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## *§1 The Creation of the Earth (Gen. 1:1–2:4a)*

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Genesis opens with the account of creation, which is as profound as it is simple. It focuses on the way God ordered the earth. The text addresses the heavens only as they have an impact on life on earth.

The purpose of this account is threefold. First, it teaches essential facts about the way God ordered the world so that humans might understand their place and role in creation. Second, it leads us to praise God as the wise, all-powerful Creator. Third, it pre-empts the deification of any created elements or forces regardless of their splendor.

The text presents the process of creation in six frames called days. Each frame follows a fixed pattern that begins with “and God said” and concludes with “And there was evening and there was morning . . .”. Within each frame God gives a command, sometimes stating the reason behind it. The report of the accomplishment of the command follows. God defines the purpose of what came into being, evaluates it, and in certain cases blesses it. The repetition of this structure echoes God’s careful ordering of the cosmos, while the scarcity of detail about how God created fosters our sense of wonder at the marvelous creation. In the process of creating, God was involved with the world in many ways: speaking, creating, making, naming, evaluating, deciding, caring for, pondering, blessing, and resting.

The focus of the six days alternates between time and space. Time is central to the activities of days one, four, and seven, while spatial aspects of creation are addressed in days two, three, five, and six. Furthermore, the ordering of each of the first three days corresponds to what is created on days four through six. The light-giving bodies of day four correspond to the origin of light on day one. On days five and six God fills the space defined on days two (sea/air) and three (land) with the appropriate life forms.

A number of literary features point to God’s creation of humans on the sixth day as the goal of creation. (a) This day receives

the longest coverage. (b) Only before making humans does God take counsel. (c) Humans are created in the image of God. (d) Three of the seven occurrences of the nodal term “create” (*bara'*) occur with humans. (e) God pronounces a blessing on humans, and (f) God invests them with authority over other members of the created order. Three features give the seventh day secondary emphasis: first, its pattern is different from that used for the other days; second, God rests; and third, God declares it holy.

This account gives God’s people the proper orientation to the created world. There are five ideas that are crucial to this orientation. (a) God entrusts humans, who bear God’s image, with stewardship of the earth. (b) God has set boundaries within which the various dimensions of the created order fulfill their purposes. (c) God assigns tasks and responsibilities to various members of creation; for example, the lights in heaven establish times and seasons. (d) No member of the created order is a deity. (e) In resting on the seventh day God provides a regular period of time for humans to enjoy the beauty of the created order. This orientation serves to counter false worldviews, including dualism, astrology, nihilism, and any philosophy that devalues human life (D. Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* [TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1967], p. 57).

There are numerous explanations for the relationship of 1:1–2 to the account of the six days of creation. We will consider four of them. The first is the gap theory or the restitution theory, popularized by the Scofield Bible, which takes verse 1 as the report of the original grand creation. In that world evil became so rampant that God had to destroy it. Verse 2 describes the results of that destruction. After an undetermined span of time God recreated the earth as recounted in the six days of creation. This theory is appealing in that it provides the eons required by some geological interpretations of the earth’s formation. It also provides an age for the existence of extinct creatures like dinosaurs, which are otherwise unaccounted for in Scripture. This interpretation, however, stumbles over the grammar of verse 2, which is not structured as an independent sentence in sequence to verse 1. Moreover, this theory leaves much to be desired in that the grand creation is recounted in a single short verse while several verses describe the restructuring of the world. Furthermore, there is no other scriptural support for this position.

A second theory, chaos before creation, holds that the matter with which God began to create (i.e., “the chaotic water”) was

completely raw material that lacked any order. Those who hold this position translate the first three verses: “When God began to create . . . —the earth being unformed and void—God said . . .” (NJPS). This translation finds support in the way most ancient accounts of creation, including the Babylonian Creation Epic and the account of the garden of Eden (Gen. 2:4b–3:24), begin. The structure of the days of creation runs counter to this theory. 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.

A third view, the initial chaos theory, understands verse 2 to describe the raw material that came into existence as a result of God’s initial creative act reported in verse 1. That is, after making the raw materials, God went about ordering the cosmos from these raw materials as recounted in verses 3–31. This view, found in the early versions, has received wide support throughout the centuries. It falters, however, before the intolerable tension between the cosmic order depicted in verse 1 and the chaos described in verse 2. In addition, a comparison of the language of verse 1 with the language used to describe God’s making/creating in six days indicates that it is incorrect to interpret the wording of verse 1 as describing a specific creative act.

A fourth position takes verse 1, “God created the heavens and the earth,” as the heading to the account of creation (1:3–2:4a). That first sentence then came to possess concrete meaning only after the completion of creation. Verse 2 is a circumstantial clause about the unorganized state of matter before God began to create. A description of disorganized matter before speaking of creation accords with the ancient practice of beginning an account of origins by describing that which did not yet exist (2:4b–7).

By juxtaposing verse 2 with verse 1, the author highlights a key theme of Scripture, the polarity between cosmic order and chaos. God created by organizing chaos into cosmos. In so doing, however, God did not eliminate the two key elements of chaos, water and darkness. Their presence accounts for the ebb and flow between abundance and want, blessing and curse. This movement is at the core of human experience. In particular, when Israel keeps the covenant throughout the OT, God blesses nature so that the land yields abundantly. But when Israel forgets the covenant, God unleashes curses that cause nature to languish, resulting in deprivation and hardship.

This movement between abundance and want is evident in the material that follows creation (chs. 1–11). God placed humans in a lush garden. But after they rebelled, God expelled them from the garden, and once east of Eden humans had to work the stubborn soil hard to produce their food. Then, when human society became dominated by violence, God brought judgment by wiping out almost all humans by the cataclysmic flood (6:9–8:22). In that judgment God returned the earth to a chaotic condition similar to that described in verse 2.

This movement between blessing (cosmos) and curse (chaos), which is formalized in the blessings and curses of the Sinaitic covenant (Lev. 26; Deut. 27–28), also became a major theme in eschatological passages. God’s final judgment was sometimes described as the *uncreating* of the cosmic order (Isa. 34:8–15; Jer. 4:23–26). When God finally creates a new heaven and a new earth (Isa. 65:17–25; 66:22–23) his lordship will be further established. Therefore, the juxtaposition of cosmos (v. 1) and chaos (v. 2) grounds the interplay between abundance and want in God’s lordship over order and chaos.

An obstacle to this fourth position is that it seems to allow for the preexistence of matter. However, only the brevity of the creation account creates this impression. Ancient authors did not employ literary techniques for addressing complex issues from many perspectives. They focused on central issues without encumbering their documents with disclaimers. The focus here is on God’s sovereignty over the dynamic movement between cosmos and chaos, so as to discount pagan cosmogonies as a valid way of understanding the world’s origin. As a result, the theme of creation out of nothing was not addressed because it was not an issue. Nevertheless, the wording of this account does not conflict with the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, which is taught in other Scriptures (e.g., Prov. 8:22–31). In addition, the heading “God created the heavens and the earth” meant for the ancients that God created the earth described in verse 2.

**1:1 / In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.** In Hebrew this sentence consists of seven words, mirroring the seven days of creation. “In the beginning” marks the start of time on earth. This is confirmed by the process of creation being presented in a sequence of days and by the creation of light first in order to mark the flow of time in days and nights (1:3–5). **God** (*’elohim*) is the generic term for the one deity. It is used so fre-

quently that it virtually functions as a name. Its plural form conveys the multiplicity and self-sufficiency of God. That is, God, who is superior to all the gods, embodies in himself the qualities of all the gods that make up a pantheon. The OT uses “create” (*bara'*) restrictively: only God serves as its subject, and the material out of which something is made is never mentioned. The terms “the heavens” and “the earth,” being at opposite ends of the spectrum, stand for the totality of what God created. “Universe” is another possible translation for this phrase, but the ancient view of the cosmos was so different from today’s view that this English term would convey more than the ancient author intended.

**1:2** / A description of the earth prior to God’s giving it form follows, in preparation for recounting the stages of creation and especially for the ordering that took place on the first three days: **the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep.** “Earth” stands in an emphatic position, signaling that it is the primary focus of this account. In Hebrew “earth” signifies the area where humans live, dry land, and the land of Israel. But in this verse “the earth”—being formless, empty, and covered with water—refers to that which held the potential for becoming land.

Darkness, symbolic of a lifeless void, covered “the deep” (*tehom*), that is, the primordial ocean. In many ancient Near Eastern myths the primordial deep was the locus of those gods who opposed the gods of order. For example, in the Babylonian Creation Epic the goddess Tiamat, who personified the primordial salt waters, set up a rebellious government in opposition to the heavenly assembly. Only after Marduk, a mighty god of the fourth generation, defeated her was he elevated to be the ruler of the gods. Afterward Marduk ordered the cosmos. In Genesis, however, the deep is an essential element in the cosmos, not a deity. The Creator God exists independently from and transcends all matter. There is no indication that God faced any opposition either before or during the process of creation. Nevertheless, this reference to the deep conveys the latent potential for forces that could be aroused to oppose God’s rule and wreak havoc on earth.

**The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.** Hebrew *ruah* is used for both “wind” and “spirit.” “Hover” or “soar” (*r-kh-p*), however, is not a verb used with wind; it is used here to compare the Spirit’s activity with a bird. The Spirit was circling above the water to make sure that the deep did not oppose God. Manifest as

wind, the Spirit was thus in control of these chaotic elements, for it could drive the water wherever it wished. Further, the presence of God's Spirit symbolized the potential of cosmic order and life that could be produced from these formless elements.

**1:3–5** / The words **God said** mark off the stages of creation, conveying that God created by the word. God's words were not empty, for the Spirit, who was present over the waters, empowered God's words, bringing into being what God had spoken (A. Kapelrud, "Die Theologie der Schöpfung im Alten Testament," ZAW 91 [1979], pp. 165–66). The wording of Psalm 33:6, 9 supports this claim: "By the word of Yahweh were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm." The parallel in this psalm between "word" and "breath" (v. 6) communicates that God's Spirit was the energy empowering God's word.

God began the process of creation with the command, **Let there be light**, and light came into being, pushing back the primordial darkness. From the context we can discern two reasons God created light first: to limit the primordial darkness, and to begin the flow of time as measured in days. From our knowledge of the world another reason can be added; light was the energy necessary to support the life forms that God was going to create.

**God saw that the light was good**, thereby making a qualitative judgment about what he had created (also vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). While usually a word carries only one nuance in any given occurrence, "good" in this account is a loaded term. It carries four implications: (a) What came into being functioned precisely as God had purposed. (b) That which had just been created contributed to the well-being of the created order. (c) The new creation had aesthetic qualities—that is, it was pleasing and beautiful—and (d) it had moral force, advancing righteousness on earth (Job 38:12–13).

God went on and **separated the light from the darkness**. **God called the light "day" and the darkness he called "night."** By naming these elements God defined their function in respect to their essence. God did not eliminate the darkness that was already present; rather he established his authority over it, assigning it a specific role and restricting its influence.

**1:6–8** / On the second day God commanded that there be **an expanse . . . to separate** the waters. **God then made ('asah) the expanse.** "Made" usually refers to God's producing some-

thing new; “create” (*bara’*) is reserved for special creative acts in days five and six. The presence of the word “made” allows for a variety of processes to come into play between God’s speaking and the object’s coming into existence. God **separated** the massive body of **water** into two parts. One part, stationed below the expanse, fed the seas, rivers, and springs. The other part of the deep was placed above the expanse. **God called the expanse heavens (sky, NIV)**. The ancients believed that above the solid dome of the heavens was a reservoir housing the rain, hail, and snow. The sun, moon, and stars moved across the surface of this dome, and between this surface and the earth was the sky. The absence of an evaluative statement for the activity on this day suggests that what had been made had been done so in preparation for a higher goal.

**1:9–13** / On the third day God carried out two distinct creative acts. First, God ordered the lower water to **be gathered to one place** so that **dry ground might appear. God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.”** As on the first day, God named both the new element and that which already existed. Since the seas sometimes symbolized God’s foe or were viewed as the home of frightful sea monsters (v. 21), the picture of God’s dominion over the seas bears witness to his sovereignty. Again **God saw** that what had come into being **was good**.

Second, **God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees . . . that bear fruit with seed in it.”** In this command God bestowed on the land generative power to produce a variety and an abundance of plant life. Possessing this generative power did not make nature a goddess, however. God’s command led to the regularity and predictability of nature as well as to the multiplication and adaptation of various kinds of plant life to the various environments on earth. All the plants and the trees are to produce seeds after their kind so that there will be an abundance of plants and trees throughout the earth, providing food for the animals. Again, **God saw** that the vegetation **was good**.

**1:14–19** / On the fourth day God brought into existence **lights in the expanse of the sky**, charging them with separating **the day from the night** and with marking **seasons, days and years. God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night** (see Ps. 136:7–9; Jer. 31:35). God clearly defined the extent of the influence that

these mighty heavenly bodies have on earthly life. One of their primary tasks is to announce the times, especially the times for holding the feasts that the law requires celebrating at “the appointed time” (e.g., Exod. 23:15; Lev. 23:4). These heavenly bodies were the main gods of various Semitic peoples, and so this description robs them of any divinity. For this reason the author used generic terms (“greater light,” “lesser light”) rather than names in describing their origin. **God saw** that these heavenly bodies **were good**.

**1:20–23** / On the fifth day God filled the spheres ordered on the second day with life by commanding **the water to teem** with fish and ordering **birds to fly across the expanse of the sky**. These new species were to produce offspring of their own kind. After seeing these new creatures, **God saw** that they were **good**. In place of the usual “it was so” comes a detailed execution of the command: God **created the great creatures of the sea**, the fish, and the birds. The text emphasizes “the great creatures,” that is, the serpentine sea monsters, by adding them to the list and putting them first. In the myths of Israel’s neighbors, sea monsters often symbolized forces of cosmic evil that opposed the ruling god and order. For example, a Canaanite myth recounts the mighty struggle between Baal, the god of fertility, and Yam, the sea, for kingship.

Scripture depicts three such creatures as God’s foes: Rahab, Tannin (the term used here for great sea creatures), and Leviathan. Any of these three may symbolize a powerful enemy of Israel or a cosmic force that opposes God. Rahab symbolizes Egypt (Ps. 87:4; Isa. 30:7) or a dragon-like cosmic foe of Yahweh (Job 26:12; Ps. 89:10; Isa. 51:9). Tannin may be a serpent (Exod. 7:9, 10, 12; Deut. 32:33); a symbol of Pharaoh, perhaps as a crocodile, having superior power (Ezek. 29:3; 32:2); or a symbol of cosmic evil (Job 7:12; Isa. 51:9). Leviathan may be a huge sea creature that sports about in the sea (Ps. 104:26) or a fleeing, twisting serpentine creature that represents the power of evil that Yahweh will defeat in the last days (Isa. 27:1). In Job 41:1–34 it is described in detail; many scholars identify it as a crocodile or a serpentine sea monster. In Psalm 74:13–14 God crushed the heads of both the Tannin (pl.) and Leviathan. It is debated whether these names in this psalm represent Pharaoh and Egypt, whom God defeated at the Red Sea, or cosmic foes that God mastered at creation.

In either case, God is praised as mastering fully whatever foe, earthly or cosmic, opposed Israel or was a threat to the order of creation. Because of the symbolic force of these serpentine sea creatures, this text specifically uses the special term “create” (*bara’*) for their origin; this is the first use of this term in the days of creation (cf. v. 1). The use of this verb for the sea monsters’ origin refutes any belief that such monsters were co-eternal with God or possessed power that in any way rivaled God’s. There is no place in this creation account for cosmic dualism. Then **God blessed** these created life forms, empowering them **to be fruitful, increase, and fill** their respective spheres.

**1:24–25** / On the sixth day, as on the third day, there were two stages of creation. The animals brought forth on this day occupied the land created on the third day. God began by ordering **the land to produce living creatures: livestock**, or large four-footed beasts, **creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals**. This division of animals into domestic and wild is inherent to the created order. In this command God endowed the land (*’erets*) with additional generative power. **God saw** that what was made **was good**.

**1:26** / Before undertaking the next act of creation God took counsel. This unique reference to God’s reflecting in community before making something underscores both the importance and the uniqueness of what God was about to create. That community is either the plurality of the deity or the heavenly council that is witnessed in several texts (1 Kgs. 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12). God considered making humans in God’s **image and likeness**. Image (*tselem*) and likeness (*demut*) are used in similar ways in the OT. “Image” refers to a copy or a close representation (it is also used infrequently for an idol; Num. 33:52; Ezek. 7:20; 16:17). “Likeness” emphasizes the comparison of one object with another or the correspondence between two objects. Each word tempers the other. The use of two terms for the comparison of humans with God, coupled with God’s use of plural pronouns in taking counsel, guards against the belief that humans are divine. Humans, bearing the image of God, therefore are truly like God, but they are not identical to God.

**1:27** / The combination of the special term “create” (*bara’*; v. 1), its threefold repetition, and the phrase **image of God** conveys that in making humans God reached the goal of creation.

“Create,” used elsewhere in the days of creation only with the great creatures of the sea (v. 21), informs us that God was personally involved in the origin of humankind. **Man**, in the statement **God created** man (*‘adam*), is a collective standing for all humanity, that is, those God made at the beginning as well as their descendants.

The placement of “the image of God” at the center of a chiasmic arrangement stresses its importance, as does the repetition of “the image.” There has been an abundance of scholarly discussion about this evocative phrase, for the text does not explicitly define its meaning. Nevertheless, the way “the image of God” functions in this context and in 9:5–6 gives insight into its significance. It conveys here that humans have the highest position in the created order. As God’s representatives on earth, humans were invested by God with authority to subdue the earth and rule over the animals (v. 28; see P. Bird, “Male and Female He Created Them,” *HTR* 74 [1981], pp. 129–59, esp. pp. 138, 154).

Genesis 9:5–6 states that every person is inviolate by reason of being made in God’s image. Besides making murder a heinous crime, this text opposes any type of caste or slavery system. Furthermore, the image carries profound moral implications. Both Testaments teach that whatever one person does to another affects God (e.g., Amos 2:7; 1 John 4:20). A person’s manner of interacting with other humans characterizes the way that one relates to God. Moreover, because God made humans in his image, God yearns to redeem those who have disobeyed him by providing the means for them to receive forgiveness and reconciliation.

**Male and female he created them.** The Hebrew emphasizes the phrase “male and female” by placing it before the verb. This third and final part of the verse contains four important ideas. (a) It ascribes sexuality to God’s design for humans. Thus, an essential aspect of human nature is quite different from God’s nature. An implication of this is that we need to draw on the outstanding qualities found in each gender to have a full view of God. If we imagine God as predominantly male or female, our picture is partial and distorted. (b) This reference to human sexuality sets the stage for God’s blessing humans with fertility and commanding them to populate the earth (v. 28). (c) This phrase establishes the fact that every male and every female is made in God’s image. In the essence of being human there is no qualitative difference between male and female. (d) We learn that God made humans as social creatures who discover their identity and destiny in rela-

tionships characterized by rapprochement. “Male and female” conveys that the basic reciprocating human relationship is between a man and a woman (see Gen. 2:21–24). Beyond that basic relationship, humans form communities for sustaining and enriching their lives. Living and working together is thus an integral expression of being in the image of God.

Another one of the many important aspects of being human that this section explores is the ability to handle the word, or language. God recognized this ability at the beginning by blessing humans and giving them instructions (vv. 28–30). God can converse with those in his image, and Scripture is a record of those conversations. Moreover, conversation enables humans to have genuine fellowship with God. This is the basis for God’s calling of Abraham, in which God established a people who would worship him wholeheartedly. Through conversation people also communicate with each other and thereby gain insight into their own identities. Rich personal interchange brings humans great joy, for it flows out of the innermost being, that is, the aspect of humanity that is in the image of God.

In addition, the ability to handle words raises human acts above biological necessity as it enables a person to conceptualize, plan, evaluate, and anticipate. Being cognizant of what they are doing, humans bear responsibility for their deeds. Skill with words also opens the pursuit of wisdom to humans. Words then become an avenue for humans to exercise their creative instincts.

**1:28–31** / God empowered humans with a special blessing in which he commanded them to **be fruitful and increase** in order that they might **fill the earth and subdue** (*kibbesh*) **it**. While the human capability to reproduce is inherent in the human physical constitution, fertility results from God’s blessing. This belief differentiated Israel’s understanding of fertility from that of its neighbors, who believed that fertility rites practiced at local shrines enabled their lands, flocks, and wives to produce abundantly.

God assigned humans rule over all animals: **the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and . . . every living creature that moves on the ground**. “Rule” (*radah*) means that humans are to promote the well-being of the animals and protect them from danger just as a monarch fosters the welfare of the citizens. “Subdue” (*kibbesh*) is even stronger than “rule”; it means “conquer, subjugate.” B. Lohfink demonstrates that this word should be

translated with as little drama as possible; he suggests “take possession of” (*The Theology of the Pentateuch* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], pp. 10–11). Although these commands empower humans to be masters of the animal kingdom and by extension the earth, they do not give them the right to abuse or to kill animals wantonly. Nor do they ordain humans to rule imprudently by abusing the earth so that nature no longer supports the various species. Such an abuse of authority would be a distortion of God’s purpose, which includes working for the benefit of those under human authority. That God made animals and humans on the same day, and the fact that they belong to the same classification of living creatures, attest to their closeness. Consequently, in promoting the welfare of animals, humans advance their own well-being.

In addition, God gave humans access to **every seed-bearing plant . . . and every tree that has fruit**, and God assigned to all the animals **every green plant for food**. This beneficial word on behalf of the animals, given in the context of God’s blessing humans, confirms that God entrusted the care of the animals to humans.

On the sixth day **God saw that all that he had made . . . was very good**. Every part of creation supported all life forms as God had made them. Everything was beautiful in a setting of complete harmony. The entire created order honored the human exercise of moral obedience to God.

**2:1–3** / A summary statement tells us that the creation of **the heavens and the earth** was **completed**. Since the cosmos was exactly as God wished and since the world was capable of continuing on its own, **on the seventh day** God **rested**. In resting God showed that he was neither bound to the creation for support nor limited in any way by it.

**God blessed the seventh day**, setting it apart from all other days by making **it holy**. From the premise that seven units symbolize wholeness or completeness, God’s sanctifying the seventh day certified that the creation was finished and perfect. In doing this God was expressing divine sovereignty over time. God separated time into ordinary time and holy time, for God did not want humans to become slaves to endless work. So humans are to rest one day in every seven in order to praise God and enjoy both the creation, the result of God’s labors, and the results of their own work. Holy time, therefore, adds meaning to activity done in regular time. Observance of holy time also refreshes the human

spirit, adding a depth of meaning to life. God ties his deliverance of Israel out of Egypt into the observance of the seventh day (Deut. 5:12–15). Thus, on the Sabbath Israel worshiped the God of creation who was also the God of the exodus. In worshipping this great God regularly, humans exercise the spiritual dimension of being in God’s image.

**2:4a** / God’s creation of the earth ends with **this is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created.** This is the first of ten *toledoth* formulas that mark the major divisions of Genesis (see Introduction). *Toledoth* is Hebrew for “generations or genealogy.” This formula stands both as a heading to a genealogy (e.g., 5:1) and as an introduction to a narrative having little or no genealogical material (e.g., 37:2). Thus the NIV often renders it “account.” This term developed in the direction of family history, for the Hebrews liked to include anecdotal notes in their genealogies. Therefore, other versions sometimes translate *toledoth* as “family history” or “narrative history.” In heading a new section it usually names the father of the central figure in that section. Only here does *toledoth* point to the origin of something other than humans. In speaking of the origin of the heavens and the earth it is not implying that the world came into being by natural generation. Rather, it conveys that the heavens and the earth were going to generate a variety of life forms.

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### Additional Notes §1

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**1:2** / While many readers understand “earth” to be our planet, the ancients had no concept of a solar system. For them, “earth” was the vast land mass established over the primordial ocean.

The precise meaning of *ruah ’elohim*, “the Spirit of God,” is debated. Grammarians have established that *’elohim* is sometimes used as a superlative for the preceding noun; e.g., the phrase “the cedars of God” means “the mighty or majestic cedars.” Possibly, then, *’elohim* with *ruah* means “a mighty wind.” However, *’elohim* means “God” in thirty other occurrences in this account. A sound exegetical principle is that when the meaning of a term is clearly established in a given text, it has that meaning in each of its occurrences unless a definitive signal indicates otherwise. Since there is no such signal here, it is most likely that *’elohim* here means “God.”

In Deut. 32:11, the same word used for “hovering” in Gen. 1:2 (Hb. *r-kh-p*) is used to describe an eagle circling back and forth, ready to

swoop under any of its young that grow weary and need to be carried back to the nest on their parent's back. However, in the Ugaritic Tale of Aqhat (Aqht C, 31), the same word is used of the eagle circling about its prey as it prepares to strike. The latter picture seems to fit this text better.

It is interesting to note that the Spirit here is portrayed in the imagery of a large bird of prey, whereas in rabbinic sources before the coming of Jesus and at Jesus' baptism the Spirit is depicted as a dove (Matt. 3:16). The significance of these two very different metaphors for the Spirit is, however, not clear.

**1:3** / The presence of light before the creation of the sun is inconceivable from our contemporary understanding of the universe. However, it was possible according to the view of the ancient Hebrews; several OT texts speak of light existing independently of the stars (Job 38:19–20; Isa. 30:26; 60:19–20).

Separation is a major activity in establishing the created order: light from darkness, day from night, upper waters from lower waters, and dry land from water. Separation of the profane from the holy is also a central theme in the law (Lev. 10:10; 11:47) and in the final judgment (Rev. 20:4–6).

**1:4** / The term "good" here carries several meanings, including aesthetic and moral; i.e., what God created was beautiful and promoted the moral order.

**1:5** / Ancient readers would have taken "day" to be an ordinary day. It is possible that day represents an age, but the text does not readily support that position. A seven-day week of creation anchors the weekly pattern in the created order.

**1:10** / Hb. "sea" (*yam*) includes larger bodies of salt water and lakes, e.g., the Sea of Galilee.

**1:14–19** / The sun, the moon, and the stars were mighty forces in God's heavenly army. At creation they were members of the heavenly chorus that sang praises glorifying God's work (Job 38:7). God, the director of their course (Isa. 40:26), could marshal them to help defeat Israel's foes (Judg. 5:20). Psalm 121:6 reflects both the fears of the ancient Hebrews that on a long journey the sun or moon might strike them and their faith that God would prevent this from happening.

**1:21** / While there is no hint of conflict during God's creating, the OT does witness to such conflict in describing God's defeat of the enemies of Israel. For example, God smashed the great sea creature by defeating the forces that opposed God's people (e.g., Ps. 74:13–14; Isa. 51:9–10). Eschatological texts employ the imagery of opposing creatures to describe God's final defeat of all forces hostile to his rule (e.g., Isa. 27:1).

**1:26** / With whom did God enter into counsel? There are many proposals: (a) God took counsel with wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31). But this text does not mention wisdom. (b) "We" is a polite manner of self-expression. But this custom is not attested among the Hebrews (GKC §124gN).

(c) “We” is the plural of majesty (Gen. 11:7; Isa. 6:8). But such usage is not attested for a pronoun in Hb. (Joüon §114eN). (d) “We” was used as an ancient literary device for a person’s speaking to himself. But this device is not commonly used in Scripture. (e) The plural reflects the multiplicity within God himself, coinciding with the plural form of *‘elohim* in Hb. However, this name of God is used throughout the account as a singular. (f) This “we” reflects the Trinity. The church fathers (e.g., *Barn.* and Justin Martyr) held this view. While the plural pronoun does acquire fuller meaning in light of the coming of Christ, it did not convey to ancient Israel any idea of God’s being triune. The following two proposals find the most support in Scripture: (g) God took counsel with his Spirit (so D. Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” *TynBul* 19 [1968], p. 68; cf. v. 2). This theory has the advantage of finding the conversation partner in the text. (h) “We” refers to the heavenly council over whom God rules (1 Kgs. 22:19–22; Job 1:6–12; 2:1–7; Ps. 82; it was common for deity to hold councils in Near Eastern myths). Before creating humans, this position argues, God entered into deliberations with this council since their role and destiny would be affected by human behavior. God’s words after the first couple ate of the forbidden fruit support this position: they have “become like one of us, knowing good and evil” (3:22).

Is there any connection between the human body and the image of God? The Hebrews viewed each person as a whole, consisting of spirit/breath and body. Since for the Hebrews any separation of the spirit from the body resulted in death, the image of God must include the body. Moreover, there has to be enough correspondence between the human body and the image for God to appear on earth as recognizably human (e.g., the angel of Yahweh, 18:2). Thus the corporeal dimension of human life bears witness in some way to the image of God. This position is crucial for the NT teaching of the incarnation. Genesis 1 emphasizes the theme of separation that is foundational to the ritual purity system; humans are separated from animals by being made in the image of God (this concept rules out bestiality, for example), and the divine creator is very distinct from the created world and its beings. Therefore, Israel denigrated any view that held that a human was a god. It rejected the existence of heroes who were a blend of divinity and humanity (such as Gilgamesh, the legendary ruler of Uruk, who was two-thirds divine). Israel also rejected the view that human rulers were divine or became divine at death. This boundary also means that God is never to be lowered to a human level and so made it difficult for some Jews to accept the NT teaching that God took on human form in Jesus. Thus, the teaching that God created humans in the image of God is essential for the incarnation, for it provides an ontological basis for God’s Son clothing himself in human flesh. Thus Jesus is uniquely the image of God (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15).

Whether the addition of the word “likeness” places more or less distance between God and humans is debated (e.g., H. Preuss, “*damah*,” *TDOT* 3:259, versus Clines, “The Image of God in Man,” p. 91).

**1:27** / Ancient Near Eastern texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia use the phrase “image of God” to mean an exalted position. Egyptian texts contain many references to the Pharaoh as the image of God.

This accords with their belief that Pharaoh was god incarnate and the son of the god Re. There are also a few references in Mesopotamian texts to a monarch's being in the image of god. This title "the image of god" gave the ruler royal status and defined his role as the god's viceroy on earth. In these two cultures the image of god was primarily limited to the monarch, though in Mesopotamia the phrase referred a few times to a high official. By contrast, Scripture asserts that all humans are in God's image. The biblical account of creation, therefore, has a democratizing force as it assigns a high status to all humans.

The high position of humans in Gen. stands out even more by comparison with the role humans had in the Old Babylonian myth *Atrahasis* (W. Lambert and A. Millard, *Atra-Hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1969]). At the beginning numerous gods had the task of laboring to feed the ruling gods. After forty years of such wearisome toil, these gods grew tired, burned all their tools, and quit working. Enlil, the storm god, decided to deal with their rebellion by killing one god. Enki, the god of wisdom, prepared clay mixed with the dead god's blood and flesh. Then Nintu, mother earth, pinched off fourteen pieces of clay and molded them into seven pairs of humans. After ten months these humans came forth from some kind of a womb (unfortunately the text is broken at this place). The gods then imposed on the humans the toil formerly done by the gods. In this myth humans are the slaves of the gods. But in Gen. all humans, not just the royal line, bear God's image and thus have regal standing.

Some excellent sources on the image of God include J. Barr, "The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study in Terminology," *BJRL* 51 (1968/69), pp. 11–26; Bird, "Male and Female He Created Them"; Clines, "The Image of God in Man," repr. as "Humanity As the Image of God," in *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998*, vol. 2 (JSOTSup 293; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 447–97; G. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (ConBOT 26; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); J. F. Kutsko, *Between Heaven and Earth: Divine Presence and Absence in the Book of Ezekiel* (Biblical and Judaic Studies 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2000).

**1:28** / *Radah* means to rule supremely (1 Kgs. 4:24; 9:23; Isa. 14:2; Ezek. 34:4). Often such rule is implemented by great force (Lev. 26:7; Isa. 14:6), but that does not have to be the case (Ps. 68:28; H.-J. Zobel, "radah," *ThWAT* 7:354–56). The use of *kibbesh* ("subjugate") confirms that this term may connote the exertion of strength in ruling. This concession does not mean, as some people have vociferously argued, that God empowered humans to exploit either the animal or the natural world. The exploitation of nature that has led to the current ecological crisis cannot legitimately be laid at the doorstep of this command. Additional support comes from Lohfink's argument that in this setting *radah* means "care for, manage" (*Theology of the Pentateuch*, p. 12). From another direction we must acknowledge that the primary reason for the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century is human greed, a motivation Scripture soundly denounces. Another possible reason for the use of these strong terms is an-

icipation of the great effort humans would have to exert in making a living from a harsh world.

**2:1–3** / Israel's calendar identified every day by an ordinal number except the seventh day, which was called Sabbath, "rest." This custom was a reaction to the way Israel's neighbors named the days of the week after gods. The term "Sabbath" does not appear here, perhaps because this account looks at the created order before Israel's existence and the giving of the fourth commandment in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:8–11). This text nevertheless provides a foundation in the created order for the observance of the Sabbath.

**2:4a** / Scholars debate whether the first half of v. 4 belongs with the preceding narrative or with the following one, as the NIV divides the sections. Many contemporary scholars take it as the heading to the next section of Gen. (2:4b–4:26), since all other occurrences of this formula stand at the head of a section. Nevertheless, three factors favor taking this formula with the preceding account. First, it uses "create" (*bara'*), which occurs six times in Gen. 1 but never in Gen. 2:4b–3:24. Second, 2:4a contains the seventh occurrence of *bara'*, which is very significant since the author relishes patterns of seven: the nodal term "good" occurs seven times; the opening sentence has seven Hb. words; creation is divided into seven days; and each of the first three stichoi (or verses of poetry) of the seventh day contains seven words (2:1–2a). The third factor is that heavens and earth with the article occur here in the same order as in 1:1 (also 2:1); thus the two lines form an *inclusio*. By contrast, these terms in 2:4b occur in inverted order and, more importantly, without the article. Thus the *toledoth* formula here marks the first division of Genesis (1:1–4:26). The reason for its unusual placement is that the author gives priority to the definitive heading (1:1). Since this line contains the seventh occurrence of *bara'*, it is probable that the editor of the first section of Genesis (1:1–4:26) is likely the author of the creation account (1:1–2:4a).

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## *§2 Excursus: Comments on the Creation Account in Relationship to Scientific Views of Origins*

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A perplexing question facing us is how to read this account in light of scientific theories of origin. Several observations provide some perspective on this question. The length of this account, about a single printed page, greatly limits the information it can provide, and its antiquity means that its viewpoint and its approach will be vastly different from a scientific outlook. It would be impossible for a brief account of creation to address communities of faith over a span of at least thirty centuries and at the same time speak in a way that is compatible with a scientific outlook that is itself ever changing.

One of the major goals of this passage is to counter mythical accounts of origins. In fact, this account contributes to a scientific approach to nature by teaching the unity and coherence of the created order. The teaching that God created the world in wisdom (especially Prov. 8:22–31) encourages the study of nature for gaining knowledge and insight.

This ancient text, therefore, moves beyond mythopoetic thought and toward scientific thinking by denying that the various forces of nature are gods, possessing will, as most of the ancients believed. This text organizes all elements of the created order under one principle—the command of God. In order for science to become a discipline of study, humans had to arrive at the belief that the world is governed by a unifying force. Furthermore, this account represents an attempt, albeit primitive, to organize and classify elements of the cosmos. Since it speaks of God and not a cosmological first principle, it does not immediately lead to a scientific outlook. Such an outlook developed only after those who held this biblical view of creation were influenced by the rediscovery of Greek speculative philosophy.

Although this text does not present a comprehensive description of the order of the cosmos, it cannot be said that it has no

regard for cosmology. In addition to its primary goal of establishing key truths about the earth for the proper worship of God, it may also speak about patterns that are in accord with the origin of the solar system. Consequently some of its ideas are compatible with scientific explanations, while others seem far removed. For example, the description of the heavens as a solid dome holding back the heavenly ocean (1:6–8) yields no scientific meaning today, but God’s commanding and thereby empowering the earth to produce vegetation and living creatures of various kinds (1:11–12, 24) fits well with the view that species change, adapt, and produce new forms.

Scientists put forth theories about the origin of life, all of which are speculative. Some of these theories are in greater conflict with the account of Genesis 1 than are others. Only as science comes to know more about the actual origin of life on earth will the continuity between this account of creation and scientific theories of origins potentially increase. In the meantime, acknowledging the purposes and the limitations of both scientific knowledge and scriptural truth is necessary for insightful interchange between these two approaches. Ultimately there can be no major conflict between the two approaches, for the world studied by science is the one created by God.

Because of the tension between this biblical account of origin and those of science, biblical theology has focused its exposition on God’s saving deeds, shunning references to creation. However, issues such as human equality, including that of male and female, and ecological conservation have rekindled interest in the scriptural teaching on creation. Tremendous advances in scientific knowledge have brought a greater awareness of the limitations of human knowledge, but in reaction the human spirit has sought to assert its spiritual transcendence over the determinism underlying certain scientific approaches. This resurgence centers on the mystic wonder found throughout the world order.

Accompanying this resurgence is a renewed interest in conversations between science and religion. According to W. Brueggemann, two key factors that OT studies may contribute to this discussion are the mystery that transcends the material world and the ethical restraints inherent in the creation process (“The Loss and Recovery of Creation in the Old Testament Theology,” *TT* 53 [1996], p. 187). Therefore, it is important to listen again to the biblical account of creation for its contributions to the human spirit and human insight.