verb without the infinitive. Thus, he suggests that verse 14 should read, "Let the lights in the expanse be for separating. . ." (not as usually translated, "Let there be lights in the expanse. . ."). Such a subtle but important syntactical shift may imply, Sailhamer suggests, that the lights were already in existence before the fourth day.⁹⁹ The "greater" and "lesser" lights could have been created "in the beginning" (before Creation week, v. 1) and not on the fourth day. On the fourth day they were given a purpose, "to separate the day from the night" and "to mark seasons and days and years."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story*, 83–90.

⁹⁹ "The construction of the Hebrew sentence in verse 14 does not imply that God made the heavenly lights on the fourth day. It does not say, 'and God said "Let there be lights in the expanse to divide between the day and the night. . ."' Rather, it says, 'And God said, "Let the lights in the expanse be fore dividing between the day and night. . ."' Do you see the difference? The text does not say God *created* the lights in verse 14, but rather that God *explains why* He created the lights in the expanse—to divide between the day and night, etc." (*Genesis Unbound*, 252).

¹⁰⁰ For further discussion, see Sailhamer, "Genesis," 2:33–34; idem, *Genesis Unbound*, 129–135. Sailhamer cites Gesenius-Kautzsch-Cowley *Hebrew Grammar*, ¶114h in support of this possible difference in syntactical nuance.

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Sailhamer's suggestion does rightly call attention to a possible difference of syntactical nuancing with regard to the wording of the fourth day, but is not without its own difficulties.¹⁰¹ Most serious is that Sailhamer views v. 16 as not part of the report of creation, but as commentary pointing out that it was God (and not anyone else) who had made the lights and put them in the sky. I find this objection overcome if one accepts a variant of this view in which v. 16 is indeed part of the report and not just commentary. According to this variant, the sun and moon were created before Creation week (v. 1), as Sailhamer suggests, but (unlike Sailhamer's view) they were created in their *tohû* ("unformed") and *bohû* ("unfilled") state as was the earth (cf. v. 2), and on the fourth day were further "made" (*āśah*) into their fully-functional state (v. 16).

Perhaps a combination of the above two options is possible. The sun and moon may have been created (in their *tohû-bohû* "unformed-unfilled" state) before creation week, but God Himself was the light source until day four.

What about the stars? Were they created on the fourth day, or before? In the second option mentioned above, we noted how the Hebrew syntax of Gen 1:14 seems to indicate that the sun and moon were already in existence before the fourth day and thus could have been created "in the beginning" (before Creation week, v. 1). The same would also be true of the stars. Furthermore, the syntax of Gen 1:16 doesn't require the creation of the stars on day 4, and in fact, as no function is assigned to the stars, such as given to the sun and moon, their mention may be seen as a parenthetical statement added in this verse to complete the portrayal of the heavenly bodies—"he made the stars also"—without indicating when.

Colin House has argued that in Gen 1:16 the stars are presupposed as already in existence before creation week, and that this is indicated by the use of the Hebrew particle *w'et*, which he suggests means "together with." Thus the Hebrew of Gen 1:16c should read: "the lesser light to rule the night *together with the stars*."¹⁰² Several passages of Scripture suggest that celestial bodies and intelligent beings were created before life was brought into existence on this planet (Job 38:7; Ezek 28:15; 1 Cor 4:9; Rev 12:7-9; etc.), and this would correlate with the implications that emerge from Gen 1:16.

E. Death/Predation before Sin?

Do the Genesis creation accounts allow for the possibility that death/predation existed on planet earth before the Fall and the entrance of sin

¹⁰¹ See e.g., Shaw, 211-212, for a critique of Sailhamer's view.

¹⁰² See Colin House, "Some Notes on Translating אֵת הַכּוֹכָבִים [w'et *hakôkabîm*] in Gen 1:16," *AUSS* 25 (1987): 241-248. This latter view is appealing, but has some (not unsurmountable) syntactical obstacles. Another view suggests that the "stars" here in Gen 1:16 actually refer to the planets, which were created on the fourth day. However, it does not seem likely that the Hebrew Bible distinguishes between the stars and planets, since there is only one Hebrew word for all these heavenly bodies.

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described in Gen 3? In answer to this question, we first must reiterate our conclusion regarding the “active gap” (or “ruin-restoration”) theory discussed under the “when” of creation. This theory, which allows for long ages of predation and death before the creation week described in Gen 1:3ff., cannot be grammatically sustained from the Hebrew text. Gen 1:2 simply cannot be translated, “The earth *became* without form and empty.” As we have seen above, there is room in the text for (and I believe the text actually favors) a “passive gap” in which God created the universe (“the heavens and the earth”) “in the beginning” before creation week (Gen 1:1); and the earth at this time was *tohû* (“unformed”) and *bohû* (“unfilled”) and “darkness was on the face of the deep.” But such description does not imply a negative condition of “chaos,” as has often been claimed, only that creation was not yet complete.¹⁰³ Furthermore, the terms *tohû* (“unformed”) and *bohû* (“unfilled”) in Gen 1:2 imply a sterile, uninhabited waste, with no life, including birds, animals, and vegetation.¹⁰⁴ So not only is there no death on this world before creation week, but there is no life! Gen 1:1–2 thus make no room for living organisms to be present upon planet earth before creation week, let alone death and predation.

According to Gen 1–2, death¹⁰⁵ is not part of the original condition or of God’s divine plan for this world. Jacques Doukhan’s insightful discussion of death in relation to Gen 1–2 reveals at least three indicators that support this

¹⁰³ See especially Mathews, 140–144, for cogent arguments from the text that the flow in Gen 1:1–2:1 is from incomplete to complete and not from a chaos that opposes God to the conquering of these hostile forces. This flow is clear from the conclusion in Gen 2:1, where “the heavens and the earth” are now seen to be “finished” or “completed” [Heb. *klh*]. Mathews, 132, shows that the terms used in Gen 1:2 are not negative ones; darkness is not a symbol of evil in this context, but an actual entity that is later named (Gen 1:5). Mathews, 143, concludes, “the earth’s elements [Gen 1:2] are not portraying a negative picture, but rather a neutral, sterile landscape created by God and subject to his protection.” This uninhabitable landscape is incomplete, “awaiting the creative word of God to make it habitable for human life.” For an even more detailed defense of this position, see the three-part series of articles by Roberto Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic?” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36/2 (Autumn 1998): 259–276; 37/1 (Spring 1999): 39–53; 38/1 (Spring 2000): 59–67.

¹⁰⁴ See Tsumura, 42–43, 155–156.

¹⁰⁵ When we refer to death in the biblical sense, it is death in the animal and human world that is in view. The Hebrew Scriptures do not use the word “death” to refer to plants, and thus for the author of Genesis and his contemporaries, such experiences as the human (and animal) consumption of, for example, fruit, before the entrance of sin would not be seen to involve the death of the fruit. The issue of whether plant cells “died” when they were eaten before the Fall is a modern issue, not one dealt with by the biblical account. It is possible, however, that the creation account makes a distinction between the edible plants mentioned in Gen 1–2 and the “herb of the field” that was cultivated after sin (Gen 2:5; 3:18), the first being those plants from which fruit could be eaten while the plant itself continued to grow (i.e., our fruits, grains, nuts), and the second being the plants whose eating necessitated the termination of the growth of the plant itself (i.e., many of our vegetables).

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conclusion.¹⁰⁶ First, at each stage of creation, the divine work is pronounced “good” (Gen 1:4, 10, 18, 21, 25), and at the last stage it is pronounced “very good” (Gen 1:31). Humanity’s relationship with nature is described in positive terms of “dominion” (Heb. *rdh*), which is a covenant term without suggestion of abuse or cruelty.¹⁰⁷ The text explicitly suggests that animal or human death and suffering are not a part of the original creation situation, as it indicates the diet prescribed for both humans and animals to be the products of plants, not animals (Gen 1:28–30). This peaceful harmony is also evident in Gen 2, where animals are brought by God to the man to be named by him, thus implying companionship (albeit incomplete and inadequate) of the animals with humans (Gen 2:18).

A second indicator that death is not part of the picture in Gen 1–2 is the statement in Gen 2:4b–6 that at the time of creation the world was “not yet” affected by anything not good. Younker has shown that the four things that were “not yet” in these verses were all situations that came into the world as a result of sin: “(1) the need to deal with thorny plants, (2) the annual uncertainty and hard work of the grain crop, (3) the need to undertake the physically demanding plowing of the ground, and (4) the dependence on the uncertain, but essential life-giving rain.”¹⁰⁸ Doukhan points to a number of other terms in the Genesis creation narratives that constitute a prolepsis—the use of a descriptive word in anticipation of its being applicable—showing what is “not yet” but will come. Allusions to death and evil, which is “not yet,” may be found in the reference to “dust” (Gen 2:7; to which humans will return in death; cf. 3:19); the mention of the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen 2:17, in anticipation of the confrontation with and experiencing of evil; cf. 3:2–6, 22); the human’s task to “guard” (*šāmar*) the garden (Gen 2:15, implying the risk of losing it; cf. 3:23, where they are expelled and the cherubim “guard” *šāmar* its entrance); and the play on words between “naked” and “cunning” (Gen 2:25; 3:1; cf. 3:7, the nakedness resulting from sin).¹⁰⁹ Though alluded to by prolepsis, the negative “not good” conditions, including death, are “not yet.”

A third indicator that death was not prior to sin and part of the divine plan is that Gen 3 portrays death as an accident, a surprise, which turns the original picture of peace and harmony (Gen 1–2) into conflict. Within Gen 3, after the Fall, we have all of the harmonious relationships described in Gen 1–2 disrupted: between man and himself (guilt, a recognition of “soul nakedness” that cannot be covered by externals; Gen 3:7–10); between humans and God (fear; Gen 3:10), between man and woman (blame/discord; Gen 3:12, 13, 16, 17), between humans and animals (deceit, conflict; Gen 3:1, 13, 15), and between

¹⁰⁶ Jacques Doukhan, “Where did Death Come From? A Study in the Genesis Creation Story,” *Adventist Perspectives* 4/1 (1990): 16–18.

¹⁰⁷ See Ps 68:28; 2 Chr 2:10; Isa 41:2. It is clear that no cruelty is implied in this term, because when one is said to have dominion with cruelty, the term “with cruelty” is added (Lev 25:43, 46, 53).

¹⁰⁸ Younker, “Genesis 2,” 76–77.

¹⁰⁹ Doukhan, “Where Did Death Come From?” 17.

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humans and nature (decay; Gen 3:17–19). Now death appears, immediately (as an animal must die to provide covering for the humans' nakedness, Gen 3:21), and irrevocably (for the humans who have sinned, Gen 3:19). The upset of the ecological balance is directly attributed to the humans' sin (Gen 3:17–18). The blessing of Gen 1–2 has become the curse (Gen 3:14, 17).

A number of commentators have pointed out that one of the major reasons for God's judgment upon the antediluvian world with the Flood was the existence of violence on the earth: "The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence [*hāmās*]" (Gen 6:11). The earth's being "filled with violence [*hāmās*]" is repeated again in v. 13. The use of the term *hāmās* undoubtedly includes the presence of brutality and physical violence, and with its subject being "the earth," probably refers to the violent behavior of both humans and animals (note the post-Flood decrees that attempt to limit both human and animal violence, Gen 9:4–6). Divine judgment upon the earth for its violence (*hāmās*) implies that predation, which presupposes violence, and death, the all-too-frequent result of violence, were not part of the creation order.

Intertextual allusions to Gen 1–2 later in Genesis confirm that death is an intruder coming as a result of sin, and not occurring before the Fall. Doukhan points to the striking intertextual parallels between Gen 1:28–30 and 9:1–4, where God repeats to Noah the same blessing as to Adam, using the same terms and in the same order. But after the Flood, instead of peaceful dominion (as in creation), there would be fear and dread of humans by the animals, and instead of a vegetarian diet for both humans and animals (as in creation), humans were allowed to hunt and eat animals. The juxtaposing of these two passages reveals that the portrayal of conflict and death is not regarded as original in creation, but organically connected to humanity's fall.

Perhaps the most instructive intertextual allusions to Gen 1–2 occur in the Old Testament Hebrew prophets and in the last prophet of the New Testament (the book of Revelation); these messengers of God were inspired to look beyond the present to a future time of salvation, pictured as a re-creation of the world as it was before the Fall. This portrait, drawn largely in the language of a return to the Edenic state, explicitly describes a (re)new(ed) creation of perfect harmony between humanity and nature, where once again predation and death will not exist:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together,
And a little child shall lead them.

The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,

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And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain.
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord
As the waters cover the sea. (Isa 11:6–9)

He will swallow up death forever,
And the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces;
The rebuke of His people
He will take away from all the earth;
For the Lord has spoken. (Isa 25:8)

I will ransom them from the power of the grave;
I will redeem them from death.
O Death, I will be your plagues!
O Grave, I will be your destruction! (Hos 13:14)

For behold, I create a new heavens and a new earth;
And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. (Isa 65:17)

For as the new heavens and the new earth
Which I will make shall remain before Me, says the Lord,
So shall your descendants and your name remain. (Isa 66:22)

I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold I am alive forevermore,
Amen.
And I have the keys of Hades and Death. (Rev 1:18)

Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:14)

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth,
For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
And there was no more sea. . . .
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes;
There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying;
And there shall be no more pain,
For the former things have passed away. (Rev 21:1, 4)¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ For recent studies of these and related passages, discussing the return to the Gen 1–2 paradise without death, see especially several chapters in William P. Brown and S. Dean McBride, Jr., ed., *God Who Creates: Essays in Honor of W. Sibley Towner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000). For example, Gene M. Tucker, “The Peaceable Kingdom and a Covenant with the Wild Animals,” 215–225, discusses Isa 11:6–9 and Hos 2:18 [2:20]; note his statement regarding Isa 11 (216): “The text presumes a negative evaluation of the world as it is, filled with predators and prey, violence and death. One implication of the passage, to put it bluntly, is that there will be a time when the world will be made safe for domestic animals and children.” Again, David L. Bartlett, “Creation Waits with Eager Longing,” 229–250, deals with such Pauline passages as 1 Cor 15:20–28; 2 Cor 5:16–21; Gal 5:1–6; Rom 5:12–14; and 8:18–25. Note his comment on the last mentioned passage (243–4): “Again, this is a reading of the Genesis story in light of Paul’s questions. . . . Creation before Adam’s disobedience was not subject to bondage, to futility, to decay; it was free, purposeful, spared the threats of mortality . . . The lost good of creation is (will be) restored purer and brighter than before.” A final chapter by John T. Carroll, “Creation and Apocalypse,” 251–260, discusses the new

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creation and paradise restored in the book of Revelation. Note his reference to the end of death (255): “John’s visionary excursion to the eschatological Jerusalem is in important respects a return to Paradise. The ‘new heaven and new earth’ fashioned by God who ‘makes all things new’ (Rev 21:1, 5, echoing Isa 43:19; 65:17; 66:22) still works with the raw materials of the old cosmos. The new creation improves the old but does not substitute one cosmos for another. . . . Several features of the old order are conspicuous by their absence. Death will no longer exist (and with it, crying or pain: Rev 21:2), a reality symbolized by the presence of the tree and water of life.”

Other contemporary theologians refer to these passages to undergird their conclusion that the “new creation” will return to a state without death. See, e.g., John Polkinhorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven: CT: Yale UP, 2002), 62–63: “We are even told that at this great feast [at the end of the world] God will ‘swallow up death for ever’ (Isaiah 25:8).” Again (115): “Yet it seems a coherent hope to believe that the laws of its nature [the new creation] will be perfectly adapted to the everlasting of that world where ‘Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away’ (Revelation 21:4), . . .” As a last sample (123): “If that is the case, lionhood will have also to share in the dialectic of eschatological continuity and discontinuity, in accordance with the prophet vision that in the ‘new heavens and the new earth . . . the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox’ (Isaiah 65:17 and 25).”

There are numerous other concerns related to the “what” of creation in Gen 1–2, about which I have written elsewhere, and will only list here. These include, among others:

1. Humankind in the image of God, both in outward form and inward character. (Richard M. Davidson, “The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning: Genesis 1–2,” *AUSS* 26 [1988]: 8–9);
2. The equality of man and woman in Gen 1 and 2 (*ibid*, 7, 13–19);
3. A theology of marriage (“leave,” “cleave,” “become one flesh”) in Gen 2:24 (*ibid*, 20–22);
4. The character of the Garden of Eden as a sanctuary-temple, with Adam and Eve as the priestly officiants “to serve” (*abad*) and “to guard” (*šamar*) (Gen 2:15) their environment—seventeen different lines of biblical evidence (Davidson, “Cosmic Metanarrative,” 108–111);
5. The Sabbath as a holy institution rooted in, and a memorial of, the six-day Creation (Gen 2:1–3)—see *idem*, *A Lovesong for the Sabbath* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1988).