

---

# Genesis One in Historical-Critical Perspective

by Larry G. Herr

---

The “historical-critical” method of Bible study, used properly, can be a valid and powerful tool for Seventh-day Adventists. How might the use of the “historical-critical” method of Bible study affect the interpretation of Genesis 1, a chapter of great interest to Seventh-day Adventists? What follows is an example of the application of the method to Genesis 1. I am going to claim, first, that the primary focus of the chapter is on God’s creation of all things in a miraculous and ordered way, and second, that there is no justification for trying to harmonize modern science with the chapter’s implicit cosmology, or worldview. I hope to illustrate how an approach that attends to the culture, history, philosophy and religion of the Bible’s time and place can enhance our understanding of its message.

I will defend my claim by explaining briefly what the “historical-critical” method is; by defining two key terms I will be using; and by proceeding straight through the chapter in a fairly detailed examination of its contents. At the end I will sum up the results of the inquiry.

---

Larry G. Herr teaches Old Testament at the SDA Theological Seminary, Far East, in the Philippines. He received his doctorate at Harvard University.

The term “historical-critical method” has for various reasons become less precise than it once was; still, it is the term characteristically used within the Adventist community for the approach I am about to describe.<sup>1</sup> Basic to this method is the assumption that the Bible writers addressed issues important to their readers and used terms and concepts they could understand. This explains why the historical-critical approach emphasizes the study of the culture, history, philosophy and religion of the biblical period. The point is that, in order to do so, we must understand its literary and historical context. The method assumes that understanding of Scripture is really possible—that, unless otherwise affirmed, as in some passages of the apocalyptic literature, for example, nothing in the Bible was intended to be veiled by obscure, incomprehensible symbols. We may successfully comprehend it today if we understand its literary and historical context. In all of this, the method assumes, too, that in Scripture the truth of God is mediated through the limited languages and feeble understandings of mankind. What we find there is stamped by humanity, but the Word of God comes through in what is said.

The actual practice of the method requires a considerable acquaintance with a

variety of tools. First and foremost, of course, is an ample knowledge of the language of the text, in this case biblical Hebrew. But since many of the meanings and nuances of the ancient Hebrew words have been lost, we must rely, too, on a comparative study of the Semitic languages related to biblical Hebrew. We must also refer to the literature of the ancient Near Eastern world in order to enhance our understanding; the Bible writers wrote in the prevalent literary modes of their day just as we do in ours. Finally, we must allow the study of ancient Near Eastern history to inform our inquiry; it illuminates the political, economic and cultural framework within which the Bible writer works. All of these tools have been used in a variety of ways in the following exegesis.

Before going further I should discuss two major terms. Both words, "cosmology" and "cosmogony" are related in that they are based upon the same Greek root word, *kosmos*, meaning "world, universe." For our purposes, "cosmology" indicates the descriptive account of the universe as a whole; a "cosmological element" is any part of that cosmology, such as the sea, the moon, the plants, and the firmament. Cosmologies change through history as knowledge changes, so that we can distinguish the cosmology of Genesis 1, for example, from the cosmology prevalent today.

The term "cosmogony," on the other hand, refers to the theory of the origin of the cosmos. How did it come about? The doctrine of creation is a cosmogony; creation *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing, and creation from preexisting matter are two different creation cosmogonies. Evolutionary theory offers still another cosmogony. With the aid of these terms we can clarify the thesis of what follows. I will show that the cosmology of Genesis 1 is a vehicle for making what is ultimately a statement about cosmogony, namely, that the ultimate origin of the universe is God. Cosmogony, then, is ultimately the point of the chapter, not the details of its cosmology.

We will proceed to an extended verse-by-verse analysis, or exegesis of the first chapter of Genesis to see how the description of nature (cosmology) understood by biblical authors can be distinguished from their statements about God being the ultimate origin of the creation (cosmogony).

## Verse 1

*"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."*<sup>2</sup>

This is usually understood to be an introductory summary statement of the upcoming creation account. Some hold, however, that this verse actually refers to the creation of a prior world which has been destroyed by the time of the creation event recorded in Genesis 1.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation offers a way to harmonize the biblical account of creation with the apparently long history of the fossil record, which, it is said, represents the fauna of the earlier creation.

Unfortunately, however, this view does not take into account the literary structure of the narrative. Highly-structured texts of the ancient Near East, both biblical (like Genesis 1<sup>4</sup>) and non-biblical, often contain introductory and concluding statements in formulaic language.<sup>5</sup> If Genesis 1:1 is such an introductory statement, where is the concluding one? Genesis 2:1, placed at the end of the six days of God's creative activity, concludes: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." It is a simple concluding statement, corresponding perfectly with the simple introductory statement in verse one.

I cannot emphasize enough how typical these introductory and concluding statements are in biblical and contemporary non-biblical literature. This makes it clear that verse one is not talking about a prior creation which may be harmonized with the fossil record. Moreover, no other known ancient Near Eastern group knew of an

earlier creation, and to suggest that the Bible hides one here is sheer conjecture, with all supporting evidence pointing in the opposite direction.

“*In the beginning*” (Heb. *b<sup>e</sup>rē šît*). In light of its grammatical form, the first word of the Bible should be translated “In the beginning of,” and followed by a noun such as “time” or “the world” or “things.” But no noun is there. One suggested solution is that the remainder of the verse should be interpreted as a noun phrase, so that in English we get: “In the beginning of God’s creating the heavens and the earth,” or

“When God began to create the heavens and the earth.”<sup>6</sup> Then Genesis 1:1, 2 would read: “When God began to create the heavens and the earth, the earth was without form and void.”

This translation implies that matter was preexistent at creation. On the other hand, the wording in the Revised Standard Version, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth,” leaves this question open. And it is in fact the better translation, as we have seen. Verse one is a formal introduction to the whole narrative. It would be structurally and formulaically

## Further Reading on Biblical Interpretation

compiled by John C. Brunt and Lawrence T. Geraty

### *Old Testament*

For those who want to learn more about the Old Testament writings in their historical context, the following are recommended: B. W. Anderson, **Understanding the Old Testament**, 3rd ed. (NY: Prentice-Hall, 1975), J. M. Muilenberg, **The Way of Israel** (NY: Harper Torchbooks, 1965), G. E. Wright, **The Old Testament Against its Environment** (London: SCM Press, 1950).

For those interested in pursuing further how one goes about studying and appropriating the Biblical message for today, the following should be helpful: E. C. Colwell, **The Study of the Bible**, rev. ed. (Chicago: University Press, 1964); L. E. Keck, **Taking the Bible Seriously** (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962); J. Maier and V. Tollers, eds., **The Bible in Its Literary Milieu** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

For those who are especially interested in Adventist views, the following jointly authored volumes of serious scholarship, all published by The Review and Herald, deserve mention: **Problems in Bible Translations** (1954), **Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics** (1974), **The Sanctuary and the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and**

**Theological Studies** (1981), and **The Sabbath in Scripture and History** (1982).

### *New Testament*

For those interested in further study on historical-critical methodology with regard to the New Testament, the following sources might prove helpful.

For a conservative discussion of New Testament criticism see George E. Ladd, **The New Testament and Criticism** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) and Ralph P. Martin, **New Testament Foundations: a Guide for Christian Students**, Volume 1, **The Four Gospels** (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

For a description of critical methodology from a liberal protestant perspective, see the “Guides to Biblical Scholarship,” series published by Fortress Press in Philadelphia.

For an example of the use of such methodology for positive presentation of the message of a New Testament work within an Adventist context, see a work with the unlikely title, **Religion in Overalls** by Dr. William Johnsson, the new editor of the *Adventist Review*. This book is a discussion of the message of Matthew.

bizarre for such a statement to be a dependent clause. This, together with other examples—in and out of Scripture—<sup>7</sup> of this same problematic grammatical structure, indicates strongly that a traditional translation like that in the Revised Standard Version is correct. No clear statement regarding preexisting matter is thus available from a study of this word.

“Created” (Heb. *bārā*). This word, the second word of the Hebrew Bible, is often said to denote creation *ex nihilo*, or out of nothing, and is contrasted with *‘āsāh* (“to make”), used elsewhere in Genesis 1 and said to indicate creation from matter. This contrast is not justified, as verses 26 and 27 show. “Let us make *‘āsāh* man in our image,” says verse 26, while verse 27 asserts “So God created *bārā*’ man in his own image.” Each verb denotes the creating (or making) of the same object. The conclusion is very clear. *Bārā*’ does not necessarily indicate creation *ex nihilo* and *‘āsāh* does not necessarily indicate creation from matter. Otherwise verses 26 and 27 would be totally contradictory. *Bārā*’ therefore cannot be said to indicate creation *ex nihilo* only, nor can *‘āsāh* be said to indicate exclusively creation from preexisting matter.

---

**“The Bible writers knew nothing about evolution, theistic or otherwise, and were not seeking to write either for or against it.”**

---

“*The heavens and the earth.*” These are the two major realms of creation into which all creation was placed. They make up the total spatial cosmology of the biblical view. They are thus a convenient summary of the complete creative activity of God for use in this introductory statement. The “heavens” includes what is above the plane of human activity and the “earth” what is at or below this level.

## Verse 2

“*The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.*”

The two Hebrew words we meet here are for various reasons somewhat enigmatic.

“*Without form and void*” (Heb. *tōhū wābōhū*). The basic idea, however, seems to be not so for various reasons somewhat enigmatic. The basic idea, however, seems to be not so much physical chaos as spiritual and existential chaos. The physical chaos is simply a reflection of this higher level of emptiness, an emptiness to be explained by the lack up to now of the presence of God. The writer was apparently not really interested in whether there was preexistent matter,<sup>8</sup> but was immensely interested in the arrival of the God who could bring meaning out of meaninglessness. The terms are thus cosmogonic in thrust—they illuminate the question of the explanation of the ordered universe.

“*Darkness*” (Heb. *hōšek*). This term is almost identical to the English word “darkness” in most of its nuances. Certainly in this context it symbolizes the absence of the Spirit of God who brings goodness, order and meaning. The phrase “and darkness was upon the face of the deep”—the deep is the primordial sea—is thus parallel to the previous phrase, “The earth was without form and void.” Both the earth and the deep were a meaningless waste before the Spirit of God arrived.

Verse two seems to assume the prior existence of two primordial realities: “earth” or land and “the deep” or the sea. The Hebrew language could have stated very plainly whether creation was *ex nihilo*; we should remember that, by and large, whether there was preexisting matter is a modern question and really should not be imposed upon the biblical text.

“Deep” (Heb. *t<sup>l</sup>hôm*). The use of this term in the story of creation has occasioned much comment due to its linguistic relation to Tiamat, the evil goddess of the primordial sea in the Babylonian creation story. Although there is little doubt that *t<sup>l</sup>hôm* and Tiamat are linguistically related, the use of *t<sup>l</sup>hôm* in the Bible simply refers to the all-encompassing primordial sea. This non-mythological use of the term in a cultural milieu which was well acquainted with Tiamat and her myth is actually a striking disclaimer of the polytheistic myth in which Tiamat played a role.<sup>9</sup> Far from being influenced by the Babylonian creation story, Genesis 1 rejects at least part of it, and constitutes a mild polemic against the polytheistic mythical religions.

“Spirit of God” (Heb. *rûah ’êlôhîm*). The “Spirit of God” was not understood by the Old Testament reader as the Holy Spirit of the Trinity. Indeed the Old Testament does not seem to be aware of the Trinity’s existence. Rather, the Spirit of God seems to have been understood as God’s presence. The picture in Genesis 1 is of the arrival of the latent creative force of God. The stage is set for the banishment of meaninglessness and the creation of the cosmos.

### Verse 3

“And God said, ‘Let there be light;’ and there was light.”

**C**reation has begun and light—the symbol of meaningfulness and divine order—is the first item to be made.

### Verse 4

“And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.”

**H**ere God symbolically separates order and chaos. Again we see the cosmogonic goal of the story. God brings in the good—and dispells the bad and the fearsome.

### Verse 5

“And there was evening and there was morning, one day.”

**I**t is natural to ask how on the first day there could be light and, indeed, the progression from evening to morning, without the sun which was not created until the fourth day? But what is important here is that the author of Genesis 1 has deliberately set out to separate light from the heavenly sources. He certainly understood the natural relation between day and night and the sun and moon; indeed, he describes that relationship in verses 14 and 15. At this point, however, he deliberately ignores this cosmogonic truth to lay down a cosmogonic truth. God’s presence is light, and therefore light must be the first item of creation. The sun, moon and stars are specific, limited created bodies—not his symbolic essence, but simply his creation. This is part of the author’s mild polemic against the polytheistic religions of his day. For them, the sun, moon and stars were divinities. By giving light, the symbol of divine presence, precedence over the luminaries, there can be no question that the one true God is supreme over all.

On the first day the daily cycle was also begun, a cycle that no doubt symbolized to ancient man the order and regularity of creation. The point here is that the daily cycle was to the author not ultimately dependent on the luminaries, but rather on God. The responsibility to keep that order is only later to be *given* to the sun and moon. The natural world and its laws cannot by themselves account for creation. Only the divine miracle can do that.

“Day” (Heb. *yôm*). Many scientists who wish to harmonize modern evolutionary theory with the biblical record, especially the proponents of the various breeds of theistic evolution, suggest that the term “day” as used in Genesis I refers to an indefinite length of time, not a 24-hour

period.<sup>10</sup> To them, each “day” was sufficiently long to allow for the evolution of certain species from other forms more or less in the order the Bible presents; the “day” of Genesis 1 is thus an era of millions of years. But even though the term *yôm* can indeed refer to an indefinite period of time, this is *never* the case when the word is used with a number; when a number occurs with the word, a period of 24 hours is always meant. The Bible writers knew nothing about evolution, theistic or otherwise, and were not seeking to write either for or against it. They would have no reason whatsoever to intend very long periods of time when they used the word “day” in this context. The author clearly intends the creative act to be understood as a miracle which occurred in one literal day. The concern here is cosmogony.

## Verses 6–8

*“And God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.’ And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.”*

The account of the second day establishes the basic form of the cosmology of Genesis 1.

“Firmament” (Heb. *rāqîa’*). Science-oriented students of the Bible have often assumed that this word refers both to interstellar space—because the sun, moon and stars are placed in it—and also to the atmospheric mantle around the earth—since it separates the waters above the firmament from the waters below. It is only logical at first sight that the waters above are the

moisture-laden clouds and that the waters below are the seas. The atmosphere seems to fit very nicely and thus the ancient and modern cosmologies are harmonized.

Unfortunately, this view represents only a superficial understanding of the biblical text. In verse eight the firmament is identified with heaven. Verses six and seven show the firmament separating the waters above from those below; that is, it holds back the waters above from rushing down upon the waters below. Only something solid could do that. On the fourth day the luminaries were placed in the firmament which then must have been conceived as *beneath* the waters above the firmament; otherwise they would not be visible through the water. However, the birds also fly in the firmament in verse 20, showing that the firmament includes the region beneath the solid object. Psalms 19:1 and 150:1 confirm the identification of the firmament with heaven, the abode of God. The four occurrences of the word in Ezekiel 1:22–26 suggest the picture of a bright, shining canopy or dome with four living creatures beneath and the throne of God above. To the Old Testament mind, therefore, the firmament is a solid dome high above the earth which holds back the waters above it, and in which the heavenly luminaries have been placed. It also contains the throne or abode of God, just below its lower surface the birds fly.

The etymology of the Hebrew word *rāqîa’* supports this. It is a noun based on a verb meaning “to spread out.” This verb is used to depict the pounding of a smith as he beats metal ingots into various forms. One Canaanite variant of the word (Hebrew is a dialect of Canaanite) indicates a bowl hammered out from a metal ingot. Although etymologies should never be used to establish the meaning of a word at a single point in time, it certainly would seem to confirm the apparent biblical understanding of *rāqîa’* as a solid construction. Job 37:18 is the clearest in this regard: “Can you, like

him, spread out, [*rāqīa'*] the skies [equals firmament], hard as a molten mirror?" (Mirrors were made of metal in antiquity.) The idea is of a ceiling for creation. All subsequent creation is contained beneath this ceiling.<sup>11</sup>

Of course, this view of the universe, which is similar to what we find in other writings of the ancient Near East,<sup>12</sup> is incompatible with our own view of an infinite space with the stars and galaxies sprinkled as far as human technology can reach, and undoubtedly farther. We know of no firmament and no waters above it. We cannot argue our way out of this impasse by suggesting that the firmament disappeared at the flood when the waters above it descended to the earth. The Psalmist talks of the firmament as if it was still present (Psalms 19:1 and 150:1). No text after the flood story clearly talks of waters above the firmament, but certain texts seem to imply floods or rain when the windows of heaven are opened (2 Kings 7:2, 19; Isaiah 24:18).<sup>13</sup>

---

**“We must recognize that the Bible writer simply accepts the cosmology of his day, never questioning, then uses the cosmology to convey his basic message.”**

---

There is no clever or magical solution. Instead we must recognize that the Bible writer simply accepts the cosmology of his day, never questioning it, then uses the cosmology to convey his basic message that the ultimate origin of the universe is God. A similar thing happens, as Adventists have always said, in Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Although the parable seems to acknowledge the existence of a pre-resurrection life after death in both heaven and hell, Adventists have rightly appealed to the historical understanding of

the people during Christ's time when they apparently believed in such a life after death. We have further said that that concept although erroneous, was simply used by Christ as a vehicle to portray a much greater truth. Once we realize the general point I am making here, the problem of harmonizing the biblical understanding of the firmament with our modern cosmology disappears. What is important is the fundamental truth that God is Creator.

### Verses 9–13

*“And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.’ And it was so. God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. And God said, ‘Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth.’ And it was so. The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.”*

**O**n the third day, now that the firmament was keeping out the upper waters, dry land could appear from the waters below. Although the English word “appear” is not passive, the Hebrew word from which it is translated is the passive form of the verb “to see” (*rāāh*). The land did nothing of its own to become visible. At the command of God the waters simply ran off and exposed the dry land called “earth.” The accumulated water was then called the “sea.” Again, in conveying its basic message, Genesis 1 is simply using the cosmology of its time, which indicated a flat earth with a single land mass surrounded by seas.

*“According to its kind”* (Heb. *l'minō*). Any person of antiquity who observed the flora

about him realized that there were different kinds of plants. Although he did not yet classify them with the rigors of scientific taxonomy, the phrase “according to its kind” was meant to suggest that all the various types of plants known to the readers of Genesis 1 were created at the same time. The narrative leaves no room for the modern idea of the slow evolutionary development of plants.

## Verses 14–19

*“And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, and let them be lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth.’ And it was so. And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.”*

In verse 14 the lights are very clearly put into the firmament, a two-dimensional expanse, as we saw before, serving as the ceiling of the universe. The heavenly bodies were thus conceived as being on a single plane more-or-less equidistant from the earth. Again, the biblical view radically differs from our own and again our explanation must be that the common cosmology of antiquity was being used in affirming the cosmogonic truth that God was the creator.

“The greater light” (Heb. *hammā’ ôr hag-gādōl*). The use of this euphemism for the sun is deliberate. The ancient polytheistic religions almost universally worshipped a god of the sun whose name in many Semitic languages was simply the common word for “sun.” In its mild polemic against the polytheistic religions of the day, Genesis 1

seeks to avoid any possible confusion with a solar divinity by using the phrase “the greater light” instead of the name of the sun god. There is but *one* true God. And because the moon was also a god in the polytheistic systems, the euphemism “the lesser light” is used for the moon.

“*He made the stars also.*” As it stands in the Revised Standard Version translation this phrase seems to have been tacked on at the last minute as a secondary thought. Indeed some scientists and theologians, wishing to harmonize the Genesis 1 account with a young earth, have suggested that the original text did not include the phrase under question and thus the stars—some of which are millions of light years away—can be understood as already created.<sup>14</sup> But no Hebrew manuscripts omit the phrase. And in the original language it is part of a typical grammatical construction and should in no way be considered secondary. Literally it should be translated, “and the stars;” (with no verb nor the word “also.”) An untranslateable grammatical marker preceding “stars” indicates that the phrase is the last of a string of direct objects, including “the greater light” and “the lesser light,” of the verb “made” (*āsāh*). In Genesis 1, as we have already seen, the verb *āsāh* refers to God’s creative activity during creation. There can be no doubt that Genesis 1 intends to say that all the heavenly lights, the stars included, were created on the fourth day. No attempt to explain this away can be squared with the text.

The solution to the problem—for us—of the great distance between the earth and the stars (the Hebrew term includes all heavenly bodies, including galaxies) is to be found not by attempting to harmonize modern science with the biblical account, but by realizing that Genesis 1 is using the known ancient cosmology. To the people of the Bible times, there were no great distances between the stars and the earth. They knew nothing of the light year or indeed that light traveled at a certain rate of speed. As far as they were concerned, all the



stars were placed within the firmament, as stated in verse 14. The author expresses the cosmogonic truth of divine creation in those ancient cosmological terms.

## Verses 20–23

*“And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens.’ So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them saying, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.’ And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.”*

On the fifth day comes the creation of life. (Plants were not considered life by the ancients.<sup>15</sup>) Of special interest among the living creatures are the “sea monsters” (Heb. *tanninim*). Out of all the multitude of various sea creatures, only the enigmatic *tanninim* are mentioned specifically. All others are included in the phrase “swarms of living creatures.”<sup>16</sup>

The background to the biblical understanding of the *tanninim* is one of the most frequent motifs in ancient Near Eastern literature, namely, the cosmic battle between the beneficent god and an evil force, usually the god of the sea, symbolized as a sea monster or a sea dragon. In Babylon, Marduk defeated Tiamat, and at Canaanite Ugarit, Baal defeated Yam.<sup>17</sup>

This battle genre was so well known that the Bible writers referred to it in several places as if it were Israel’s God who had defeated the great evil beast of the sea in establishing the created order (Psalm 74 and Isaiah 51).<sup>18</sup> This does not mean that the Bible writers necessarily believed the story, but apparently they thought it expressed very nicely the awesome power with which divine creation came about.

Genesis 1:21 provides an interesting twist to all of this. Here there is no mythical context, not even an allusion to a myth. Instead the fearsome *tanninim* are simply creatures of God’s creation, totally subject to him. There is no hint of a cosmic battle; the scene is totally demythologized. Instead of fearsome divine opponents of God in the cosmic battle, they are merely his creatures sporting in the sea. If it were not for this polemic against polytheism, there would have been, indeed, no reason whatsoever to mention this one creature of the sea. The Israelites were not a people acquainted with the sea, though the biblical readers had undoubtedly heard stories of great sea monsters from neighboring seafarers. Not being able to confirm or deny the existence of sea monsters (nor even, probably, being interested in doing so), they simply included the *tanninim* in their marine bestiary. They thus had to be accounted for in creation.

---

**Genesis I is theological in intent and scientists need not attempt to harmonize the ancient cosmology used by Biblical authors with the cosmology of modern science.”**

---

Again, the ancient cosmology is used in pointing toward a cosmogonic truth: God is the creator and ruler of all, including the fearsome *tanninim*.

## Verses 24–25

*“And God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.’ And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.”*

The account of the sixth day of creation (as with the third and fifth) includes the phrase “according to its kind.” The phrase indicates that all the observable types of animals were created at this time. Genesis 1 does not allow room for an interpretation that they developed from each other (the Hebrew language could have said so, if it wished).

## Verses 26–31

*“Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’ And God said, ‘Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.”*

The creation of man is the literary climax of the chapter. On no other day is a complete section of the chapter devoted to the creation of only one kind of creation. Moreover, the usual, consistent divine formulaic statement, “Let there be . . . ,” is dramatically broken by a new form of creative statement, “Let us make man in our image,” a statement which also identifies God with the creature being made. Man, the image of God, is the supreme work, the climax, of God’s creative activity.<sup>19</sup>

“Image” (Heb. *selem*). This word, frequent in the Old Testament, is used primarily for idols. The root idea behind the word is that man is physically like God, as a picture or a sculpture is like the object being represented, although the ancient Semitic mind would not have sharply differentiated between a physical and spiritual likeness.

“Dominion” (Heb. *rādāh*). God made man his coregent on earth. Man, who is God’s image, will rule all creation, including animals and plants, in God’s place. The text then says that God saw all that he had made and pronounced it very good.

## Chapter 2:1–31

*“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.”*

After the statement of Genesis 2:1 concluding the narrative of the six days of creative activity God rests and thereby creates the Sabbath. One could be tempted to see this day as an anticlimax for several reasons. It follows: 1) the climactic creation of man; 2) the closing formulaic expression “And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good”; and 3) the formal concluding statement in Genesis 2:1. Actually, this is a typical form of ancient Near Eastern literature where a sequence of six (or other numbers) plus one is frequent. Literary works often picture a person traveling for six days and on the seventh reaching his goal. Or a fire may burn for six days and on the seventh it goes out. Many examples could be given.<sup>20</sup> In each, the seventh day represents a climactic release from the activities of the preceding six days. Certainly a similar pattern is present in the creation account of Genesis 1. Thus, far from being an anticlimax, it is a

type of climax. The creation of man is the climax of God's creative activity, but the seventh day, the day of rest and fellowship, is the meaning and goal of all that has happened up to now.

The above analysis, relying on close attention to the meaning of the words at the time they were used, suggests that the primary purpose and intent of the author of Genesis 1 was cosmogonic; he is affirming that the cosmos was created by the one true God in a miraculous and ordered way. It is the miraculous word of God which brings the universe into being; and *only* he could have done such a thing. The author is aware of a tendency among at least some of his readers toward polytheism. He wishes to state unequivocally that true Israelites are monotheists who disdain polytheistic systems, and he dismisses their divine luminaries, primordial seas, and cosmic battles as mere mundane reality.

It is against this background that we must read the chapter today. As we have seen, Genesis 1 is certainly not meant to be primarily a compendium of scientific claims about the universe to which we must harmonize all our modern data. The chapter simply uses the common ancient Near Eastern cosmology in expressing what it takes to be the *theological* (or cosmogonic) truth.

Obviously, the ancient cosmology found in Genesis 1 cannot be harmonized with our present observations of the sun, moon and stars. One implication of the evidence we have examined is that Genesis 1 is theo-

logical in intent and that scientists need not attempt to harmonize the ancient cosmology used by biblical authors with the cosmology of modern science. The cosmological elements of Genesis 1 are simply the background for the cosmogonic point of the chapter: the ultimate origin of the universe is God. It is on *this* that a biblical people must take their stand, whatever modern science may have to say.

What does this do to the Sabbath, one of the most sacred of Adventist beliefs? Does the fact that some parts of Genesis 1 do not conform to our "known" view of the universe destroy our confidence in proclaiming the truth of the Sabbath, as some would hold? Once again it must be underscored that every problem we have encountered in Genesis 1 is a cosmological one. Here also the cosmology of Genesis 1 is the vehicle for its cosmogonic, or theological message. The Sabbath is in no way part of cosmology; it describes nothing of the universe. It is wholly cosmogonic. It is the symbol of, and provides the daily meaning for, the miraculous creative activity of God. As such, it is part of the central theological message of the chapter.

Have we subjected modern science to the Bible as Ellen White has suggested? Yes. We have insisted that the truth of Genesis 1 is its cosmogonic statement. God created the world miraculously in an ordered fashion. If science is to be related to the Bible, it is to this cosmogonic statement that the comparison should be made. After all, it is the theological message of a passage which is at stake, not the vehicle by which it is presented.

---

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

---

1. See Edgar Krentz, *The Historical-Critical Method* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

2. All Biblical quotes are from the Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

3. See E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 15. I have come across this view especially while talking with members of various conservative religious groups.

4. The repeated formulaic expressions throughout the chapter as well as the recognized relationship between the first, second and third days of the creation week to the fourth, fifth and sixth days, respectively, are a part of the structure.

5. Other biblical examples include the Book of Ecclesiastes where 1:2 is the introductory *inclusio* and 12:8 is the concluding *inclusio*. The opening vision of Ezekiel has an introductory *inclusio* in 1:4 and a

similar concluding *inclusio* in 1:28. Many other examples could be given. Extra-biblical examples are just as frequent. For an example see *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969); hereafter, *ANET*. pp. 414–418, “The Instructions for King Meri-Ka-Re,” Lines 1 and 144. Spot checking through *ANET* will reveal many more.

6. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, pp. 1–3, discusses this alternative in detail.

7. Young, *Ibid.*, p. 3, gives several examples.

8. He could have answered this question very clearly, if he had so desired.

9. The extant tablets of this early Babylon composition date to the first millennium BC when it seems to have reached the heights of its popularity as Babylon became the cultural center of the ancient world.

10. One of the more recent uses of this interpretation was by Norman Young, *Creator, Creation and Faith* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976).

11. Some Hebrew dictionaries translate *rāqia'* as “expanse,” but it is clear that a two-dimensional expanse is intended, similar to a table top or the surface of a lake, not three-dimensional space.

12. Consult James B. Pritchard, ed., *ANET.*, pp. 4–6: The Theology of Memphis (Egypt); pp. 60–72: Enuma Elish (Babylon); pp. 129–142: Myth of Baal contains references to the cosmogonic battle, one of the Canaanite ideas of creation.

13. These “windows of heaven” may also be used to illustrate the solid nature of the firmament, but more likely they are intended as symbolic schematizations.

14. See, for example H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1942), p. 76. There are many others.

15. To be considered “alive” by the ancients an organism must move (Genesis 9:3), have blood (Genesis 9:4) and visibly breathe (Genesis 7:22). Transpiration is, of course, a modern concept and does not fit this definition.

16. Other passages in the Old Testament that mention this beast show that “sea monsters” is more nearly, though not precisely, correct. In Psalm 74:13 the *tanninim* are great beasts of the sea who are defeated by God in an allusion to the Canaanite cosmic battle between Baal and the god of the sea which symbolized for the Psalmist the crossing of the Red Sea; the term Leviathan is parallel to it in the next line. Isaiah 27:1, in referring to the upcoming new exodus from captivity, pictures God slaying the *tanninim* which are again paralleled with Leviathan. They are a symbol of all that is evil. Isaiah 51:9 uses them to allude to the same cosmic battle as Psalm

74:13 (now symbolizing creation as well as the exodus); the *tanninim* were defeated and God’s established order is created. In a context of sorcery in Exodus 7 it is the *tanninim* which came from the rods of Moses and the magicians; there is thus a serpent aspect to the word. Fortunately, the Canaanite texts found at Ugarit, in Syria, have helped greatly to make this rather enigmatic beast known; text 1001 describes *tanninim* as having two tails and a forked tongue, and, like the Bible associates it with the sea. See Arthur J. Ferch’s recent discussion, “Daniel 7 and Ugarit: A Reconsideration,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 99, p. 81.

17. See Pritchard, pp. 4–6; pp. 129–142.

18. These passages also refer to the Red Sea experience during the exodus on another level.

19. “Let us make” (Heb. *ná ašéh*). Many have seen this word which is in the first person plural form to be proof for the existence of the Trinity, though the Trinity is mentioned or referred to clearly nowhere in the Old Testament. However, if we consider the literatures of the ancient Near East, it will be seen that an important divine address to the heavenly court is often phrased in the first person plural. This is especially true in the case of the highest of the gods. (See Patrick D. Miller, Jr., Genesis 1–11: *Studies in Structure and Theme*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement Series 8 (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978). The first person plural also occurs in Genesis 3:22 and 11:1–9, but the same picture of the divine address to the heavenly court is no doubt intended.)

We should certainly understand the pronouncement in verse 26 in the same manner. The decision to create man was the greatest decision of the creation plans and as such was recorded in Genesis 1 by the most solemn tones possible. The phrase would have evoked in the mind of the ancient reader a picture of God on his throne solemnly suggesting to the heavenly court surrounding him the creation of man in the image of God. It thus does not refer to the Trinity, but is instead consistent with the rest of the Old Testament on this point.

The three persons of the Trinity are first revealed in the New Testament and were apparently unknown to the Old Testament. Looking back, we can isolate the individual persons by theological projection, but the discipline of biblical study cannot talk about the Trinity in the Old Testament. Our modern concept of the Trinity, and indeed the term itself, developed during the Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries AD.

20. For a few see E. J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One*, pp. 79–81.

### Adventist Women Mix Career and Marriage

John G. Beach. *Notable Women of Spirit: The Historical Role of Women in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Publishing Association, 1976. 125 pp., bibl.

review by Carol Richardson Boyko

One dimensional approaches to the pioneer parents of Adventism are increasingly coming under fire, and several books have appeared that, in time, should help make the Seventh-day Adventist Church unafraid of criticism or investigation. Therefore, I find it incredible that such a book as John G. Beach's *Notable Women of Spirit*, a book plagued with interminable inspirational glosses of Adventism's founding mothers, should have found its way into print.

To begin with, the author has profoundly misunderstood his audience. He has apparently attempted to placate what he views as a surly group of feminist hotheads, while frankly admitting, in his own words, to being a "male chauvinist." The book continues with such "concessions" as a woman leader introduced to us as "Haskell's wife" and the imposing physician Kate Lindsay referred to as a "single girl." But because Beach is not so callous as to be unaware of rumblings in the women's ranks (though he cannot, he admits, understand them), he goes on to introduce to us a number of notable Adventist women who, though figuring heavily in the development of Adventism, somehow got lost in the shuffle when credit was given. We wish to see

women in the midst of a dramatic, exciting struggle, helping give birth to what they believe is God's last church on earth. But those who expect to meet flesh and blood mothers will be disappointed, since all vigor and intelligence are drained until these women dissolve into one vast, murky blur.

This is done, as in all propagandizing literature, by emphasizing similarities at the expense of personality, and Beach begins with physical appearance and "feminine charm." It is somehow important, for example, that Jean McIntosh, a pioneer in the development of Sabbath School visual aid material, raised "four equally beautiful daughters" (p. 58), and that Sera Henry, the famous prohibitionist, possessed certain secrets:

One of her secrets was her feminine charm—slim figure, black hair, soulful eyes, and deeply spiritual expression. As she grew older—her figure matronly and hair tinged with gray—she gave the overall impression of a mother with that "Can I help you?" look beaming from her eyes (p. 89).

It is unnecessary, of course, to point out the trivializing effect emphasis on appearance has on a treatise of this nature. But a fitting irony comes at the end of the chapter, where Beach has marshalled the following quotation from Margaret White's *Whirlwind of the Lord*:

The trend today is to exalt and exploit the superficial feminine qualities. The admiration of young people is daily directed in countless ways to the importance of beautiful hair, clear skin, and alluring smile, and a well-proportioned figure, instead of to the charm of cheerfulness, the premium of patience, and the pride of purity (p. 100).

Not surprisingly, a career in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a woman has

---

Carol Richardson Boyko holds a master of arts degree in English from Loma Linda University.

always meant serving in a secondary capacity, yet Beach is unabashed in his praise for the many women who dropped these careers for marriage. Still, there were, unavoidably, some women who just did not fit the pattern—those few who never married and never faced Beach's false dilemma of serving church or family. Beach apparently meets his match in the defiant Dr. Lindsay. Since no amount of camouflage can conceal her obviously brusque, even severe personality, Beach can only offer us a faint: "underneath the surface beat a very warm and tender heart" (p. 83).

But the unmarried ladies are only excess baggage on the journey to Beach's most impassioned, though hardly surprising, point: women are to put family life before career. "God created woman to be a wife and mother as well as a member of the board of trustees" (p. 107). Aside from a callousness likely to ruffle unmarried or childless women, what is so vexing is the false dilemma he would perpetuate to make his point, and at the expense of many church leaders who themselves saw no dilemma.

Beach takes as a matter of course that women have a different basic nature from men, a nature more suited to domestic confines, and without giving evidence in support, he announces that "of course, most women, even today, still prefer the home to the office, the preparation of food to that of an audit report, and the training of a family to that of an office staff" (p. 14). And what really surprises is that the bulk of his own book denies the very point he is attempting to make. It is obvious that many women throughout the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have managed to make a significant contribution to the church while married and raising children. Beach's persistence in asking the false question, "which is more important—a family or a career?" (p. 109) suggests that he never really met these "notable women of spirit."

## The Sabbath as a Witness to the Gospel

Niels-Erik A. Andreasen. *Rest and Redemption: A Study of the Biblical Sabbath*. (Studies in Religion, Andrews University Monographs, vol. 11) vii 137 pp., bibl. Berrien Springs, Mich: Andrews University Press, 1978.

review by A. Josef Greig

This work largely re-presents the fruit of Niels-Erik Andreasen's earlier tradition-historical investigation which was entitled *The Old Testament Sabbath* (1972), and reflects his theological treatment of biblical Sabbath texts. Andreasen's purpose in this present work is to present the theological and sociological implications of the Bible's Sabbath.

After an introduction and discussion of the origin and institutionalization of the Sabbath, Andreasen thematically develops relevant Sabbath texts in the Old Testament according to their literary history. Thus, chapter four, "The Sabbath, Work, and Rest," presents the Sabbath in its earliest form as law (basically prohibiting work on the seventh day) and draws out the theological and practical implications of those Sabbath laws. Chapter five, "The Sabbath and Freedom," theologically assesses the Deuteronomic texts, which unite the Sabbath with the theme of freedom, and allows Andreasen to introduce the humanitarian implications of the Sabbath, a theme that he pursues throughout the remainder of his book.

Finally, in "The Sabbath and Worship" Andreasen presents textual evidence, possibly priestly, that the very foundation of the Sabbath was a day of worship—a day when God was recognized as Lord of life and time. Despite the prophets' criticisms of Sabbath practices, their recognition of the need for

devotional time explains their deep interest in the Sabbath.

Compared to Sabbath laws, which are concerned with the cessation of labor and with worship, the creation Sabbath symbolizes the covenant relationship between creator and creature that is actualized in the Sabbath. Andreasen argues that Genesis 2:1-3 is more concerned with God's creative work than with the Sabbath institution. The Sabbath is offered to man, but he is not commanded to keep it; a point Andreasen takes to mean that we are not dealing simply with man's Sabbath-keeping, but with God's Sabbath-keeping. God's rest at creation seeks to convey the idea that God has turned away from further work in order to commune with man. Chapter eight further develops the characteristics of the Sabbath that allow it to function as a sign of the covenant. These are the aspects of the Sabbath that unite God and man, express God's presence, describe Israel's relationship to the land God gave her, and stress the relationship between Sabbath observance and covenantal participation.

The next-to-last chapter discusses the Sabbath controversies in which Jesus' teaching opposes that of contemporary Judaism. This chapter presupposes that these controversies in the various Gospels were original to Jesus and his contemporaries within Judaism, and not the invention of later Christian groups. Andreasen argues that, in both the grain field incident and in the healing miracles, Jesus is not addressing the rabbinic Sabbath regulations and their casuistry; rather, he is reassessing the fundamental meaning of the Sabbath by stripping away trappings that obscure its attractiveness. The Sabbath is a witness to the gospel and anticipates the hope of the final Sabbath rest.

The final chapter, "The Sabbath and Redemption," traces the evolution of the nature of Israel's perpetual hope for a time of rest. In the New Testament book of Hebrews that hope is reinterpreted in terms of Christ's redemption and associated with

the Sabbath, which contributes both a contemporary and eschatological dimension to the concept of rest for the people of God.

One criticism that may be leveled at Andreasen's book arises from his statement that New Testament scholars in recent years have rejected the position that the Sabbath controversies originated in the early church. It would be more representative to say that most New Testament scholars have abandoned the view that the Sabbath controversies in the Gospels are *entirely* the creations of the early church. The significance of Andreasen's position is that by concentrating on *Jesus'* view of the Sabbath, the problem of the Sabbath tradition in the early church, which is reflected in the Gospels, is largely ignored, and the kind of insights into the texts that he brings to the Old Testament portions of the book are largely missing from the New Testament portions. Andreasen gives us the historical Jesus pitted against the historical Pharisees. This criticism aside, Andreasen's study has enhanced the theological and sociological significance of the Sabbath in a way that will certainly command the recognition of laymen and professional theologians alike.

## 666 and All That

Martin Gardner. *The Incredible Dr. Matrix: The World's Greatest Numerologist*. 256 pp. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976. \$8.95.

review by Ronald L. Numbers

**I**n this story, Gardner describes his central character, Dr. Matrix as being the son of an Adventist missionary to Japan, William Miller Bush. It seems that young Bush, who takes the stage name of Dr. Matrix, first

---

Ronald L. Numbers is chairman of the Department of the History of Medicine, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

God wanted him to be “a laborer in the Adventist cause.” The discovery a few years later of D.M. Canright’s *Life of Mrs. E.G. White* shattered his faith, and he subsequently drifted into the entertainment world.

Martin Gardner, described by the *New York Times* as “probably the leading popularizer of mathematical recreations now writing in English,” writes a regular column in the *Scientific American*. In it, Gardner occasionally invokes the name of his fictional Dr. Leving Joshua Matrix, identifying him as the inventor of mathematical puzzles. In Gardner’s book, Matrix frequently draws on his Adventist background for illustrations. Once, after reading about the number 666 in Carlyle B. Haynes’ *Our Times and Their Meaning*, Gardner asked Matrix for his views on 666. “‘I could talk for hours about 666,’ the doctor said with a heavy sigh. ‘This particular application of the Beast’s number is quite old. Of course it’s easy for a skillful numerologist to find 666 in any name. In fact, if you add the Latin numerals in the name ELLEN GOULD WHITE, the inspired prophetess who founded Seventh-day Adventism—counting *w* as a “double *u*” or two *v*’s—it also adds up to 666’” (note that each word in Irving Joshua Matrix has six letters, giving 666).

An entire chapter of Gardner’s book is devoted to mathematical puzzles Matrix found in the King James Bible, presumably while writing a 13-volume biblical commentary. Again the doctor’s familiarity with Adventism is evident. “Mrs. White, in a trance, saw the 144,000 saints standing on a sea of glass in ‘a perfect square.’ She failed to realize, writes Dr. Matrix, that the square of 144,000 is not 120 or 1,200 but the irrational number 379.4733+” (but see p. 256 for a possible way of extricating Mrs. White from this embarrassment).

As a youth Gardner himself converted briefly to Adventism, perhaps explaining why this is not the first time Adventists have appeared in his writings. The chapter on George McCready Price in his widely read *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* remains the most thoughtful assessment of the Adventist geologist yet written, and Gardner returns to Price in his quasi-autobiographical novel *The Flight of Peter Fromm* (reviewed in SPECTRUM, Vol. 5 No. 2, by Donald E. Hall). The Peter Fromm story should be read by all Adventists wrestling with their faith—as well as by those who may be called upon to counsel such persons. *The Incredible Dr. Matrix*, a much lighter work, simply provides a pleasant way to pass a quiet weekend.