Linguistic and Thematic Parallels Between Genesis 1 and 3

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Introduction

A superficial glance may give the impression that there are no points of correspondence between Genesis 1 and 3. However, a deeper and more exhaustive analysis from linguistic, literary, and thematic perspectives reveals that there are indeed significant similarities between these two chapters. Generally, scholars have attributed Genesis 1 and 3 to two different literary sources: the Priestly (P) source for the redaction of Genesis 1 and the Jahvist (J) source for the redaction of Genesis 3. The immense majority of the studies on Genesis 1 and 3 sustain this view.¹

Scholars have analyzed the linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 2, but there are no systematic and deep studies of the linguistic, literary, and thematic correspondences between Genesis 1 and 3.² This article will establish that such linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 do indeed exist.³


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The thesis of this article is that there are nine texts within these two narratives that are parallel in form and content. This suggests that both accounts were written by the same author, resulting in a similar linguistic, literary, and thematic model and establishing a common literary design.

We will analyze what it is objectively fixed and observed (the current Masoretic Text [MT]), rather than what is subjectively supposed and proposed (the Documentary hypothesis). As D. W. Baker urges, we should study the text as a literary unity to find where it is divided into smaller sections, using the mechanisms used to mark the divisions to indicate the unity.

On the other hand, as M. Kessler points out, each passage must be studied in its objective context, its Sitz im Text (“text setting”) before it can fairly be studied in its vague and subjective Sitz im Leben (“vital setting”).

Using these considerations and positions, our investigation will proceed as follows. We will analyze the Masoretic Text in its objective Sitz im Text, which is the fundamental principle for a sound and rigorous scientific methodology of exegesis. We will observe the linguistic and literary dependence of Genesis 3 on Genesis 1, noticing how different antithetical and synonymous parallels correlate both accounts. We will observe the thematic dependence of Genesis 3 on Genesis 1 at certain levels, based on the linguistic and literary dependence noted in the previous point. Finally, the presence of coherences, consistencies, correspondences, and intertextual parallels between the two accounts will allow us to verify the homogeneity and internal unity of both accounts. This will falsify the presupposition of heterogeneity and internal incoherence based on the subjectivity of Sitz im Leben studies.

Taking into account all of the above, we begin our analysis of the correspondences and parallels between Genesis 1 and 3.

1. Gen 1:10 || Gen 3:17: Antithetical Parallelism

Gen 1:10 wayyiqraו} }§loœhˆîm layyabaœs¥a® }eresΩ u®l§miq§weœh hammayim qaœraœ} yammˆîm wayyar§} }§lohˆîm kˆî-t√ob. And God called the dry land earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called seas. And God saw that it was good.

Gen 3:17 }∞ru®ra® haœ}∞daœma® ba{bu®rekaœ b§{isΩsΩaœbo®n toœ}k∞lenna® koœl y§me® hΩayyeykaœ. ÒCursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.Ó

4For a study of biblical parallelism, see, for instance, A. Berlin, The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1985), 31-102.
7Scriptural texts are taken from the NKJV.
In this first antithetical parallelism\(^8\) between Genesis 1 and 3, we can see that “the dry land (ground)” \([layyabašā]\)\(^9\) appears in Gen 1:10. This Hebrew term is a noun feminine singular. God called “the dry land (ground)” “earth” \([êreṣ]\) and saw “that it was good.”\(^10\) In Gen 3:17, an antithetical linguistic and thematic parallelism appears with the curse of “the ground” \([hāʾdāma]\)\(^11\) on account of the man. Where before God, seeing the land/ground, thought “How good!” \([kî-tôb]\), He now said it would be “cursed” \([rārā]\). The Hebrew word \(hāʾdāma\) is also a noun feminine singular, like \(layyabašā\). There is a synonymous parallelism between \(layyabašā\) [“the dry land (ground)’’] (Gen 1:10) and \(hāʾdāma\) [“the ground”] (Gen 3:17).

2. Gen 1:12 || Gen 3:18: Antithetical Parallelism

\[\text{Gen 1:12} \quad \text{watoš} \ hāʾreṣ \ ësēb mazʾría’ \ zeraʾ \ lʾmînēhû \ weʾēṣ \ ësēk-pri’ \ *ár zêbō \ lʾmînēhû \ wayyar’ \ *lōḥim kî-tôb. \text{And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its} \]

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\(^8\)As Watson points out when referring to the parallel types of words: “antonymic word-pairs are made up of words opposite in meaning and are normally used in antithetic parallelism” see W. G. E. Watson, Classical Hebrew Poetry, JSOT Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 131.

\(^9\)The Hebrew term \(yabāšā\) means “the dry land,” “the dry ground.” It appears in Exod 4:9 to refer to “dry land/ground” (close to water): “And it shall be, if they do not believe even these two signs, or listen to your voice, that you shall take water from the river and pour it on the dry land. And the water which you take from the river will become blood on the dry land (NKJV).” Exodus 14:16, 22, 29; 15:19 refer to the crossing of Israel on the “dry land/ground” of the Red Sea: “But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. . . . So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. . . . But the children of Israel had walked on \(dry \ land\) in the midst of the sea, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. . . . For the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them. But the children of Israel went on \(dry \ land\) in the midst of the sea (NKJV).” In Josh 4:22 the word refers to crossing of Israel on the “dry land/ground” of the Jordan River: “Then you shall let your children know, saying, ‘Israel crossed over this Jordan on \(dry \ land\) (NKJV).’” See also Neh 9:11; Ps 66:6 (F. Brown, S. R. Driver & C. A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951], 387; cf. W. L. Holladay, A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971], 127).

\(^10\)Literally, in Hebrew \(kî-tôb\) is a preposition + adjective in exclamative form, giving God’s thought on “seeing” the excellence of His work and its fidelity to his intentions, perhaps most adequately translated in Spanish as “Que bueno!” and in English as “How good!” though the formula “and God said” does not occur, so the thought was unspoken.

\(^11\)The “ground” \(hāʾdāma\) is the area of the arable ground/land that one can work for food production (E. Jenni and C. Westermann (eds.) Diccionario Teologico del Antiguo Testamento [Madrid: Cristiandad, 1978], 1:110-15). Originally this word meant the arable red ground/land. Starting from this meaning, it ended up denoting any ground to plant or cultivate and/or goods (R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer and B. K. Waltke (eds.) Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament [TWOT] [Chicago: Moody, 1980], 1:10).
kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

\textbf{Gen 3:18} \textit{w’qōṣ w’dardar tasmîha}. “Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.”

In this second antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, we can see that “grass” \textit{dešē} (noun masculine singular) and “herb” \textit{esēb} (noun masculine singular) appear in Gen 1:12. God looked at them and thought, as we have previously indicated “How good!” [\textit{kî-tōb}]. Then, in Gen 3:18, God saw that to these “good” things would be added harmful “plants,” such as “thorns and thistles” [\textit{w’qōṣ w’dardar}] (noun masculine singular + noun masculine singular), harmful to those now doomed to cultivate the land/ground and to the other plants God found to be “good” in the Creation account. This is an antithetical thematic parallelism, because it pertains to the same topic, but with consequences opposite to what had been intended.

\section*{3. Gen 1:25 || Gen 3:14: Antithetical Parallelism}

\textbf{Gen 1:25} \textit{wayyašqō} “lōhîm ‘et-hâyyat hâ’āres l’înînā w’et-hab’hêmî l’înînā w’êt kol-remeš hâ’dâmî l’înîhî wâyyan’ “lōhîm kî-tōb. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

\textbf{Gen 3:14} \textit{wayyoš’er yhwh} “lōhîm ‘el-hannâhās kî ‘āšîtā zzô’î ‘ârûr ‘atâ mikol-hab’hêmî ūmîkîl ūhayyat haššâdeh. So the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field.”

In this third antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, God again saw “How good!” [\textit{kî-tōb}] as He viewed “the beast of the earth” [\textit{‘et-hâyyat hâ’āres}], “the cattle” [\textit{hab’hêmî}], and especially “everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind” [\textit{kol-remeš hâ’dâmî l’înîhî}] that He made in Gen 1:25. Look at the use of the noun masculine singular in the construct state—“everything that creeps” [\textit{kol-remeš}]—referring to all the reptiles in absolute terms. By contrast, in Gen 3:14, God curses one reptile, “the serpent” [\textit{hannâhās}], saying to it: “you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field” [\textit{‘ârûr ‘atâ mikol-hab’hêmî ūmîkîl ūhayyat haššâdeh}]. This is linguistic and thematic parallelism between these texts of Genesis 1 and 3. (There is also reverse parallelism in the order of presentation: beast, cattle, creepers in 1:25, then serpent, cattle, beast in 3:14.) These texts constitute the narrative nucleus of the antithetical parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3.

\footnote{NKJV.}

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\footnote{There is debate over whether \textit{kol-remeš} means reptiles or might include small animals or insects, but the parallel between these two verses suggests at the least that the serpent was among \textit{kol-remeš}, and may even mean that the author understood \textit{kol-remeš} to mean serpent-like reptiles.}
4. Gen 1:12 || Gen 3:6: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:12** watošΩh äëı̂ t胺°k’ éεé½h ‘señ’ zera’ l’mínëhú we’ës ‘òëëh-p’ri ³ker zar’°b-h l’mínëhú wayyar’³ lôhîm kî-tôb. And the earth brought forth grass, the herb that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:6** wateœre’ hâïšsa kî tôb hâïës l’måækol w’kî ta’wâ-hâ’ lâïnayı̄m w’ñeë’måd hâïës l’ha’š’kîl watiqqâh mipiryë watô’kal waiûen gam-l’ïšâh ’immåh wayyâ’kal. So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.15

Another linguistic and thematic parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3 appears in these texts.16 In Gen 1:12 we find the Hebrew formula “How good!” [kî-tôb].17 The phrase “and God saw that it was good” [wayyar’³ lôhîm kî-tôb] refers here to all the vegetation He has created. This same formula appears in Gen 3:6, used by the woman to refer to “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil”: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good [lit. ‘How good!’—wateœre’ hâïšsa kî tôb] for food.” The woman saw “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” as good, beautiful, pleasant, and desirable much as “God saw that it was good” when He viewed in Gen 1:12 the grass, plants, and trees He had created.18 Consequently, the woman was in effect pronouncing her judgment on the quality of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil,” just as God had judged the quality of the vegetation He had made.

5. Gen 1:25 || Gen 3:1: Synonymous Parallelism

**Gen 1:25** wayya’as’ lôhîm ’et-ħayyat hâïëres l’mînäh w’et-hab’hamä l’mînäh w’et kol-remeš hâ’måmå l’mínëhú wayyar’³’ lôhîm kî-tôb. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

**Gen 3:1** w’ha’nnä’ha yhwh ’ârim mikôl ḥayyat ha’ssädêh ’ker ‘ášâ yhwh lôhîm. Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.19

Again we consider Gen 1:25, but this time in synonymous parallel with another verse, Gen 3:1. This parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3 is highly signifi-

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15NKJV.
16“Synonymous word-pairs comprise a large class with a broad spectrum... Its components are synonyms or near-synonyms and therefore almost interchangeable in character” (Watson, 131).
17Preposition + adjective masculine singular.
18“And God saw that it was good” [wayyar’³ lôhîm kî-tôb] “So when the woman saw that [it] was good” [wateœre’ hâïšsa kî tôb]
19NKJV.
cant because of the verb used in both passages. In Gen 1:25, the verb “to do (make)” [‘āšā] appears in the Qal imperfect form wayya’āš. The same verb appears in Gen 3:1 in the same Qal form, but in the perfect, pointing toward an action concluded. This linguistic parallelism (and as we will also see it is also thematic) is very important, because when the Documentary theory distinguishes between Genesis 1 and 2-3 as being from two separate literary sources (P for the redaction of Genesis 1 and J for the redaction of Genesis 2-3), one of the fundamental arguments is the difference between the two verbs used to describe the divine activity. This difference has been based on the use of the verb bārā’ [“to create”] in Genesis 1 and the verb ‘āšā [“to do (make)”] in Genesis 2-3. But here it is evident that there is a linguistic unity, for the same verb is used in both passages and so in both accounts. There is also a thematic unity marked by the use of the same Hebrew terminology and expressions:

A wayya’āš ʾlōhîm [God made]

B ‘et-hayyat hā’āres l’mînāh w‘et-hab’hēmā l’mînāh w‘ét kol-remes hā’dāmā l’mînēhā [the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind.] (1:25)

B’ w’hannaḥāḥ hayāʾ ārūm mikōl ḥayyat haššādeh [Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field]

A’ ʾser ‘āšā yhwh ʾlōhîm. [which the Lord God had made.] (3:1)

Besides the linguistic relationship already signaled, B||B’ establishes a literary and thematic correspondence by means of the use in B of “beast of the earth” [ḥayyat hā’āres], “cattle” [ḥab’hēmā], and “everything that creeps on the earth” [kōl-reman hā’dāmā] and in B’ of “the serpent” [hannaḥāḥ] as representative of the reptiles of the land/ground, and “any beast of the field” [kōl ḥayyat haššādeh]. By means of the use of the Hebrew term kōl [“all/everything”] the author includes both “beast of the earth” and “cattle.” Remember that for these animals B does not use the word kōl. This way, a precise correspondence and parallelism on all levels between both accounts is established.


Gen 1:26-27 wayyyō’mer ʾlōhîm naʿsēh ʿāḏām b’šal’mēnā . . . wayyib’rāʾ ʾlōhîm ʿet-hāʾāḏām b’šal’mō. Then God said, “Let us make man in our image” . . . So God created man in His own image.

Gen 3:8-9, 12, 17, 20-22, 24 wayyīhāḇēh hāʾāḏām w’tišō. And Adam and his wife hid themselves . . . wayyiqrāʾ yhwh ʾlōhîm ʿel-hāʾāḏām. Then the Lord God called to Adam . . . wayyō’mer hāʾāḏām. Then the man said . . . ʾlʾāḏām ʿāmar. Then to Adam He said . . . wayyiqrāʾ hāʾāḏām. And Adam called . . . wayyaʿāš yhwh ʾlōhîm lʾāḏām ʿīlʾtišō. Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made . . . wayyō’mer yhwh ʾlōhîm hēn hāʾāḏām. Then the Lord God
said, “behold, the man . . . waygareš ʾet-hāʾādām. So He drove out the man.”

In this correspondence and parallelism between Genesis 1 and 3, the noun masculine singular “man” [ʾādām] is often used. The same term is used both in Genesis 1 to refer to God’s creation of the man (male and female), and in Genesis 3 to refer, in many verses, to the “man” in relationship to God or to the action of “individual man.”


Gen 1:28    waygāreṣ ʾādām ʾlōhîm wayyāmer lāhem ʾlōhîm p’rā ēr’ū bā umil’ā ʾet-hāʾāreṣ w’kibshūh ēr’dā bīdag hāyām ēb’āp ḫaššāṣayim ēb’kōl-ḥayyā hārōmēšet ʾal-hāʾāreṣ. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

Gen 3:16    ʾel-hāʾāṣē ʾāmar harbā ʾarbeh ṣiqbōnēk w’hērōnēk ṣeṣēb ṣēḏē bānām wʾel-ʾıšēk ṣiqqētēk w’hāʾ yimṣāl-bāk. To the woman He said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow and your conception; in pain you shall bring forth children; your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

These texts reveal another very significant synonymous parallel between Genesis 1 and 3. In Gen 1:28 the verb ṛābā (“to multiply, increase”) appears in Qal imperative form, while in Gen 3:16 it appears in Hiphil infinitive absolute—Hiphil imperfect harbā, in a very characteristic form found in Genesis 2-3. But, while in Genesis 1 it is a simple Qal action in imperative form, in Genesis 3 it is a causative verbal form expressing the simple action caused by another.

Consequently, in Genesis 1, God blesses the couple and tells them by means of three Qal imperatives “be fruitful; multiply; fill the earth.” Therefore, they have children in abundance. However, in Genesis 3, He tells the woman He

20NKJV.

21The Hebrew word ʾādām appears 554 times in the OT. It has the collective meaning of man (as gender), mankind, and men, and it is only used in singular and absolute state, and never with suffixes. The “individual man” is expressed with ben ʾādām, and the plural “men” with b’ne/b’not (ha)ʾādām. The meaning of the word continues unchanged throughout the OT (Jenni and Westermann, 1:92).

22NKJV.

23This is a very common form in northwestern Semitic, similar to the Ugaritic ṛb and the Akkadian ṛab. This is the common suffix of many Assyrian-Babylonian names, e.g. “Hammurabi”; “the god Ham (maybe ʾāmmu) is big.” The root appears about 200 times in the OT. Two more important differences with relationship to the meaning are related with the appearance in Qal form (60 times) and in Hiphil form (155 times). The first time it appears is in Gen 1:22, where it translates as “to multiply,” but other varied translations appear in later texts. In Hiphil, the most common translation is “multiply,” but many other translations are also given (TWOT, 2:828).

24See, for example, Gen 2:16-17 (Qal verbal form) and Gen 3:16.
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“will greatly multiply” not only her conception but her sorrow, and He reiterates it when He tells her “in pain you shall bring forth children.” Thus, these verses directly correspond linguistically and thematically with Genesis 1, showing that at the beginning it was not this way. That is to say, bearing children was not meant to be painful (the expression “in pain you shall bring forth children” implies that this had not been so in the past).


In these passages, we have several linguistic, literary, and thematic correspondences. The most significant parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 are the use of three similar Hebrew words: “tree” [אָדָם], “fruit” [פּרֵי], and “to eat” [קְלָא] (the antecedent of Gen 1:29-30 is found in Gen 1:11-12, where the terms “tree” and “fruit” appear twice). These are repeated several times in Gen 3:2-3, 6: “We may ‘eat’ [נַּחֲלָא] the ‘fruit’ [מִפְרִי] of the ‘trees’ [אָדָם] of the garden; but of the ‘fruit’ [עַמִּפְרִי] of the ‘tree’ [אָדָם] which is in the midst of the garden, God has said ‘You shall not ‘eat’ [קְלָא] it’ . . . So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a ‘tree’ [אָדָם] desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.”

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25NKJV.
vegetation, food/diet, and human attitude regarding the divine command of not eating of the fruit of a tree.


In this synonymous parallelism, we find both linguistic and thematic levels, marked by the appearance of the Hebrew words “herb” [‘ēšeb; twice] and “for food” [‘āk’la; twice] in Gen 1:29-30. We find the same Hebrew words in Gen 3:18: “you shall ‘eat’ the ‘herb’” [‘ākaltā ‘ēšeb], with the added term “of the field” [hašṣādeh]. This points to an alteration of the diet specified in Gen 1:29, adding the “[wild and cultivated] herb of the field” for the man as a consequence of his disobeying the divine command to not eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Now “the ground” [ḥāʾăḏānā; Gen 3:17] will provide him with other plants God had not included in his original diet, establishing a precise and exact correspondence between Genesis 1 and 3.

Summary

A detailed outline of the linguistic and thematic parallels between Genesis 1 and 3 may now be presented:

26NKJV.
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<td>- “man” ʾādām</td>
<td>- “man” ʾādām</td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- “multiply” ṣrār</td>
<td>- “multiply” ḫarbā</td>
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</table>
## LINGUISTIC AND THEMATIC PARALLELS BETWEEN GENESIS 1 AND 3 (II)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“tree” Ēq</td>
<td>- “tree” Ēq (4 times)</td>
<td>“fruit” miph̀, ṣamiph̀, miph̀yô</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“fruit” p’rî</td>
<td>- “fruit” miph̀, ṣamiph̀, miph̀yô</td>
<td>“eat” nōkal, ṭôk’lā, ma’kol, tō’kal, yō’kal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“eat” āk’lā</td>
<td>- “eat” āk’lā</td>
<td></td>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“herb” ēseb</td>
<td>- “herb” ēseb</td>
<td>- “eat” ākaltā</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“eat” āk’lā</td>
<td>- “eat” ākaltā</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Conclusion

This analysis, we think, has shown clearly that there are linguistic, literary, and thematic similarities between Genesis 1 and 3. Baker claims that nothing in the structure of the book of Genesis indicates that it was originally a heterogeneous amalgam of separate sources as has been announced, apart from the evidence of rough unions some have proposed. In support of the ideas discussed in his article, this article shows that Genesis [or at least, Genesis 1 and 3] seems to be a well-structured literary document.27

At least nine fundamental Hebrew texts of contact exist between the two narratives. These texts present very similar linguistic, literary, and thematic forms in many aspects. These contact points suggest that Genesis 3 was modeled after Genesis 1. The comparison of linguistic and thematic parallels provides strong evidence of intentional design in the forms found in the passages analyzed previously and suggests that both accounts were written by the same hand, for the same author, following a similar linguistic, literary, and thematic model, and establishing a common literary design. It is difficult to exclude the possibility that there could have been two authors, with the second author deliberately paralleling the first, but it seems unlikely that P would try to parallel J in these ways, or vice versa. There are enough details in common between Genesis 1 and 3 to point toward both chapters being written by the same author.

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27 Baker, 214.