

Commentary on Genesis (1)

by Dr Peter Pett BA BD(Hons-London) DD

Genesis 1.1 - 2.4 The Creation of the World.

Coming from the ancient world, this account of creation must be seen as quite remarkable. Yet it must not be considered as an attempt at primitive science. Its purpose is wholly theological. The ancients, apart from a few 'learned men' of a type unknown to Israel, were not interested in scientific explanations. They were practical people and interested in 'who' and 'why'. They did not ask themselves 'how'. We must not tie them down to the speculations of a few Babylonian priests and their like.

What the writer wants us to know is that all we have has come from God. He is not concerned with how God did it, except in the sense that He did it through His all-powerful word.

This is in accord with the Bible as a whole. It constantly describes the world as men saw it and experienced it, using metaphors to describe it which were not intended to be scientific or to be pressed too closely. When they spoke of 'foundations' they were thinking from their own standpoint of what they saw below them, not speculating as to the nature of the cosmos. When they spoke of a firmament, something which held up the clouds, they were doing the same thing, just as we do when we describe the sun as 'rising' and 'setting'. We are describing what we see. It does, of course, do neither. And they described things in the same way without speculating as to their nature.

The account is unique in the fact that it totally and deliberately excludes the thought of any other gods than the One God. The sun and the moon are specifically shown to be merely luminaries and he refers to the stars almost as an afterthought - 'He made the stars also'. To other nations these stars were important, they were gods in their own right, and the sun and moon were important gods to be worshipped, but to the writer they were inanimate objects made by God.

There may be what seem like vague connections with the language of ancient creation myths, as we might expect when speaking of the same kind of events in the same environment, but if they exist the connections are genuinely indirect and purified. For example 'Tehom' need no longer be seen as derived etymologically from Tiamat, the creation monster, for it has now been established by archaeology (from Ugarit) as a word in its own right. It is true that there is the idea of emptiness and waste, but there is no suggestion of violent conflict, which is remarkably absent. Rather the emptiness is because he considers that all form and purpose must come actively from God. He does not see a devastated creation, he sees an unformed universe. If he has had in mind anything from ancient myths he has avoided directly drawing on it and has given it a different content and significance.

Approaches to the Interpretation of Genesis 1.

There are a number of different schemes of interpretation applied to these verses in the modern day, and perhaps we should consider these first of all. But we intend to be brief and would ask those who would like to look into them further to consult those who propose them, for we must not allow these schemes to take our minds away from the central message of the creation account, which is to enable us to recognise how God has, in His own time, established all things for our good. Thus we will not mention them in the commentary, except in passing.

The main interpretations are:

1). The belief that God created the universe in seven twenty-four hour days. This is an interpretation based on comparatively modern views of time claimed as self evident. It also holds that those who accept it either assume that God deliberately planted fossils in the world so as to give an impression other than the reality, to test the faith of the nineteenth and later centuries, or that scientific 'laws' have changed so that the complexities of fossilisation took place on very different time scales.

Those who hold this view may quite rightly point out that scientific 'laws' are not inviolate, they are simply interpretations of experience. Scientists vary their scope constantly with new discoveries. They are simply variations of how scientists see things as having always happened, in accord with the hypothesis of cause and effect. They assume these 'laws' or principles are unchanging, for without them their application at the present time science could not exist, and in practical terms it serves us well. But they are not inviolate. They describe the set up of the world as we see it now, not necessarily as God made it.

Those who hold this view usually also claim that the earth has only existed for a number of millenniums rather than millions of years.

2). The belief that Genesis 1.1 describes the original creation, and that a time gap occurs between Genesis 1.1 and Genesis 1. 2. They translate the latter 'and the earth BECAME without form and waste'. This latter situation is usually connected by them with the fall of the Devil and his angels. This then leaves room for as many millions of years as they believe the fossils require, while at the same time usually accepting that the seven days are literal twenty-four hour days during which God regenerated the world.

The main problem with this theory is that, although the word for 'was' can sometimes be translated 'became' (Hebrew words were not as exact as in more modern languages), this is usually only when the context makes this clear. However in this context it is far from clear. Indeed, the connection between 1.1 and 1.2 is so close and specific that it must be considered extremely doubtful whether the verses can be separated in this way. The writer could not, in fact, have made the connection any closer (there are no verse divisions in the original). The Hebrew is - 'ha aretz (the earth) we ha aretz (and the earth)' - and thus we read '---created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was ---'. The second verse is describing what was the condition of what was created, not what became of it.

3). The belief that the seven days are not days of creation but days of revelation. They are thus seen as being a comment of the writer as he describes his series of visions. 'The evening and the morning was ---' being an indication of the day in which he had each vision. The problem with this view is that it does not naturally arise out of the way the words are used in the text. There is no preliminary explanation to suggest that a series of visions are in mind. Nor does it solve the problem as to why the seventh day does not end in this way.

4). The belief that the 'days' of creation are intended to be read as literal earth days but are not to be taken as factual but rather simply as a mythical presentation. This view is usually held by those who do not see the Bible as God's inerrantly inspired word, although there are those who do hold the latter but see the creation account as a parable of creation rather than as a factual account. The difficulty with this view for the latter is that there really are no grounds for differentiating this account from later accounts in this way. At what point, and how, do we differentiate between parable and history?

5). The belief that the writer did not intend his words to be read as restricting days to twenty-four hours, but as representing a working week of God with the time scale being read accordingly. Thus they are to be seen as 'days of God', to Whom a thousand years are but as yesterday, and to Whom a few billion years are but a tick of His clock. This position has been

argued in detail in the introduction and we will not add anything further at this stage. It is a view held by many of all persuasions.

Many of those who hold this view do consider it remarkable that the writer expressed the centrality of electro-magnetic waves (light) to the basis of the universe, that he differentiated between 'creation', when God specifically stepped in with something new (the universe, animal life, the human spirit) and 'making' or 'bringing forth', which suggest a process of adaptation. Some even argue for evolution or adaptation as Scriptural on this basis.

They usually consider that the sun, moon and stars were created at the beginning, but that on the fourth 'day' they appeared through the deep cloud and mists and began to exercise their control over times and seasons. They point to the agreement between 'science' and Genesis 1 that the world was once covered in water, that dry land appeared as a result of the upheaval of land below the sea, that the earth would be covered with cloud so that for a period the sun would not be seen, although its effects would filter through to aid the growth of vegetation, that various types of vegetation would develop, 'brought forth' by the ground, that eventually the cloud cover would thin so that the sun would appear and times and seasons be established, that creatures would first arise in the waters, and that from these would come birds and dry land creatures. Many who believe this also argue that the creation of life, and of the spirit in man, were new acts of God.

That is as may be but the writer was not writing as a scientist but as a believer, and he wrote without attempting to explain how God did it. This is why all the above views can find some justification for their positions and many theories will fit the text. This was his genius. He did not try to go above what he knew, or claim to knowledge he did not have.

We will now consider the text in more detail, and as we do so we should note that emphasised throughout it is 'God' (Elohim). It begins with God, and God is prominent all through it. If we spend our time in studying it from any other aspect of it we are missing the writer's point, God created everything, God produced light, God adapted what He had made, God set the heavenly lights in their places, God established a world ready to receive life, God produced life, God created man. All is of God.

Genesis 1.1-2.4a.

1.1 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.'

'In the beginning'. This phrase is signifying the beginning of existence as we know it, the beginning of our universe. The writer is considering the beginning as it relates to man. It does not refer to the creation of God, Who has no beginning, nor necessarily to the creation of the angelic or spiritual world which is outside the scope of the universe as we know it. This was the point at which God began His exercise of creation of the world which would lead to the creation of man. Thus it is not the beginning of all things, but of all things physical, of all things as far as man was concerned.

That the 'heavenly world' was already in existence comes out later in that God speaks to them in 1.26. God did, of course, create that heavenly world too, and we may read it into the words 'created the heavens'. The writer certainly did believe that all things that are were created by God. But that is a spiritual world, not a physical one, and not prominently in mind here. Here action is concentrated on the earth and its environs. But in the end it is indicating that all things came from God.

'God' - the word is 'elohim' which is in the plural signifying three or more. It is the plural of El (or strictly eloah, which in the Bible is used in poetry), the Hebrew and Canaanite word for a

divine or supernatural being. It can also be used of supernatural beings such as angels or other world beings (e.g. 1 Samuel 28.13) or of the 'gods' of other nations, but there it is used with a plural verb. The plural here, however, which is used with a singular verb, is intensive indicating that God is greater than the norm. He is complex and great beyond description. The writer did not however think in terms of a trinity (as shown by its use with a singular verb), although we may see that as nascent within it.

'Created' - the word is 'bara'. It is never used in connection with creative material, and there is no suggestion in the account of any such material. In this form (qal) it is only ever used of the divine workmanship, and always indicates the production of something new. It never has an accusative of material. While it is not directly stated it thus implies creation from nothing, but that is not its main emphasis. Its main emphasis is the sovereign activity of God. It is used three times in this account, - of the first creation of the 'world stuff', of the creation of animal life and of the creation of man 'in the image of God'. These were seen as three unique beginnings, where what was added was totally new and not obtained from what already existed. But the stress is on the fact that they were created by God.

God first creates the 'stuff' of the Universe, 'the heavens and the earth. From then on He will act upon the earth and adjust it and shape it so that it produces a world suitable for life, bringing in the activity of the heavens in the fourth day. Then He will create life. Until the creation of life all will be produced from what was first created. We note here that light precedes life. Without light there could be no life. This idea will later be taken up by the Apostle John and spiritualised (John 1.1-18).

'The heavens and the earth' - this is probably not to be seen as including 'the heaven of heavens' (1 Kings 8.27; Nehemiah 9.6) or the 'third heaven' (2 Corinthians 12.2), which are spiritual realms, but has in mind the heavens in relation to the earth, the whole physical cosmos (see on 2.1). The writer is not speculating on questions that we would like to know the answer to, such as the creation of supernatural beings, he is considering God's preparation for the creation of man.

As the Psalmist says, 'by the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all their host by the breath of His mouth' (Psalm 33.6). These are the physical heavens whose formation is later described. The spiritual heavens are referred to indirectly in v.26.

1.2 'And the earth was without form and empty. And darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved on the face of the waters.'

'And the earth' - the connecting 'and' ('waw') really excludes the suggestion of a gap between verses 1 and 2. The writer could not have made the connection any closer (there are no verse divisions in the original) - 'ha aretz we ha aretz' - '---the heavens and the earth, and the earth was ---'. Having spoken of the creation of heavens and earth he is now turning his attention directly to the earth's condition as created. It should be noted that what is now immediately described is therefore limited to 'the earth'. The remainder of the universe is not in mind.

It was 'tohu wa bohu' - 'without form and devoid of anything positive'. Try pronouncing the Hebrew quickly and deeply (pronouncing toe - hoo wah boe -hoo). Like many Hebrew words it conveys its meaning by its sound as well as by its interpretation. This is the condition in which God created the earth. He had made it formless that He may give it form, He had made it empty that He might fill it. He had made it covered with water that from that He might produce what is, as altered by His hand. There is no thought that it had 'become' this way, or was naturally so. Nor that forces of chaos were at work against which God had to fight. It was as He had determined it to be. God had created the earth covered in water and now He began His work upon it. No conflict is involved.

‘Tohu’ is used in both Hebrew and Arabic to indicate a waste place. The meaning of ‘bohu’ is uncertain, but in Arabic it means ‘to be empty’. In the Old Testament it is only used in connection with ‘tohu’ (three times). Thus the idea here is of an uninhabitable, lifeless and empty, water-covered earth.

‘And darkness was on the face of the deep.’ The point is that without God’s word there is no light. Darkness is seen as negative. It is God’s positive action that brings light. Unless God acts the universe such as it is will remain forever dark. So the primeval world is seen as formless, empty and dark, as without shape or evident light. It is covered with water. Note that all that was outside of God and was visible was described as ‘the deep’, and that everything that happens is seen from the point of view of earth. But the fact that he speaks of ‘the face of the deep’ demonstrates that it is apart from God. This dark, unshaped, mass is not God, it is not everything that is. It has a surface, and over that surface God waits and is about to act.

But why ‘the deep’. ‘The deep’ - ‘tehom’ (in Ugaritic ‘thm’) means ‘the deeps’, thus usually referring to the oceans and seas. To the Israelite the deep itself was a mystery. It was dark, impenetrable, shapeless and for ever fluid. It formed nothing solid or specific. Thus it indicated that which was impenetrable, and beyond man’s sphere, that which was shapeless, dark and fluid. It had no form or shape, was ever changing and temporary, and was suitable as a description of ultimate formlessness and barrenness. Here in the beginning it was dark and unformed because light and shape and form and all significance had yet to come from God, and He had not yet acted. There is no suggestion of a struggle. It is impersonal. We may speak of ‘chaos’ as long as we do not read in ideas that are not there. It is chaos in the sense of being unshaped and unformed and not controlled, utterly waste and shapeless and void. As being ‘empty’.

‘And the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters.’ This could also be translated ‘wind of God’. Either way the idea is of God hovering over earth ready for action. In view of this, ‘Spirit’ is the most likely meaning. It is the creative energy of God waiting to act. He Who is light is ready to act on darkness. He Who is all that is significant would bring significance to this shapeless mass. (The translation ‘mighty wind’ is extremely doubtful. The word ‘God’ appears too many times in this narrative for its appearance here to be just adjectival, and there is no suggestion in the later narrative of the activity of a mighty wind. Creation takes place through His word, not through a wind).

In the Old Testament when God’s direct action is seen in the world it is often described in terms of the ‘Spirit of God’. To the Old Testament the Spirit of God is God extending Himself to act positively, locally and visibly in the world. Basically the writer is saying here that God is now hovering over His world about to reveal Himself in action. It should be noted that this description already assumes a kind of ‘heaven’ where the Spirit is hovering, but not our heaven. Our earth and heaven is seen as not all that there is. It is probable therefore that he intends us to see the Spirit in action in the following verses, acting through God’s word.

‘Hovered’. Compare its use in Deuteronomy 32.11 of a bird hovering over its young. The same root in Ugaritic means ‘hover, soar’. The word as used here suggests intimate concern.

‘The face of the waters.’ As light was positive and darkness was absence of light, so ‘land’ was positive and ‘waters’ or ‘deeps’ represented absence of land, in other words here there was the absence of the means of creaturely existence and absence of shape and form. The deeps were fluid, unshaped, dark and mysterious. They had no form. There was no atmosphere. They were therefore to the writer a perfect symbol of unformed existence.

But while ‘the deep’ was formless and shapeless and fluid, the sphere of hovering was outside of this emptiness, outside the beginnings of creation as we know it. God was not a part of the

stuff of creation. He was there ready to act upon it. This deep was the incomprehensibly mysterious described in terms of what was indescribable, that which was formless and shapeless and waiting for God to give it shape, and form, and significance. And God is pictured as by His Spirit waiting apart from it to act on it from the outside.

1.3 'And God said, "Let there be light", and there was light.'

This is God's first 'action'. Here was a 'big bang' indeed. The writer is brief and to the point. God speaks and light is. That which was without form and empty now experiences that which makes it spring into positive existence. That which was permanently lacking light, now receives light. And as light (electro-magnetic waves) is the basic essential of the universe we recognise that it is also necessary in the bringing into usefulness of earth. It is separate from Him and yet provided and sustained by His word. Let Him say, 'Let light not be' and the universe would collapse into itself. So by His word God produces positive out of negative.

From our perspective we know that when God spoke He acted through His Word, Jesus Christ (John 1.1-3), Who created all things and upholds the universe through His powerful word (Hebrews 1.3). It is through His sustaining that the universe continues as an inhabitable cosmos.

It is significant that what is positive in the world is seen as not initially there in what was created, but produced from it by His word, a reminder that the whole universe and the whole of life on earth depends upon His continual sustenance (Colossians 1.17). It will be noted that pantheism, which believes that everything is part of God, is excluded by all this. His work of creation was separate from Himself, although He remained intimately connected with it. He acted on it from 'outside' and it was by His word of command that the means of it being held together came into being.

'And God said.' This phrase introduces each phase in God's creative activity. It is the creative word indicating God's transcendence and demonstrating that all is done in accordance with His will and command and through His power. Not for this writer a god who interplays with others in a complicated scenario. God but speaks and His will is accomplished. It is God's world and only He has a say in it. This stresses that all that takes place results from God's word. We may investigate a hundred scientific hypotheses, but behind the outworking of them all we hear the words, 'God said'.

Eight actions will now be detailed in a 'six day' framework. The making of light and darkness; of water below and above the atmosphere and therefore of the atmosphere itself; of land and sea; and then of plant life. Then sun, moon and stars to control light and darkness; fish and birds to inhabit water and atmosphere; animals to inhabit land and sea and to partake of the plant life; and then finally man. The point being made is that in each case God made provision for what was to come, and that that provision is from Him. We may complicate the process by our theories, we cannot evade the fact. Note the parallels between first and fourth, second and fifth, and third and sixth, while at the same time there is continual progression. Note also that the eight resultants are fitted into a six period (yom) framework. It was necessary for all to be depicted as within the divine 'seven' in order to bring out its perfection. To ancient man anything else was unthinkable. Even the seven spoke of God.

1.4-5. 'And God saw the light, that it was good, and God separated the light from the darkness, and God called the light day and the darkness he called night. And there was evening and there was morning one day.'

'The light, that it was good'. It is not that God was in any doubt about the outcome of His word. These words are just to confirm that His word achieved what He wanted to achieve. He

saw that it was as good as He knew it would be. His creation was in perfect harmony with His desires.

Now He separates light from darkness so that there will be periods of both, and the periods of light He calls 'day' (yom) and the periods of darkness He calls 'night'. So the term 'yom' is used in this sentence with two meanings. In the one it describes the periods of light, in the other it describes the whole first period of creation. This reminds us that even today long periods of light in the Arctic are called an 'Arctic day'. The term 'day' is not quite so circumscribed as some suggest, even in our scientifically oriented era.

The truth is that this verse presents a problem for any 'natural day' view (see introduction). Not only is 'yom' shown to be capable of different meanings, and therefore not quite as specific a word as some would suggest, but also total darkness, where there is no light, and never has been, is called 'evening'. This is a strange and unnatural use of the term evening. Surely evening, in its natural meaning, is the gloaming going into night, not the total darkness before there was light? Evening was the time for rest and relaxation, but when morning came it was the time for action. So in creation's story, having created all things, God rested and relaxed and then He acted. So in each yom, evening is the time before God acted.

Furthermore, are we then to assume that having created the heavens and the earth He waited the length of a so-called 'natural night, before saying 'let there be light', and then produced a 'day' of 'normal' length? Surely not. God works in His own time. This 'day' is certainly extraordinary. At first, light pervades the darkness, and then God acts to separate them so as to form periods of light and darkness (of 'days' and 'nights') which are not said to be of any determinate length. Light is made the basic yeast of the universe and of the world, and then it becomes something which contrasts with the darkness. Is this a natural day? It is rather the principle of light and darkness, and its fluctuation, that is established here. He made the process. There is no suggestion that it is formulated into time cycles. That is something that he stresses happened on 'day four', when the sun specifically determines the length of a day.

So we are asked by some to assume that God, for the first three 'days, artificially made light appear according to the time span that will be fixed on day four. If this is the natural meaning of the words it appears a little strange. Surely the truth is that we are meant by the writer to see these first periods as being accomplished in God's time, and thus within the time span of *His* days? And thus that the 'evening and the morning' of the first 'day', and of each 'day', is simply the use of a man-oriented description to indicate start and finish and to describe a completed time period, the length of which we do not know, indicating the completion of the first stage of God's purposes. God's nights results in God's days. This is not pandering to science, but simply using God-given intelligence in considering the narrative. What the writer is saying is that God is laying the basis for what is to follow, in His own way. If 'evening' is not used in its 'natural meaning', why should 'day' be?

'There was evening and there was morning one day.' The Hebrew day was measured from sunset to sunset, and this thus indicated the passing of a 'day'. But on this first day there had been no evening, unless we see it as merely a period of waiting and relaxing in readiness for the next act. And it had not resulted from a sunset, for there was no light. The phrase is metaphorical describing an evening and morning of God's activity expressed as a day of God, concerning which a thousand years is but a watch in the night (Psalm 90.4).

1.6 'And God said "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.'

Up to this time there has been no atmosphere, for creation is seen as being one blanket of 'primeval water'. All is 'liquid'; all is primeval, unshaped, formless matter, but now given

body by 'light'. And now God acts to produce an atmosphere with 'water' below and clouds above.

The word for 'expanse' or 'firmament' is *raqia* which originally indicated 'something trodden on and stamped out', and then 'to make thin like a piece of metal beaten into shape', and thus 'to spread out, to expand'.

The ancients saw the water come down through the atmosphere from the heavens, but we know from later descriptions that they recognised that this came from the clouds (e.g. Deuteronomy 11.11; Judges 5.4; 2 Samuel 22.12; 1 Kings 18.45; Job 36.27). And people then as now had climbed mountains and found themselves above the clouds and above the rain (we must stop thinking of them as stupid).

Thus the writer is not suggesting that there is a physical cupola somehow holding up the water. He is using a vivid metaphorical description to describe a reality, water held above by something 'stretched out' by God, and water below. He does not pretend to understand the mechanics of it, he does not try to explain it. He simply describes what he sees. He just knows that God has made some way of holding the water up. He sees that it is so, and He knows that it is so at the behest of God.

The Bible writers give many descriptions of this 'firmament'. It is described in terms of being like a transparent work of sapphire stone (Exodus 24.10), in terms of a molten mirror (Job 37.18), in terms of the curtains of a tent (Isaiah 40.22; 54.2), but all were vividly descriptive, not an attempt to explain the universe.

We must not over-literalise the descriptions of poetic minds and make them hold views that they did not hold, however simple minded we make them to be. They saw things as an artist sees them, not a scientist. Their very 'simplicity' and practicality of mind prevented them from trying to formulate scientific theories, but that did not prevent their ideas from being profound. This writer was not investigating world phenomena, he was taken up with what God was doing. He was not analysing 'how', he was asking 'Who?' and 'Why?', profounder questions far. The how he left to God.

1.7-8 '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 Sky (or Heaven). And there was evening and there was morning the second day.'

So by His word the waters were separated to produce atmosphere, and the waters above were held up by His 'sky'. And it was all done by His word. As we have already seen the writer knew about clouds and rain. He is using metaphorical language to describe what he sees.

The first 'yom' has established light as the basis of the positive aspects of the universe, and has established light and darkness and called them 'day' and 'night'. The second 'yom' has established an atmosphere above the waters so that fish and birds might enjoy their benefit, and He has called the upper canopy Sky (or Heaven). The giving of names by God is an indication of His authority over them. Man will have no control over them. They are outside man's control.

1.9-10. 'And God said, "Let the waters that are under the heaven be gathered together in one place and let the dry land appear, and it was so. And God called the dry land 'eretz' and the waters that were gathered together he called seas. And God saw that it was good.'

As with the word 'yom' the word 'eretz' is not fixed in meaning. Originally 'eretz' was the whole earth including the waters (1.1-2), now it is the dry land as opposed to the waters. It can

mean the earth as opposed to the heavens (1.1-2), land as opposed to sea (as here), and within that definition a particular area of land. Thus the people of Israel were later the 'people of the land (erezt)', which meant Israel. As 'yom' means a period of time, so 'erezt' means the idea of somewhere to dwell.

God is here causing dry land 'to appear' in preparation for animals and man. It was already there but comes out of the sea. The birds too will benefit, as will many river fish. Again the writer expresses satisfaction with the situation by saying that God sees it as good. He is satisfied with the provision He has made for man. Thus we should be filled with praise at His wonderful provision.

It will be noted that the dry land is seen as already being under the waters. It is intrinsic within the waters. This is not a new act of creation, but a shaping by His word of what is already there. From the formlessness He produces form. From the shapeless He produces shape. But those who see 'evolution' at work here must recognise that it happens under God's command and control.

So the dry land is surrounded by water, and there is abundant water above. All are held in their place and controlled by the hand of God. But let God withdraw His hand and total inundation will result, as later it will (7-8).

So now we have light and shape and differentiation, the building blocks of life are being put in place. But darkness ever threatens to envelop all things if God withdraws His word, and shapelessness will overcome what has been formed unless God sustains it.

1.11-13. 'And God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, herb yielding seed, and fruit tree bearing fruit in which is its seed, each according to its kind upon the earth." And it was so. And the earth brought forth vegetation, herb yielding seed according to its kind, and tree bearing fruit in which is its seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And there was evening and there was morning the third day.'

Again God commands and then what He commands takes place. Now God provides the sustenance that animals and man will require. Notice the stress on the diversity of what He produces. There is to be plenty of choice. When we enjoy our varied diets we need to be grateful for the way in which He made provision for us.

Furthermore the sustenance is self-sustaining. The world is self-propagating. The verb 'brought forth' indicates that what comes forth is already an essential part of what God has already created. As far as the writer is concerned the earth produces it through the activity of God. This is not a new creation, but the outworking of what is already intrinsically there in God's first creation. This is seen by some as indicating the process of evolution, but again it must be noted that if this is so it was at God's command. There is no place here for a blind process, it was specifically a process taking place under God's designing hand. We may read what we like into it. We may fit in our pet theories. But behind all is God.

There is no suggestion that vegetation is 'created'. It comes forth from the earth by natural process under the hand of God. It is a part of the first three days, preparation for the introduction of life. Unlike the Canaanites, who saw vegetation in terms of dying and rising again, the Israelite saw it as part of a continual process with its idiosyncrasies of growth and adaptation and production of further growth as being controlled by the hand of God.

We are not to see here 'forced growth'. Time is given for the vegetation to spring forth and grow, producing after their kinds. The picture is of steady progress from wonderful beginnings.

So after three 'days' the world has been made ready for its essential function, the production of life. From the first 'day' there have been periods of darkness and light, but the very fact that controllers are needed demonstrate that they did not originally appear in the controlled way necessary for man's full benefit. If 'days' were 'normal' at this stage there would be no need for a controller. Land has risen from the sea, and atmosphere has been instated. There is water above as well as water below, an essential for the propagation of plant life. The plants have been brought forth by the earth, and are reproducing themselves on the earth. All has been prepared. Now we move into the second phase.

1.14-15. 'And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs and for seasons, for days and years, and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth". And it was so.'

From now on periods of light and darkness will be determined by the action of sun and moon. No longer will darkness permanently threaten for it is controlled. It is these lights which will now determine the length of days and years. To ancient man his ideas of time were ruled by the heavenly lights. They were the signs that guided his thoughts on the passage of time. From them he knew the seasons. Days and months and years resulted from their activity. And it was they under God which ensured that permanent, enveloping darkness did not prevail.

They were also the signs to men of God's continued provision for them. While vegetation has been able to grow without these cycles, it will be better for man that these functions are systematised. No more definite statement could be made that before this act days, years and seasons had not existed as we know them. But now those seasons will be the guarantee of the means of existence, and later the rainbow will be God's sign of their permanence for man (Genesis 8.22; 9.12-17).

Furthermore these lights will give light to the inhabitants of earth. The sun will enable them to go about their daily round. At night the moon will guide the hunter and the shepherd. But the main occurrence and emphasis of the fourth day is that the 'lights' are called on to establish the times and seasons. Time and provision is systematised and guaranteed.

1.16- 19 '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 heaven to give light upon the world, and 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.'

Note that the activity on the fourth day is that of the establishing of the lights in the heavens to fulfil their functions. So the first sentence need not necessarily indicate that the Sun and Moon were created at this stage. Indeed we have already been told that God made 'the heavens' in the beginning. Now the heavens begin to impinge on earth. As we have seen throughout, God first created and then from that creation produced what He wanted from what had already been established. Thus the actual creation of the lights may be seen as having taken place when creation took place almost at the beginning and when light was first 'drawn out' from the primeval stuff. Now they are being brought forth for their tasks, and seen by the world for the first time as the atmosphere thins.

We would say in English, 'Now God *had* made the two great lights', but Hebrew verbs do not have the pluperfect. Hebrew is not specific as to time. Tenses in Hebrew express either completed action (Perfect tense) or incomplete action (Imperfect tense) without saying when they took place. Here the tense is perfect to declare an action which is complete, the making of the great lights by God, at whatever time He made them. This is as an introduction to what He is about to do, the establishing of them in the heavens to control time and seasons as required

for life. He had made them to rule, now He establishes their rule.

Notice that the lights are deliberately unnamed. This is in contrast with what has gone before. They are but tools for God's purposes, inanimate objects not worthy of a name. And the stars are but an afterthought hardly worthy of mention. This is deliberate. In the light of the worship of Sun, Moon and stars by the surrounding nations, the writer wants their position to be quite clear. They are but 'lamps' in the sky.

It is significant with regard to this that 'naming' occurs in the first three preparatory days, and that in days five and six what is made is 'blessed' as living and reproductive, but the 'lights' are neither named nor blessed. God does not give them names indicating their background nature. They control from afar. They are not actively involved, nor are they living. They are 'formed' not 'created'. All thought of their divinity or importance except as devices is deliberately excluded.

Their task is clearly stated. They mechanically ruled day and night and separated light from darkness. The latter must mean as related to the length of day and night or else it is just a repetition of 'day one'. Thus up to this point there have been no evenings or mornings in a literal sense. The phrase 'and the evening and the morning were of the --- day' must therefore be metaphorical, denoting beginning and ending (and will continue to be so. They are God's days, not earthly days).

1.20- 23. 'And God said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that has life, and let birds fly above the earth on the face of the expanse of the heaven". And God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them and said, "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.'

We note here a remarkable fact. Firstly that God commanded the creatures to be 'brought forth' by the waters, and secondly that He 'created' them. Thus there would appear to be a twofold process. The first, adaptation from what was in the waters, the second, creation of something from nothing. The creatures are to be seen as a part of that from which they come, and yet also to be seen as being distinctive. Thus the life of living creatures is distinguished from plant life. It is new and unique. They receive their life from God. As with the vegetation God determines that there will be many 'kinds' so as to provide diversity. These 'kinds' are the result of God's activity.

'Living creatures' - nephesh chayah. The word nephesh comes from Akkadian 'napishtu' where it meant throat. That is where the breath was seen as coming from and thus it developed to mean the life within and 'alive', thus 'living things' The whole phrase therefore means 'living things that have life'.

'The great sea monsters'. The writer was aware, as all men were, of huge creatures in the sea. To many they must have seemed terrifying. But he knew that they were creatures of God. Many ancient myths spoke of semi-divine sea monsters (tannin) who caused distress and chaos, (and the Psalmists use the ideas pictorially to demonstrate God's control over creation), but the writer wants it to be clear that they are no such thing. They are made by God and they are under His control and will.

'Brought forth abundantly' from the root 'to swarm', thus things which appear in swarms. The waters were filled with swarming things.

‘And every winged bird.’ First the fish and then the birds. These filled the waters and the area under the firmament (verse 7).

‘And God saw that it was good.’ This brings out God’s personal interest in what He has produced. He is, as it were, making sure that the world into which man will come is a good place for him to be. Yes, even the sea-monsters are good in His eyes. They are no enemy to Him.

Then God blesses the creatures. Again this is new, stressing that a new distinctive beginning has been achieved. The vegetation was not ‘blessed’. The heavenly lights were not blessed. The creatures are seen as in some special way distinctive and personal. The main blessing is that those who have received life can pass on life. They can be fruitful, and multiply. Sexual functions, rightly used, are blessed by God to the furtherance of life. A clear distinction is made between animate life and inanimate life. Animism, the belief that inanimate objects have souls, is here rejected by God. Such objects are not ‘blessed’ for they have no ‘life’.

1.24-25 ‘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 cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.’

We note here that God is not said to ‘create’ these living creatures. Thus their created life must in some way be derived from the previously mentioned living creatures (v.21). This shows a continuity of a process which began with the latter.

Again it is stressed that God planned a diversity of creatures, each according to its kind. Diversity in creation is not blind chance, but results from the purpose of God. Note that His plan included both animals that would later be domesticated, and what we would call ‘wild animals’. Man’s good is clearly in mind.

The creation includes ‘everything that creeps’, including the tiny scavengers that clean up the world. All have their place in God’s creation.

Now we come to the moment that it was all leading up to, the creation of man in God’s image. Everything that has gone before was subordinate to this. It is for man that the world has been made.

1.26 ‘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”.’

‘Let us make man.’ The thought is intimate and personal, and carefully considered. Here will be one who has connections with the infinite, and Heaven is called on to consider this special act of creation, and indeed to participate in it to some extent, for it will affect them too. But as v.27 makes clear, ultimately it was the act of God Himself.

So the next question that this verse raises is, who is the ‘us’? The answer is not difficult. We can compare its use in Isaiah 6.8 when God is surrounded by seraphim. The writer could only have in mind the spiritual beings, called in the Old Testament ‘the sons of God’ (Genesis 6.2; Job 1.6; 2.1; 38.7 - see also 1 Kings 22.19 etc; Isaiah 6.2 etc), from whom came His messengers (‘angels’) that He would send to earth, and one of whom was Satan himself (Job 1.6). In Hebrew the term ‘sons of --’ indicates not those who have been born from, but ‘those who are connected with’ or sometimes ‘those who behave like’. Thus these ‘sons of God’ are those

connected with the sphere in which God operates rather than in the sphere in which man operates. They are not literally His sons.

This brings out the meaning of the remainder of the verse. Man was to have the 'image and likeness of the heavenly beings, of the elohim'. While the word 'elohim' usually means God it can, as we have seen, also refer to 'out of this world beings' e.g. 1 Samuel 28.13. Man was thus to have heavenly status and a spiritual and moral nature capable of communion with God, of active choice and of moral behaviour. While in one sense an earthly creature, bound to earth, he would also have a spiritual nature which could reach into the heaven of heavens.

Note that God said 'OUR image'. Thus He associated Himself in this with the heavenly beings. The image in which man is made is not the unique image of God but that which He shares with the elohim. This justifies the above interpretation. Man is made a spiritual being.

But the idea of 'in our image' possibly also includes the idea that man is placed in a position of dominion. He is to stand in the place of God and His court. In a later period ancient kings would erect their images in subservient countries as a reminder of their authority. In Zechariah 12.8 'the house of David (the royal house) shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them'. In the same way man is here seen as present to represent God's court on earth. This was what warranted his being placed over all that God had made.

We might differentiate by saying that as the image of God he stands in God's place and has dominion, while as the likeness of the elohim he can communicate with God in spiritual terms, but the separation must not be pressed. The two ideas are inter-linked and merge into one. 'Likeness' is intended to limit 'image'. Later 'like God' signifies 'knowing good and evil' stressing the moral aspect of the likeness (Genesis 3.5).

(As mentioned the phrase 'sons of God' does not suggest direct relationship, but that such beings are closely connected with God. The Old Testament can, for example, also speak of 'sons of Belial' (Judges 19.22; 1 Sam 2.12; 2 Sam 23.6) as describing those who behave like Belial. They are not literally seen as being born from Belial).

'Let us make man (adam).' The word 'adam' always appears in the singular. It is a collective noun signifying mankind as a whole. But the verse goes on to say 'and let *them* have dominion'. Man's procreation is immediately in view. Sovereignty is not given to one man but to all mankind.

'Over all the earth.' Man's dominion is not limited to the living creatures. He is to dominate the earth for its good.

1.27 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them.'

Now man's privilege is stressed. He is created in God's own image. Notice the stress on the fact that he is 'created', deliberately repeated three times in the verse. Three represents completeness. Again this is something totally new which does not come from what existed before. While his body is of the earth, his essential being is made in the likeness of God and the angels. However the link with the 'sons of God' in the previous verse shows that we must not read this as the 'divine spark' in man. Man does not share divinity. He shares the spiritual nature of the 'elohim', which they share with God.

Yet, in order that God's intimate concern and interest may be shown, the writer in this verse stresses that man is made in God's own image. The warning has been given that we must not apply this too rigidly, but he nevertheless wants us to recognise the privilege that is ours. We

are on the heavenly side rather than the earthly side.

Note also the mention of the female. Both were made to share the task of dominion. Both share in the image, the privilege and the responsibility. So from the beginning it is stressed that the woman is not inferior to the man, and they are equally instructed by God. The fact that man's new nature is 'created' demonstrates that we must not see this as a receiving divine life. Note that there is really no ground for arguing that they were both necessarily created 'at the same time' in contrast with chapter 2, any more than we need see all the animals as made at the same time. The point is that He made them, not when they were made.

1.28 '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 face of the earth".'

Like the living creatures man is 'blessed'. They are to produce children and populate the earth. This again brings out that sexual functions, rightly used, are blessed by God. The verb 'subdue' is strong, as is 'have dominion'. The latter means 'trample down'. There is no suggestion that man's task will be easy. The subjugation of the animal world will be hard and demanding. But man has been given what is necessary for victory and control.

So man's function is twofold. To people the earth and to be master over it. But privilege brings responsibility and in that man failed.

1.29-30 '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.'

God reminds man that He has made full provision for them, providing a storehouse that will propagate itself. Man may eat of the seeds of plants and of fruit. They are God's provision for them, and are provided in abundance for their enjoyment. They will not have to be fought for or toiled for, for they reproduce themselves. These two verses are the purpose to which the whole narrative leads up. They are God's covenant with man around which the context is built.

So the whole narrative is built around this covenant with man in verses 28-30. The whole chapter is the historical background preparing for this covenant in which Man is given his instructions, and has explained to him his purpose and the provision that God has made for him.

Why was there a creation in the first place? It was so that man could be created and could multiply, enjoying the full benefits of God's provision. God has fulfilled His responsibility in making full provision for man and by giving him life. Man's responsibility on the other hand is to watch over the world that God has made.

The suggestion is also here that God's 'intention' was that the world would progress without bloodshed. Both animals and man could live from the fruit and vegetation of the earth. 'Nature red in tooth and claw' is therefore seen as an aberration from God's purposes. What caused such a change of situation we are not told, but the strong language of v.28 suggests it already has to be contended with when man appears on the scene. The animals need to be 'subdued', to be tamed. Thus 'nature' is already getting out of hand. In the 'ideal' world of the future there would no longer be bloodshed (Isaiah 11.6-9; 65.25).

There are differences of viewpoint as to when 'mankind' became 'Adam'. The answer is found

in when he became a worshipping creature. It was then, whenever that was, that the image of God' was revealed. All viewpoints seem, however, to be agreed that mankind came from a single original pair.

1.31 '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 world has been prepared for man and man can be satisfied because God is satisfied with it from start to finish. His final day of work is over. He has now completed His work satisfactorily and can leave it in man's hands. Whatever happens it will not be His fault. Up to now things have been 'good'. Now it is all 'very good'. This stress clearly has in mind the following chapters when that 'goodness' will be marred by the effects of the fall.

2.1 'Thus the heavens and the earth were finished and all the host of them.'

This use of the word 'host' is unusual. Here it signifies the totality of creation, including sun, moon and stars, the different types of vegetation, fish, creatures and animals, and man, everything contained therein. Nothing remains unfinished. Every part has its place and it is completed to the last dot.

Note that 'the heavens and the earth' refers back to verse 1. Thus what has been described is the detail of the fulfilment of that verse. This would seem to confirm that 'heavens' in 1.1 primarily meant the material heavens

2.2-3 'And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had made, and he rested (ceased work) on the seventh day from all the work which he had made. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because that in it God rested from all his work which God had created and made.'

Note the distinction again brought out between 'created' and 'made'. There is a clear distinction in activity. 'Finished the work which He had made.' It was complete. We would say 'had finished'. Nothing remained to be done.

It is interesting that no ending to this day is ever mentioned. No reference is made to 'the evening and the morning of the seventh day'. This must surely be seen as deliberate. God's 'week' is over and there will be no repetition. The seventh 'day' does not end, for there is no eighth day. The work of creation is complete and God has no further work to do. He has seen it as 'very good'. This is yet another indication that we are not thinking of 'natural' days. The suggestion of God resting is anthropomorphic. It simply means He ceases His creative activity. He 'ceases work'. There is no indication that God is tired.

There may be the thought here that God has now appointed someone to take care of His creation so that the necessity for His direct action has ceased. The writer may indeed be thinking, 'and then His rest was broken by man's failure!'

It should especially be noted that the description of the final day is solely in the writer's words. *God does not Himself act or speak.* It is the writer who describes the seventh day as the culmination of the work of creation, as the 'day' on which God 'finished his work, and rested'. Previously when God is said to have blessed, this is followed by His words explaining the blessing, but there are no words of explanation here. It is *the writer* who sees it as a day blessed and hallowed by God because it was the day when the work was finished.

But notice that he does not connect this with the observance by his people of the Sabbath (probably from *sabat* = cease, desist), the day when they too cease work. There is in fact no

suggestion that the pattern is incumbent upon mankind, and it is noteworthy that no suggestion of the Sabbath appears elsewhere in the book of Genesis. The Sabbath would later arise from this idea, not this idea from the Sabbath.

The question whether man was able to keep count of days and observe the seventh day before he was able to count and calculate does not therefore arise. It is only later when the account of creation in six ‘days’ followed by a day of rest has become an accepted part of worship, that recognition of the day follows, and it is seen as applicable to daily life. We are never told when this was. Thus there are no specific grounds for seeing this as ‘the institution of the Sabbath’.

‘So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.’ This is the writer’s comment. It may refer to a later gradual recognition of the seventh day as a day for worship, so that it has become officially recognised by the writer’s time, or indeed to the later sanctifying of the day in the time of Moses, for it is not said that God blessed it at the time, as He had the living creatures. Or it may simply meant that as the day on which nothing further needed to be done it was a blessed day, was uniquely different from the others.

The first known application of the Sabbath as a strict day of rest is in the time of Moses (Exodus 16). There the people were gathering the manna provided by God on a daily basis, and they were forbidden to keep any until the morning after. But on the sixth day they were to gather two days supply (v.5). This is the first introduction of what would later (Exodus 20.11) be instituted in God’s covenant, the day special to God. When the leaders of the people come to Moses to point out that the people are gathering two days supply on the sixth day (gathering for more than one day has previously caused problems), Moses at that point explains the law of the Sabbath.

Had the Sabbath already been strictly in practise these leaders would have known this and would not have expected people to gather on the Sabbath. This suggests that, although up to this stage it may have been generally observed by custom, it was at this stage that it became in its strict state a newly ordained institution. Later God would relate it to the ‘days’ of creation (Exodus 20.11). The wording with which it is expressed in Exodus 20.11 suggests that by that stage this creation account had been written under God’s inspiration, and could thus be used as a pattern of, and justification for, the Sabbath. Note that Deuteronomy 5.12-15 and Ezekiel 20.12-21 stress the connection of the giving of the Sabbaths with the deliverance from Egypt.

So in Exodus 16 the leaders on the one hand are not aware of the strict observance of the Sabbath, but the people on the other are aware of some kind of distinction, suggesting a conception which was not yet fully formed.

This does not necessarily mean that there had been no recognition of the seventh day previously, only that it had not previously been strictly related to total cessation of work. It may well be, possibly again arising from the Creation story, that the seventh day was previously looked on as special , although we have nowhere else any earlier indication of it. The Sabbath was in fact unique to Israel and is not paralleled elsewhere (despite numerous attempts to suggest otherwise). There is no ‘race-memory’ of a Sabbath.

(The Babylonian ‘sabbatum’ was not in fact a day of ceasing from work, as various labour contracts demonstrate, and those things that were excluded on the ‘sabbatum’ were excluded because of the danger of ‘ill luck’ not because they were work. Furthermore the Babylonians had a ‘five day’ week).

2.4 ‘These are the generations of (or this is the history of) the heavens and the earth when they were created.’

This apparent colophon suggests that the account was once recorded separately on a clay or stone tablet.