

## Creation, Evolution, Intelligent Design, and the Replicating Universe: What Does the Hebrew Text of Genesis 1 Allow?

Michael S. Heiser, PhD, Hebrew Bible and Semitic Languages

**Goals:** My goals for this paper are twofold: (1) to introduce readers to the real issue of how Genesis 1 can be interpreted: the grammar and structure of the passage; (2) to demonstrate to readers how various views of modern cosmology can be matched to what the text of Genesis 1 allows. This won't be easy since most readers will not know Hebrew and, frankly, learned to hate grammar in junior high school.

Please note at the outset that I'll be taking you through the difficulties of the grammar and structure so you can understand how others have understood the passage. I won't tell you my own view and why I think the way I do until the end.

### The Three Basic Views of Genesis 1:1-3

In some respects, whether you realize it or not, you've already been introduced to this subject if you've read much on the varying interpretations of Genesis 1. The reason is because the debate over how to interpret Genesis 1:2, the biblical statement that the earth was "formless and empty," invariably requires some discussion over the relationship of that verse to Gen. 1:1 and Gen 1:3.

There are basically three opinions on the relationship of the chaotic state of Gen 1:2 to the verses immediately preceding and following:

- 1) Some researchers and scholars argue that the chaos of 1:2 occurred *after* the original creation of 1:1. That is, Gen 1:1-3 are chronological, and something happened after the original perfect creation of 1:1 that produced the chaos of 1:2. Gen. 1:3 then describes God's "restitution" of the original creation of 1:1. This theory is known as the **restitution theory**. More popularly, it is known as the **gap theory**, since it is posited that something happened during the "gap" of time following the original creation of Gen 1:1 to produce the chaos of 1:2. In this theory, the original creation was *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"), meaning that before this event, there was absolutely nothing (except God).
- 2) A second view is probably the **view taken by a majority of creationists**, whether they believe the days or literal 24 hour periods or not. This view argues that the chaotic conditions of Gen 1:2 were *part of* the original creation of Gen 1:1. That is, Gen 1:1-3 are chronological, but God's original creation was chaotic, not perfect. Gen 1:3 continues a description of how God fashioned the chaotic thing he created into something more orderly. In this view, the original, though chaotic, creation was *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"), meaning that before this event, there was absolutely nothing (except God).
- 3) The third view is called the **"pre-creation chaos" theory**. This view argues that the chaos described in Gen. 1:2 existed *before* the original creation. This means that Gen. 1:1-3 are not chronological and consecutive. That is, we should view the description in Gen 1:2 as describing something that was around before Gen 1:1. Hence the "original" creation of Gen 1:1 really isn't the original creation—something material existed *prior* to Gen 1:1, and whatever its nature, it was chaotic. In Gen. 1:1 God takes that prior-existing material and fashions into the heavens and the earth. As a result, the creation of Gen. 1:1 is not *ex nihilo* ("out of nothing"). Gen. 1:3 is part of that fashioning process (as are the following verses). God would also be the Creator of the chaotic material prior to Gen. 1:1. The creation of that material may or may not be described in the Bible.

It is important at the outset (especially for those who hold a traditional view of creationism for Gen. 1:1-3) to realize that *these views do not necessarily derive from "concessions" made to scientists*. I say "not necessarily" since those who want to start with science can easily adopt one of the views and match it to what they feel science compels. However, these views arise out of disagreements among Hebrew grammarians over the syntax (sentence structure) and grammar of Gen. 1:1-3. I'll try to unpack those difficulties now in a way understandable to those of you who haven't studied biblical Hebrew. During this unpacking, I'll be commenting on the three views above—as to how plausible they are in light of the syntax and grammar. Again, they are all possible, but they are not all equally plausible.

### **Clauses (no, not Mr. And Mrs.)**

If you are dependent on your English Bible, you most likely think of the Bible in terms of verses. You need to realize the verses of the Bible are arbitrary and not part of the original text. We need to look at Gen. 1:1-3 the way a Hebrew grammarian does: as a set of clauses.

In case you have tried to forget English grammar (or had poor English teachers) clauses are NOT the same as sentences (though the terms can overlap). For our purposes, **a clause is a string of words that presents a single thought**. The clause will often have a subject and a verb ("The man ran"; man = subject; ran = verb) that together express the single thought. However, a clause may not have a noun subject ("Look out!") and may not have a verb ("You jerk!"). All that matters is that a single thought is expressed. In the noun-less example, the subject is not stated, but a single thought is expressed: the speaker wants you or someone else to get out of the way. In the verb-less example, the single thought is that the person the speaker is speaking to is a jerk or is behaving like a jerk.

Sentences differ from clauses in that sentences are usually composed of two or more clauses: **"The man ran and said, 'Look out', but the woman didn't understand and yelled back at him, 'you jerk!'"** In this sentence there are actually five clauses, three of which I used in the above examples. A sentence composed of one clause is where "clause" and "sentence" would be the same thing.

I said above that a clause is a string of words that presents a single thought. While a clause certainly does that, some clauses are dependent on other clauses for their full or complete meaning—they need the other clauses around them to be complete. These clauses are called **"dependent" or "subordinate" clauses**. Some clauses, though, don't depend on other clauses for the completeness of their thought. These would be called **"independent clauses" or "main clauses"** since they can stand alone in their completeness. Sentences can have both independent and dependent clauses in them, and often do. For example, the sentence **"Some clauses are called dependent clauses because they 'depend' on a main clause to give them meaning"** has both an independent clause and a dependent clause. The independent clause is in **blue**. It can stand alone as a single thought. Yes, something can be added to it to make it more meaningful, but whatever might be added can be taken away and it still makes sense and doesn't read like something is missing for it to be understood. The dependent clause is in **red**. It cannot stand alone. If we just read "they depend on a main clause to give them meaning," we wonder right away who are what "they" are. It doesn't make sense by itself—something is missing so that it makes a single, coherent thought.

If you grasp these points, you're ready for **the real problem of Genesis 1:1-3 – which clauses are independent and which are dependent**. If not, I recommend reviewing the above until you understand the points. If you don't, you'll be lost in what follows.

## The Clauses of Genesis 1:1-3

Hebrew, like English, has both clauses and sentences. It also has independent clauses and dependent clauses. Here are the clauses and the facts of the clauses of Genesis 1:1-3. The first line below the Hebrew text are parts of speech (these are simplified for the non-Hebrew reader and are not meant to be technically precise). The second line has basic word glosses for the reader. The third line is a tentative translation (preparatory to the discussion that follows).

**Abbreviations used:** "N" = noun; "V" = verb or verbal (e.g., participle); "DO" = direct object; "DOM" = direct object marker [untranslated in Hebrew; it just points to the DO]; "S" = subject or part of the subject of the clause (may also be a subject complement); "PREP" = preposition; "ADJ" = adjective; "CJ" = conjunction).

### Genesis 1:1

בְּרֵאשִׁית	בָּרָא	אֱלֹהִים	אֶת	הַשָּׁמַיִם	וְאֶת	הָאָרֶץ:
PREP+N-OP	V	N-S	DOM	N-DO	DOM, CJ	N-DO
in beginning	created	God		heavens		Earth

In (the?) beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

#### NOTES:

- 1) Genesis 1:1 is one clause (I am using a traditional syntax approach). The words cannot be broken down any further and combined in more than one grouping so that more than one coherent, single idea is expressed. Every OT Hebrew scholar agrees that Gen 1:1 is a single clause; the disagreement is over what kind of clause it is. We'll get to that in a bit.
- 2) I translated the first word "in (the?) beginning"—with "the" in parentheses and with a question mark—deliberately, since the translation of the very first word is a matter of debate, deriving from disagreement over what kind of clause Gen 1:1 is.

### Genesis 1:2

וְהָאָרֶץ	הִיְתָה	תְּהוֹ	וּבְהוֹ	וְחֹשֶׁךְ	עַל־פְּנֵי	תְּהוֹם:
N-S, CJ	V	ADJ	ADJ, CJ	N-S, CJ	PREP+N-OP	N-OP
now the earth	was	desolate	and empty	darkness	upon the face	deep

(2 clauses): Now the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.

וְרוּחַ	אֱלֹהִים	מְרַחֶפֶת	עַל־פְּנֵי	הַמַּיִם:
N-S	N-S	V (ptcpl)	N-OP	N-OP
spirit / wind	God	hovering	upon face	waters

(1 clause): And the spirit / wind of God was hovering upon the face of the waters.

NOTE: Gen 1:2 is composed of three clauses.

**Genesis 1:3**

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי-אוֹר׃  
 N-S V, CJ N-S V N-S V, CJ  
 light was and light be God said and

(2 clauses): And God said, "let there be light." And there was light.

It's now time for our discussion of the syntax of Genesis 1:1-3. Please note at the outset that I am well aware of the evidences offered by proponents of the three views of Gen 1:1-3 to defend their position. Frankly, much of what is offered is pointless without solving the grammar and structure problem first. For example, Gap Theory defenders (view #1) often support their view by saying the verb in Gen 1:2 can be translated "and the earth *became* desolate and empty" (as opposed to "and the earth *was* desolate and empty" as I have it). They do this to imply a perfect original creation and then a subsequent chaos. They then go to Isaiah 45 to bolster their argument for some sinister event that caused the chaos. While there are instances where the Hebrew verb (*hayah*) can be translated as "became," this is meaningless as an argument. What must first be determined is whether Gen 1:1 is a main clause or a dependent one, and if the latter, upon what other clause is it dependent? Doing this *helps us to grammatically and syntactically sort out the correct ORDER of the clauses*. Only *then* is it time to worry about word meanings. You'll see why this matters in a moment.

So how are these various clauses to be understood? What kinds of clauses are they, and why does it matter? Remember, if a clause is **DEPENDENT**, that means it depends on something else (some other clause) for its sense. Whatever the clause "depends on" is said to be **modified** by the dependent clause. Here is how the three views of Gen. 1:1-3 above have understood the clauses. I have **colorized** important wordings affected by the clause choices. You'll be amazed at how the meaning often turns on *one word*.

<b>View #1 - Gap Theory</b>		
Option A		
1:1	Independent Clause	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
1:2	Independent Clause	<b>And</b> the earth <b>BECAME</b> desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit /wind of God was hovering over the waters
1:3	Independent Clause	And God said, "let there be light." And there was light.
	<p><b>NOTES:</b> The gap theory wants to see the first three verses as chronological, and so proponents of this view unacquainted with Hebrew grammar sought to translate the second verse as <i>a sequential event</i> to verse 1. The problem is that this violates the way Hebrew narrative plots sequential events. In biblical Hebrew narrative, a sequence of actions or events is introduced by a conjunction + verb, and then other conjunction + verb forms follow (giving the effect, "and X event happened [verb]; then Y event happened [verb]; then X event happened [verb]). Notice above in 1:1 that 1:1 does not begin with a verb—it begins with a preposition + noun. 1:2 does not even begin with a conjunction + verb—it begins with a conjunction + NOUN. For this reason, 1:2 has been universally regarded by grammarians as a series of three <b>DEPENDENT</b> clauses. This fact of Hebrew grammar alone nearly destroys the Gap theory. However, gap theorists could argue that all the clauses in 1:1-3 are independent, but that means <b>AT THAT POINT</b> the theory depends <b>ENTIRELY</b> on (1) the translation of "became" for the first verb of v. 2, and (b) the accuracy of its idea that the desolate and empty description = evil chaos caused by some sinister event (the Gap theory puts the fall of Satan in the alleged gap as the cause of this evil chaotic state). Since they believe this description denotes an evil event, they are driven to translate the first verb in 1:2 as "became", else this chaotic state would be God's doing in the creative event of 1:1. This is the second major flaw in the Gap theory—there is no secure proof from the text that "desolate and empty" are bad (despite their best attempts).</p>	

<b>View # 2 - Traditional View</b>		
Option A		
1:1	Independent Clause	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
1:2	Independent Clause	And the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit /wind of God was hovering over the waters
1:3	Independent Clause	And God said, "let there be light." And there was light.
Option B		
1:1	Independent Clause	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
1:2	Dependent Clauses modifying 1:1; that is, 1:2 is the <i>result</i> of 1:1	<b>Now</b> the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit /wind of God was hovering over the waters
1:3	Independent Clause	And God said, "let there be light." And there was light.
<p>NOTES: Both these options have the effect of being chronological and making the product of the initial creation event (1:1) be the conditions described in 1:2. That is, the traditional view has no problem affirming that God's initial creative act resulted in the thing created being "desolate and empty." As Isa. 45:18 makes clear (see esp. the parallelism), it was not God's intention to leave the earth unfilled and unproductive. This view is workable on a syntactic and grammatical level. It does not suffer from any significant grammatical or syntactic problems (see Rooker's sound response to Waltke's objections to the option 2 of the traditional view in the bibliography; that is not to say Waltke's position is not workable as well). However, it is likely that Option B is stronger since it has 1:2 as a series of dependent clauses, not independent clauses. Those clauses appear to be commenting on something (in this view, commenting on 1:1). In either option Gen 1:1 is seen as creation <i>ex nihilo</i> ("out of nothing").</p>		

<b>View # 3 -Pre-Creation Chaos</b>		
Option A		
1:1	Independent Clause functioning as a <b>content heading</b> – structurally <b>unrelated</b> to 1:2 or 1:3	In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
1:2	Dependent Clauses modifying 1:3 and functioning as a <b>parenthetical</b> setup to 1:3	<b>(Now</b> the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit /wind of God was hovering over the waters)
1:3	Independent Clause	<b>Then</b> God said, "let there be light." And there was light.
<p>This is Waltke's view (see bibliography). It is grammatically and syntactically sound (no significant violations), but that is not to say no other view is possible. Waltke makes much of the fact that the other creation "summary" in Genesis (2:4-7) follows the same "introduction, then parenthetical thought" structure. It does, but as Rooker points out, the parallel isn't perfect.</p> <p>The effect of this view should be clear. When God said "let there be light," THAT was the initial creation act. Verse 1 is just a content heading. And if 1:3 is the initial creation event spoken of in this passage, then 1:2 tells us that something was already there, namely the earth and heavens were already there and in a chaotic state, having been created by God earlier, in a creation event not described by Genesis. Hence Genesis 1:1-3 do not speak of creation <i>ex nihilo</i>.</p>		
Option B		
1:1	Dependent Clause modifying 1:3	<b>When God began to create</b> the heavens and the earth,
1:2	Dependent Clauses modifying 1:3	<b>And</b> the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the spirit /wind of God was hovering over the waters,
1:3	Independent Clause	<b>then</b> God said, "let there be light." And there was light.
<p>Option B results in the same view as A, but its basis is different. It sees 1:1 as a dependent clause because (a) the first word is in construct [a Hebrew term referring to the state of the noun] and (b) because the first word lacks the definite article – that is, the Hebrew literally does not read "THE" beginning, but just "beginning." Grammatical work in the Hebrew text has shown, though, that time words do not need the article to be definite, and that the first word need not be understood as in the construct. This option is a bit weaker than Option A for this view, but in my mind Option B is still possible.</p>		

**So what is to be made of the disagreement** over the clause structures? Here are some points I'd make:

1) In nutshell, of all the views on how to understand Gen 1:1-3, the gap theory has the most serious problems, and really no secure grammatical or syntactical support. As Waltke and Rooker have detailed, it is also suspect for its poor word study analysis and theological speculation (we are not actually told when Satan fell in the Bible, for example). In my mind, the gap theory should be dismissed.

2) The traditional view and the pre-creation chaos view are both possible. In my mind, Option B for the traditional view and Option A for the Pre-Creation chaos view are basically even in merit on syntactic / grammatical grounds.

3) The latest research on the Hebrew phrase **תְּהוֹ וְבֹהוּ** (tōhū wabōhū; “desolate and empty”) demonstrates quite clearly that there is nothing sinister about the terms. Dr. David Tsumura, whose research is specialized on this issue, notes:

“Hebrew tōhū is based on a Semitic root \*thw and means “desert.” The term bōhū is also a Semitic term based on the root \*bhw, “to be empty.” ... The Hebrew term bōhū means (1) “desert,” (2) “a desert-like place,” i.e. “a desolate or empty place” or “an uninhabited place” or (3) “emptiness.” The phrase tōhū wā ōhū refers to a state of “aridness or unproductiveness” (Jer 4:23) or “desolation” (Isa 34:11) and to a state of “unproductiveness and emptiness” in Genesis 1:2.”<sup>1</sup>

The parallel in Isaiah 45:18 also does not evince anything sinister. Quoting Tsumura again:

“tōhū here is contrasted with lāsebet in the parallelism and seems to refer rather to a place which has no habitation, like the term s<sup>e</sup>māmāh “desolation” (cf. Jer 4:27; Isa 24:12), ārēb “waste, desolate” and ’āzūbāh “deserted.” There is nothing in this passage that would suggest a chaotic state of the earth “which is opposed to and precedes creation.” Thus, the term tōhū here too signifies “a desert-like place” and refers to “an uninhabited place.” ... It should be noted that lō-tōhū here is a resultative object, referring to the purpose of God’s creative action. In other words, this verse explains that God did not create the earth so that it may stay desert-like, but to be inhabited. So, this verse does not contradict Gen 1:2, where God created the earth to be productive and inhabited though it “was” still tōhū wā ōhū in the initial state.”<sup>2</sup>

4) If the traditional view is held, then the big bang can only be in verse 1. The traditional approach’s syntax requires a chronological flow to 1:1-3, which means the earth is around in 1:2. Hence 1:3’s burst of light cannot speak of the big bang. You cannot argue that 1:3 is some sort of repetition (or “referring back”) to 1:1. The only Option that allows you to “merge” 1:3 and 1:1 is Option B of the pre-creation view, but that syntax has no big bang in view (it assumes the original creation event happened, but that isn’t being talked about in Gen. 1).

---

<sup>1</sup> David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2 : A Linguistic Investigation*, JSOT Supplement Series 83 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 155–56 (updated and reprinted, 2005, under the title *Creation and Destruction*)

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34

5) The pre-creation view does not necessarily allow for a big bang in the text, but it does leave the door open to such an event. This view has the main clause as 1:3, when God said "let there be light" and therefore Gen. 1:1-3 is describing God's reworking or fashioning of material that was already in existence. Hence some sort of creative event preceded Gen 1:1-3 to produce that material. This event could either be the big bang or even the "birthing" of our universe by another universe. The door is entirely open as to what happened prior to Gen 1:1-3.

### **Conclusion for THIS issue: What is the key syntactical issue?**

Number 5 above illustrates the fundamental difference between the traditional view and the pre-creation chaos view (even if by "chaos" one does not mean something sinister). Assuming both views take 1:2 as a series of dependent clauses, the **key question** is this: *WHICH OF THE OTHER TWO VERSES—1:1 or 1:3—DOES 1:2 MODIFY?* The answer is that we can't be sure. Both are viable. The traditional view says 1:2 modifies 1:1. The pre-creation chaos view says 1:2 modifies 1:3. **This means that the traditional view is on good footing, but it is not the only viable view of Gen 1:1-3.**

It is for this reason that modern cosmology has a place in the work of the biblical exegete. If those who accept the Bible as authoritative want all truths to be on equal footing (what God did in creation and what he did in giving us the Bible), then we need to harmonize one arena with the other.

### **My Own View**

My own view involves leaving the grammar and syntax for a moment. I believe that God is the Creator of all matter and that the ultimate Creator must, by definition, be separate from the creation. There must be an ultimate beginning and Beginner for philosophical coherence.

Usually the "ultimate beginning" is referred to as the singularity point. Those who prefer a "traditional" approach to the big bang use such terms, even though they know that prior to the big bang there must have been something (that which exploded). Recently things have changed in physics, as scientists who are not content to have God put the "pre big bang stuff" there to explode have come up with what they imagine removes the need for a singularity: the universe as we know it came from another universe that birthed our universe into existence. This "parent-baby universe" view has been popularized by James Gardner in his book *Biocosm*. Gardner posits that the intelligent designer of the universe IS the universe (or rather, the parent universe that birthed our universe). Gardner therefore accepts the idea of a multiverse that births universes all over the place. This view takes away the need for a "first cause" to our universe as we perceive its beginning. But all Gardner's view means is that the question changes. Now the question becomes, "So where did the parent universe come from?" Gardner would likely reply "from another parent universe" – and so on in endless regression of universes begetting other universes. This is another example of where an "answer" for ultimate beginning just moves the question back one degree. It thus keeps removing the question in infinite regression, perhaps hoping we'll get tired of asking it.

I say all the above for a couple reasons. One, I am not troubled by modern cosmology. The pre-creation chaos view is workable from my discipline, and so it's easy for me legitimately to say Genesis had this covered from the beginning (pardon the pun). Two, it means I feel comfortable waiting until science comes to certain conclusions (but I'm not holding my breath since that might be asking for the impossible).

However, my own view is that Genesis wasn't meant to tell us how God created with scientific precision or details. As a Semitist, it is very obvious to me that the cosmology of the Old

Testament follows ancient Near Eastern pre-scientific cosmologies, albeit with Yahweh at the helm and a polemic purpose in the rhetoric of Genesis to smack the other gods around a few times. There are just too many (an abundance, actually) examples where there are tight linguistic parallels between the language of the description of the Genesis cosmology and that of other ancient Near Eastern cultures – things like:

1. Firmament or fixed dome covering the earth (Gen 1:6ff.)
2. Waters above the firmament
3. Chambers of winds
4. windows of heaven
5. Pillars of the sky
6. Pillars of the earth
7. Fountain of the deep
8. Waters under the earth

The following quotation from the Anchor Bible Dictionary (from the entry on “Cosmogony” by Robert A. Oden, Jr.) hits the main points (but do not assume I agree with everything in this article:

The variety in date, origin, and scope of the Hebrew Bible’s cosmological materials means that achieving a single, uniform picture of the physical universe is hardly possible. Still, sufficient overlap does obtain between the many accounts of the universe, however these may vary in their details, to allow for a few generalizations. The earth on which humanity dwells is seen as a round, solid object, perhaps a disk, floating upon a limitless expanse of water. Paralleling this lower body of water is a second, similarly limitless, above, from which water descends in the form of rain through holes and channels piercing the heavenly reservoir. The moon, sun, and other luminaries are fixed in a curved structure which arches over the earth. This structure is the familiar “firmament” (*r qia*) of the priestly account, perhaps envisioned as a solid but very thin substance on the analogy of beaten and stretched metal.

Though some texts appear to convey a picture of a four-storied universe (Job 11:8–9 or Ps 139:8–9), the great majority of biblical texts assume the three-storied universe so clearly assumed in other, ancient traditions. Thus, the Decalog’s prohibition of images specifies “heaven above,” “earth below,” and “water under the earth” as the possible models for any such forbidden images (Exod 20:4). If we understand the common term “earth” (*ere*) as designating at times the “underworld,” then the combined references in Ps 77:19 to heaven, the “world” (*t b l*), and the “earth” (*ere*) are another appeal to the universe as a three-storied structure (for other texts where *ere* may refer to the underworld, see Stadelmann 1970: 128, n. 678). Clearer reference still to the same structure is to be found in Ps 115:15–17, where we find grouped together “the heaven of heavens,” “the earth,” and the realm of “the dead” (cf. Ps 33:6–8 and Prov 8:27–29).

The curving, solid structure which arches over the realm of humanity is sometimes called a “disk” or “vault” (*ûg*; Isa 40:22; Prov 8:27). That which allows the heavenly abyss to water the earth are occasional interruptions in this solid structure, openings called variously windows, doors, or channels. In some texts, that which suspends the habitable earth above the underworld’s waters (see 1 Sam 2:8 for another reference to these rivers) are pillars or some such foundational structures. These seem envisioned in Job 38:4–6; Pss 24:2; 104:5; Prov 8:29, and elsewhere. Finally, the realm beneath the arena of human activity is not only imagined as one of watery chaos but also given the specific designation “Sheol” (*š ôl*), usually translated “the underworld.” In the different elaborations upon just what one should imagine Sheol as including, again there is little consistency. At times, Sheol is personified, with a belly or womb and a mouth (Jonah 2:3—Eng 2:2); Prov 1:23; 30:16; and Ps 141:7), while at others Sheol is rather more architecturally portrayed (Isa 38:10; Job 7:9–10; 14:20–22; 17:13; 18:17–18), as a dark and forgetful land or city (Stadelmann 1970: 166–76).<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1996, c1992), 1:1167–1168.



I am in basic agreement with Paul Seely, whose three articles on OT cosmology can be accessed below. I believe that God communicated to the biblical author the salient points of creation: Yahweh is the creator and no other god, everything that is was brought about by Yahweh.

Just as Scripture doesn't give us lessons on genetics and embryology when describing the development of the human being inside the womb (cf. Psalm 139), describes such development in terms understandable to the culture at the time. God didn't inspire lectures on physics and astrophysics in Genesis. He prompted men to write the basic truths with the vocabulary at their disposal. This is why the Hebrew Bible changes details from surrounding creation myths, and yet keeps a lot of the common vocabulary. The readers were pre-scientific, but they needed to know who the Creator was and the fact that everything began with that Creator. The use of mythological language is therefore a concession by God to human ignorance (and God does this a lot in the Bible – he doesn't waste his time giving answers that won't be understood) and a slap in the face to the other gods and those who follow them. We need only align Genesis with science when there is warrant to do so – and in the matter of the origin of all matter, there is warrant. Scripture affirms a Creator unambiguously.

### **What about the creation days then?**

The most straightforward reading of the text is that from Gen 1:3ff. the days are 24 hour periods. I have no trouble applying the pre-creation chaos view to this question. Gen 1:3 marks the beginning of God's fashioning of material already in existence. We aren't told precisely what that material was. Whatever it was, it is conceivable that God did what he did in consecutive 24 hour days. I would add, though, that I also think the "literary framework" view is workable (that the day descriptions are a literary device to describe the "making productive" and "filling" of the "desolate and empty" place that God began working with as of Gen 1:3. This view does not require the days be 24 hours, but would argue that the correct terminology for 24 hour days is used because the sub-intent of the author is to wed the Sabbath weekly cycle to God's creative activity.

### **Summation**

In summary, I am willing to accept the traditional view but in the way(s) described above. For me to adopt that, I would need scientific evidence to prove that current scientific cosmology is wrong. This would not trouble me in the least.

On the other hand, I am willing to accept the pre-creation chaos view. This view fits with modern cosmology and the literary framework view handles the day issue.

Right now, the cosmology of the Hebrew Bible, matching as it does the ancient Near Eastern material, suggests to me that God accommodated himself to the pre-scientific writers and that we should not look to Genesis as a science textbook. The key question for me would be "does Genesis (or some other passage in the Bible) *affirm* a non-scientific cosmology? That would depend on what is meant by "affirm." The question is really, "Does Genesis present its cosmology as scientific fact?" vs. "Does Genesis show us God curtailed his own knowledge to pre-scientific people?"

These options seem mutually exclusive, and I think the latter is the correct way to view this issue. I believe the Bible is the product (equally) of both God and human beings). Therefore, I don't see how the human authors would be presenting scientific fact since they weren't scientists (nothing in the text ever says they were). If I wrote something about some area of science as a non-scientist and claimed it was scientifically tested fact, that would be dumb. I also don't see how the premise that there is a God allows us to say God is so stupid as say the earth is covered by a dome. To me it's obvious accommodation.

God actually does this a good deal in the Bible. He tells us that Jesus is both God and Man, but doesn't explain to us how that works; he tells us that our lives are foreknown and we also have free will, but doesn't bother to explain how that works; he tells us there's such a thing as celestial flesh, but doesn't explain how that works; he tells us Jesus was human but that he had no sin nature, and that every human has a sin nature post-Adam, but doesn't tell us how all that fits. The list could go on and on. Why do we require scientific certainty from the biblical text in creation and not these other areas, especially when these other areas are in the province of theology, not science?

One last illustration. When your toddler comes to you and asks you where babies come from, it would seem you have a choice. You can give him or her a scientifically precise answer, or you can put it into terms they understand, skipping details and casting precision to the wind. Have you answered the latter way because you want to deceive your child—to misdirect them to error—or because you know what they can handle and still get a real answer? If you answer the former, then you can say the Bible has a problem with accuracy (and you might have a problem with parenting). If you say the latter, then you understand the accommodation principle, articulated in much the same manner as John Calvin argued centuries ago, seemingly way ahead of his time.

## **Bibliography**

Bruce Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 — Part I: Introduction to Biblical Cosmogony," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:525 (Jan 1975): 25-36

Bruce Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 — Part II: The Restitution Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:526 (Apr 1975): 136-144

Bruce Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3 — Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132:527 (Jul 1975): 216-228

Mark Rooker, "Part 1: Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:595 (Jul 1992): 316-323

Mark Rooker, "Part 2: Genesis 1:1-3: Creation or Re-Creation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149:596 (Oct 1992): 411-427

Paul Seely, "[The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 1: The Meaning of \*raqia'\* in Genesis 1:6-8,](#)" *Westminster Theological Journal* 53:2 (Fall 1991): 227-240

Paul Seely, "[The Firmament and the Water Above, Part 2: The Meaning of 'The Water Above the Firmament' in Genesis 1:6-8,](#)" *Westminster Theological Journal* 54:1 (Spr 1992): 31-46

Paul Seely, "[The Geographical Meaning of 'Earth' and 'Seas' in Genesis 1:10,](#)" *Westminster Theological Journal* 59:2 (Fall 1997): 231-256