

The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3

Part IV: The Theology of Genesis 1

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

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

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

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

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

THE POLEMICAL FUNCTION OF GENESIS I

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

THE CONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

Second, there are points of similarity in their content. Both accounts present a primeval, dark,⁷ watery, and formless⁸ state prior to creation, and neither account attributes this state to the Creator/creator. Also the two accounts agree about the order of the creation. Heidel has charted these basic similarities in detail between the chronological sequence of the creation of the cosmos in the two accounts.⁹

Enuma elish

Genesis

Divine spirit and cosmic matter are coexistent and coeternal

Divine spirit creates cosmic matter and exists independently of it

Primeval chaos; Tiamat enveloped in darkness

The earth a desolate waste, with darkness covering the deep

Light emanating from the gods

Light created

The creation of the firmament

The creation of the firmament

The creation of dry land

The creation of dry land

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of the luminaries

The creation of man

The creation of man

The gods rest and celebrate

God rests and sanctifies the seventh day

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

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

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

8 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

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

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

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

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

10 Ibid., pp. 130-32.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE DISCONTINUITY BETWEEN THE CREATION MYTHS AND GENESIS 1

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹⁹ Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, p. 7.

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

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

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

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

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

THE THEOLOGY OF GOD ACCORDING TO GENESIS 1

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

GOD AS THE CREATOR

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

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

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

23 Ibid., p. 102.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comparison of **ברא** and **עשה**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

²⁹ Anderson, *Creation versus Chaos*, pp. 124-26.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD AS THE SAVIOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GOD AS THE RULER

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

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

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

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

Announcement: And God said . . .

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

Report: And it was so

Evaluation: And God saw that it was good.

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

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

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

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

37 Ibid.

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

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

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

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

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

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The Genesis creation narrative is the creation myth of both Judaism and Christianity. The narrative is made up of two stories, roughly equivalent to the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis. In the first, Elohim (the Hebrew generic word for God) creates the heavens and the Earth in six days, then rests on, blesses and sanctifies the seventh (i.e. the Biblical Sabbath). In the second story, God, now referred to by the personal name Yahweh, creates Adam, the first man, from dust and places him in