

# Recovering Genesis One from Scientific and Societal Misunderstanding

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**Abstract:** The Genesis 1 creation story is an enigma to modern society because it reads like a historical account, and yet does not accord with scientific descriptions of origins. The cosmic temple model explains some of the puzzling features of Genesis 1, including its six/seven-day structure. However, it leaves many unanswered questions, including the watery beginning of the earth, in contrast to the desert-like beginning of creation in Genesis 2. Nevertheless, the watery beginning and seven-day structure of Genesis 1 provide links with the biblical and Mesopotamian Flood stories. In addition, the stages of creation in Genesis 1 seem to closely mirror the re-creation of the earth after the Flood. This leads to the suggestion here that Genesis 1 was revealed as a series of visions inspired by the experience of Noah's Flood. Inspiration of the creation story by the cosmic Flood would have grounded the account in historical reality, and also served to intensify its spiritual message. However, this implies that attempts to find concordance between Genesis 1 and scientific accounts of origins are mistaken. Instead, seeing Genesis 1 as a True Myth inspired by the Flood imparts the reality of God's creation at a deeper level of human experience than a rational scientific explanation could ever achieve.

**Keywords:** creation; flood; history; spiritual intensification; true myth; watery chaos

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“Christianity as a faith is fundamentally grounded in history.” When we say this, we mean that God’s principal means of revelation, his eternal Word, was manifested in the historical person of Jesus; but we also mean that the life of Jesus is authoritatively brought to us through the Bible. According to Christian orthodoxy, Jesus is revealed to us through the eye-witness accounts of the apostles, which are recorded in the New Testament. This means that, to believers, the New Testament equates to what we would normally think of as history: an accurate record of the life of Jesus and the early Church. However, history to historians is a bit more complicated.

Human history arises from the contested arena of human affairs, where people (especially powerful people) can make false claims to further their own interests. If these false claims are recorded, they become part of the historical record, and must be sifted by historians for their accuracy or otherwise. A good example is found in Matthew 28, which records the bribing of the soldiers who guarded Jesus’ tomb, so that they would make the false claim that Jesus’ disciples stole his body. As Christian believers, we accept that the Gospel story is an accurate record of the false story circulated by the temple priesthood.

Christian orthodoxy also maintains that the principal purpose of the Old Testament is to witness to Jesus, in the sense that it points forwards to Jesus prophetically, but also tells the story of how God worked in the world to prepare humanity for Jesus’ coming (e.g., Luke 24:27). It affirms that God worked through human agents, the patriarchs and the prophets, who served God as a demonstration of their faith. Perhaps the clearest statement of this principle is made in Hebrews 11, which summarises some of these acts of faith as models for the letter’s readers. If the acts of faith were not real, these models would lose much of their power, because they could not then serve as testimonies to the God who vindicates the faith of his people.

The list of the faithful in Hebrews 11 begins with Abel, Enoch, Noah, and Abraham, before going on to mention many of the later prophets. However, the New Testament as a whole clearly recognises Abraham as the “Father of Faith.” This is affirmed in the letters of Paul,

but also in the recorded dialogue between Jesus and the Jews (e.g., John 8). This affirmation is made despite the lack of any testimony of the existence of Abraham from outside the Bible. In contrast, the story of the Flood hero (biblical Noah), and his obedience to God in building the Ark, is recorded not only in the Bible but in also in several ancient Mesopotamian sources.

Was Noah's Flood a real event? Contrary to much scholarly opinion, there is considerable evidence for Noah's Flood as a real event, whereas disbelief in the reality of the Flood is largely based on misunderstandings of the texts.<sup>1</sup> For example, Genesis describes the enormous dimensions of the Ark, but does not say that it was a ship. The horizontal dimensions of Noah's Ark correspond to the area of a one-acre field, the same size as the craft described in the Mesopotamian sources. On the other hand, the height of the Ark most likely describes the height of a reed-built shrine, built on a raft surfaced with asphalt that was more like a floating farmyard than a container ship.<sup>2</sup> Thus, by focusing on the commonality of the Mesopotamian and biblical sources, we obtain a version of the Flood story that is historically credible. This historicity of biblical faith is important for modern society because it builds bridges with the scientific method; both are founded on the accurate recording of events by human eye-witnesses.

## Genesis 1 as History?

The example of Noah's Ark suggests that Genesis may come closer to an eye-witness account of ancient events than is generally supposed. But where does this leave Genesis 1? Genesis 1 (taken to include the first four verses of the second chapter) describes the creation of the cosmos, including humankind, in what appears to be six human days; but this does not seem to be scientifically possible.

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- 1 Alan P. Dickin, "New Historical and Geological Constraints on the Date of Noah's Flood," *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 70:3 (2018): 176–177.
  - 2 Alan P. Dickin, "The Design of Noah's Ark and Its Significance for Biblical Faith," *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 74:2 (2022): 92–105.

Based on its direct and straightforward manner, Genesis 1 appears to be a factual description of the creative process. Indeed, this understanding seems to be specifically endorsed by the text of the Fourth Commandment: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:11). Because this text comes from the foundations of the Mosaic Law and is attributed in Exodus to the direct words of God, it has often been taken as a statement that God made the universe in six human days, and therefore represents a “historical” description of the creation of the cosmos. However, such an understanding has also been a stumbling block throughout the life of the Church.

Augustine warned that a naïve interpretation of Genesis 1 could provoke ridicule of the Church.<sup>3</sup> He believed that the universe was actually created in an instant, but that God described the process of creation over six days as a vehicle for communicating this abstract idea to the unlearned.<sup>4</sup> However, if the account of Genesis 1 was an “accommodation” to human understanding, Augustine was unable to explain the enigma of why God apparently created light on day 1, three days before he made the sun.<sup>5</sup>

Augustine’s confusion was seized upon by Martin Luther in his own commentary on Genesis, where he admonished that if we do not understand the days of creation, we should trust in God and admit our ignorance.<sup>6</sup> Hence, both Luther and Calvin affirmed the literal creation of the cosmos in six human days, a belief followed by many modern fundamentalists. However, these modern followers are probably unaware that the Reformers also believed that the sun rotated around the earth and that the moon was literally on fire.<sup>7</sup>

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3 Augustine of Hippo, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.19, trans. John H. Taylor, *Ancient Christian Writers* 41 (New York: Newman Press, 1982).

4 Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.14.

5 Augustine, *The City of God* 11.6–7.

6 Martin Luther, *Commentary on Genesis 1*, in *Luther on the Creation: A Critical and Devotional Commentary on Genesis*, ed. John N. Lenker (Luther in All Lands Co., 1904), 41.

7 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, in *Calvin’s Commentaries*,

Others have attempted to find concordance between science and Genesis 1, either by interspersing literal days of creation between long geological ages, or by understanding the “days” of creation as stretching out over geological eons. Hugh Miller attempted a geologically informed nineteenth-century presentation of this idea,<sup>8</sup> while its most prominent modern proponent is Hugh Ross.<sup>9</sup> However, such attempts always involve violence to the text, forcing it into a pattern that was clearly not intended by the ancient author. For example, Ross proposed that the darkness of the early Earth (Genesis 1:2) was caused by an opaque blanket of orbital debris. However, scientific analysis of this model shows that such a blanket would have effectively insulated the earth, evaporating the oceans and creating a sea of molten rock instead.<sup>10</sup>

## The Cosmic Temple Model

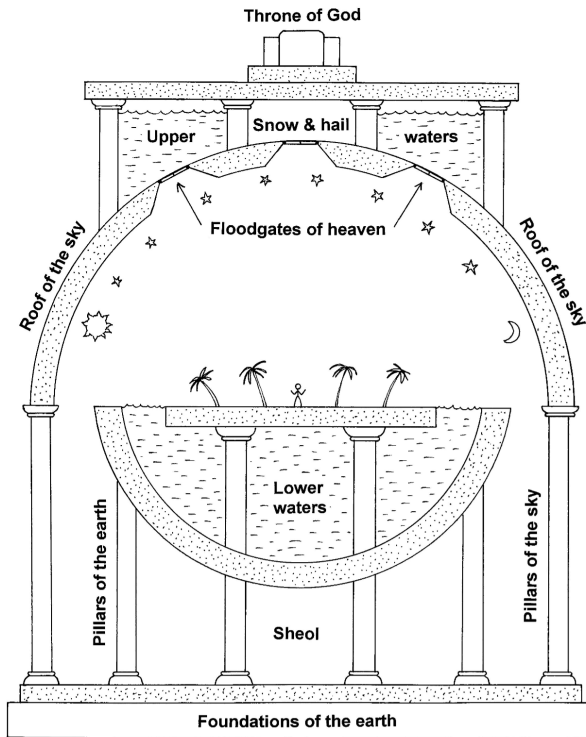
The difficulties in finding concordance between Genesis 1 and a scientific account of origins suggests that more attention should be devoted to finding the reasons for this discrepancy. The cosmic temple model explains this lack of concordance by setting the Genesis 1 creation story in an ancient cultic environment. For example, John Walton argued that Genesis 1 describes “the period of time devoted to the inauguration of the functions of the temple, and perhaps also its annual reenactment.”<sup>11</sup>

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vol 1, ed. John King (Calvin Translation Society, 1847; reprinted Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), 46.

- 8 Andrew Brown, *The Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2014), 248.
- 9 Hugh N. Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation-Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: Navpress Publishing Group, 1994).
- 10 Chushiro Hayashi, Kiyoshi Nakazawa, and Hiroshi Mizuno, “Earth’s Melting Due to the Blanketing Effect of the Primordial Dense Atmosphere,” *Earth and Planetary Science Letters* 43 (1979): 22–28, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0012-821X\(79\)90152-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0012-821X(79)90152-3).
- 11 John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 92.

The idea of the cosmos as a giant temple-like edifice is expressed by the use of building metaphors to describe the cosmos in several biblical texts. These accounts emphasise architectural elements, such as the foundations of the earth (Psalms 102 and 104), the pillars of the earth (1 Samuel 2:8), the pillars of the sky (Job 26:11), and the roof of the sky (Job 37:18). Taken together, they seem to describe the cosmos as a kind of giant building with a three-tier structure (Figure 1) consisting of the heavens, the earth, and the underworld (*sheol*).<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1.** The ancient three-tier conception of the cosmos, based on descriptions in the books of Genesis, Job, and Psalms.

12 Paul H. Seely, "The Three-Storied Universe," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* 21:1 (1969): 18–22.

This is an attractive idea, but when we try to understand the historical context of the cosmic temple inauguration and its reenactment, serious problems are encountered. For example, it seems clear that the cosmic temple is a metaphor, which must arise from the experience of a tangible human-built temple, where the hypothesised reenactment presumably occurred. However, this identification begs the question of what temple institution inspired the metaphor.

Walton noted that the Temple of Solomon had a seven-day inauguration ritual, which might fit with the seven days of Genesis 1.<sup>13</sup> However, if the inauguration of Solomon's temple also represented the inauguration of the cosmic temple, this would imply that the ancient priestly author saw Solomon's Temple as preceding the giving of the law, since the Fourth Commandment invokes the creation week as inspiration for the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8–11). This is precisely what Julius Wellhausen proposed, in what is normally termed the Development Hypothesis.<sup>14</sup> He argued that the Law was not given until after the building of the temple, but the price for this view was to treat the whole story of Moses, the Exodus, and the tabernacle in the wilderness as invented history. Obviously, this flies directly in the face of Hebrews 11, which claims Moses as one of the heroes of faith. Indeed, we may judge the orthodoxy of Wellhausen's position from the fact that he resigned from his university chair of theology because his teachings were undermining the training of students for Christian ministry.<sup>15</sup>

## Genesis 1 as a Revelation to Moses?

As orthodox believers, we may take the history of divine revelation in the Bible seriously, but if we do not understand the *compositional* setting of Genesis 1, we may still not properly grasp its meaning. In

13 Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 90.

14 Rudolf Smend, "Julius Wellhausen and His *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*," in *Semeia 25: Julius Wellhausen and His Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, ed. Douglas A Knight (Chico, CA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1983), 1–20.

15 Roger W. L. Moberly, "Theological Interpretation, Second Naiveté, and the Rediscovery of the Old Testament," *Anglican Theological Review* 99 (2017): 651–670, <https://doi.org/10.1177/000332861709900402>.

a search for this compositional setting, Walton speculated that Moses himself might have composed the Genesis 1 creation account, even though his role for most of Genesis was more as a transmitter of earlier traditions.<sup>16</sup> In this suggestion Walton followed Duane Garrett (and earlier, Hugh Miller), who suggested that Genesis 1 might describe a vision or series of visions seen by Moses.<sup>17</sup> For example, the six-plus-one day structure of Genesis 1 might reflect events described in Exodus (24:16), when the cloud of God's presence covered Mount Sinai for six days, followed by a seventh day on which God called to Moses from within the cloud.

Although this idea provides a valid literary basis for the structure of Genesis 1, it is much more likely that the events at Sinai were *recapitulating* the previously established creation week of Genesis. A new (primary) revelation of Genesis 1 to Moses would create several major problems.

Firstly, it does not solve the problem of why Genesis 1 was cited as the basis for the Fourth Commandment. The reference to the creation week as the model for the Sabbath implies that the creation story was already known to the Israelites, not a new revelation to Moses. Indeed, the principle of the Sabbath seems to have existed before the covenant at Sinai, since it governed the collection of manna (Exodus 16).<sup>18</sup> One could argue that the sequence of events described in the Exodus narrative is not a historical account (as Wellhausen claimed), but in that case, why would the author undermine the stature of Moses by implying that a weekly day of rest, inspired by Genesis 1, existed before the giving of the Law? As universally recognised (e.g., Luke 16:29), Moses is the authority figure with whom the giving of the Law is asso-

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16 John H. Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture: Ancient Literary Culture and Biblical Authority* (InterVarsity Press, 2013), 69.

17 Hugh Miller, *The Testimony of the Rocks, or, Geology in Its Bearings on the Two Theologies, Natural and Revealed* (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable, 1857; reprinted Edinburgh: Nimmo, Hay & Mitchell, 1889), 170; Duane A. Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis: The Sources and Authorship of the First Book of the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

18 Nahum M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (Schocken Books, 1986), 146.



ciated, so any story that tended to undermine Moses' unique authority would be quite undesirable for a later author. On the other hand, the story of the rotting manna in Exodus 16 has all the marks of unwitting testimony to an earlier tradition, given as part of an account of God's supernatural provision in the desert.

A second problem with Genesis 1 as a new revelation to Moses is its ubiquitous use of the divine name Elohim, which conflicts with the new name Yahweh by which God revealed himself to Moses. Strictly speaking, the name Elohim is plural, and thus introduces a hint of plurality into the Godhead. This plurality is then more explicitly stated in God's intention to create humankind, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness" (Genesis 1:26–28). Although the Church Fathers believed this to be a reference to the Trinity, most modern scholars interpret it as an address to the "Divine Council" (cf. Psalm 82).<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, even a faint suggestion of the plurality of the Godhead in any revelation to Moses would have been very undesirable at Sinai, as the story of Exodus 32 demonstrates. This text claims that God interrupted his revelation to Moses because Aaron had let the Israelites run riot, with the claim, "These are your gods, Oh Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Exodus 32:7). In other words, the plurality of gods invoked by the Israelite rabble was a direct threat to the Mosaic covenant. Therefore, as Karl Barth argued, the suggestion of divine plurality in Genesis 1:26 is more reasonably interpreted as a vestige of early biblical religion: "We cannot escape the conclusion that the saga thought in terms of a genuine plurality in the divine essence, and that the priestly redaction within which it is presented in Gen. 1 did not see fit to expunge this element."<sup>20</sup>

A third major problem with a new revelation of Genesis 1 to Moses is the watery beginning of Genesis 1:2, which seems completely out of place in the Sinai desert. Walton hinted at a possible answer to this

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19 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Bible Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 27.

20 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 3.1, ed. G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance (London: T&T Clark, 1936), 192.

problem<sup>21</sup> when he quoted from Jan Assmann's summary of Egyptian temple and creation mythology: "The temple recalled a mythical place, the primeval mound. It stood on the first soil that emerged from the primeval waters, on which the creator god stood to begin his work of creation."<sup>22</sup>

This idea of the Egyptian temple invoking the primeval mound of creation was clearly based on the emergence of the land of Egypt from the yearly inundation of the Nile. But any suggestion that the opening statement of the Pentateuch could be based on an Egyptian temple mythology seems very problematic, since it runs counter to the whole ethos of the Exodus as an escape from slavery to the Egyptian gods (which included Pharaoh). Thus, the ten plagues of Egypt clearly expressed God's declaration: "I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12).

A more plausible explanation is that this Egyptian creation myth and its concept of a creator god both originated elsewhere. For example, there is clear evidence for a Mesopotamian influence on earlier Egyptian civilisation, based on the preservation of Mesopotamian artefacts and designs in the grave goods of Egyptian cemeteries.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a more attractive inspiration for the watery origin of the biblical creation story is Mesopotamian mythology, which espoused a very similar watery creation, presumably based on the emergence of the land of Mesopotamia from the Cosmic Flood.

Consistent with a Mesopotamian origin of Genesis 1 *before* the events of Exodus, Stephen the Martyr claimed that God first revealed himself to Abraham in Mesopotamia, implying that Abraham could also have received stories of the creation and Flood from there: "The God of Glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran" (Acts 7:2). This claim is tempered

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21 Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 80.

22 Jan Assmann, *The Search for God in Ancient Egypt*, trans. David Lawton (Cornell University Press, 2001), 38.

23 Luc Watrin, "From intellectual acquisitions to political change: Egypt-Mesopotamia interaction in the fourth millennium BC," *De Kêmi à Birît Narî (Revue internationale de l'Orient ancien)* 2 (2004): 48–95.

by the suggestion in the book of Joshua (24:2) that Mesopotamian religion, like that of Egypt, was based on idolatry: “Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshipped other gods.” But the fact that idolatry was rampant in Mesopotamia at the time of Abraham does not preclude the worship of the true God in earlier Mesopotamian temples, in the period after Noah’s Flood. After all, it was to Noah that God had apparently promised: “I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you” (Genesis 9:9). This promise implies that, for some time after Noah, his descendants who settled in Shinar (Mesopotamia) were worshippers of the true God, and could have received the divine revelation of Genesis 1 as an ancient temple liturgy.

## The Mesopotamian Context of Genesis 1

There is an obvious Mesopotamian example of how the cosmic temple idea could have worked as a religious liturgy, in the form of the Babylonian Creation Epic, *Enuma Elish*. According to an analysis of various textual sources by Wilfred Lambert, the Creation Epic was not only *recited* every year at the New Moon festival in Babylon, but a ritual reenactment of the central battle-scene of the epic was performed.<sup>24</sup> This therefore provides an analogy of how Genesis 1 could have worked as a liturgy that reinforced the theology of a temple institution. However, the content and belief systems of Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish* are completely different.

The victory of the god Marduk over Tiamat (the deified sea) is the central focus of *Enuma Elish*, and a similar theme formed the centrepiece of the Ugaritic (Canaanite) Baal cycle, which described Baal’s defeat of the sea god, Yam. Scholars like Lambert have interpreted these epics as politically motivated works, in which the gods were conceived anthropomorphically and therefore carried out human warfare on a cosmic scale.<sup>25</sup> In both epics the cosmic battle acted as a pretext to

24 Wilfred G. Lambert, “The Great Battle of the Mesopotamian Religious Year: The Conflict in the Akitu House (A Summary),” *Iraq* 25 (1963): 189–190.

25 Lambert, “The Great Battle.”

justify the promotion of the victorious deity to be the new head of the pantheon, reflecting the victory of Babylon and Ugarit over their human enemies. Such second-millennium cosmic battle themes are referred to in Isaiah 27:1, showing that later biblical authors were aware of these myths.<sup>26</sup> In contrast, the absence of the battle theme from Genesis 1 is better explained by its earlier date, before human warfare had been “elevated” to a cosmic plane.

Another difference between Genesis 1 and *Enuma Elish* concerns the seven-day motif in Genesis 1, which is lacking in *Enuma Elish*. However, this motif is present in both the Mesopotamian and biblical Flood stories. In both the Atrahasis and Gilgamesh epics, the storm lasts for seven days and seven nights,<sup>27</sup> whereas the biblical account has repeated seven-day periods of waiting both before and after the Flood. Hence, this use of the seven-day motif could point to a relationship between the Flood story and the creation story of Genesis 1.

The idea that the Flood was like an undoing of creation is a well-established principle. Hints of it are found in Calvin’s commentary on Genesis, where he sees the Flood reversing creation by breaking through the barriers that God had previously made to hold back the waters above and below the sky.<sup>28</sup> But the corollary of this picture is that when God remembers Noah and the flood-waters begin to subside, it genuinely appears that the earth is being “re-created” out of chaos in a way that parallels Genesis 1.

## Re-Creation after the Flood

The idea of God re-creating the earth after the Flood is actually very old, and hints of it are seen in the Dead Sea scrolls. For example, in the *Genesis Apocryphon* (1QapGen), Noah is invited to rule over the earth in a manner very similar to the blessing of Adam on the sixth day of

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26 John Blenkinsopp, *Creation, Un-Creation, Re-Creation: A Discursive Commentary on Genesis 1–11* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2011), 37.

27 Stephanie Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others* (Oxford University Press, 1989).

28 Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses*, 192.

Genesis 1.<sup>29</sup> However, the most detailed exploration of these parallels was made by Kenneth Mathews in his *New American Commentary: Genesis 1–11*, quoted here with minor modifications.<sup>30</sup> Mathews notes specifically that the description of re-creation after the Flood (Genesis 8) uses key Hebrew words that are also used in Genesis 1. The English translations of these words are italicised in the following summary to emphasise the parallels.

- Pre-creation/Day 1. Just as God's *wind (ruach)* moved over the face of the watery abyss (1:2), God sends a *wind (ruach)* over the flood waters to renew the earth (8:1).
- Day 2. Just as God initially divided the waters to create the *skies (shamayim, 1:8)*, God re-gathers the flood waters, closing the apertures of the *skies (shamayim, 8:2)*.
- Day 3. Just as God gathered the water in one place and commanded dry ground to *appear (ra'eh, 1:9)*, so again the tops of the mountains *appear (ra'eh)* after the Flood (8:5).
- Day 4. Just as the sun and moon were placed in the heavens to mark seasons, *days*, and *years (yom, shaneh, 1:14)*, they reappear after the Flood to mark *days*, months, and *years (yom, shaneh, 8:4, 13)*.
- Day 5. Just as birds were created to fly *above the earth ('al-ha'erezt, 1:20)*, so the raven is released to fly back and forth (until the waters have dried up) *above the earth ('al-ha'erezt, 8:7)*.
- Day 6. Just as various kinds of *living creatures* and *cattle* were created (*nephesh chay, behemah, 1:24*), so the *living [creatures]* and *cattle* are called out from the Ark (*chay, behemah, 8:17*).
- Day 6. Just as the human being was first made in the *image of God (tselem 'elohim, 1:27)*, the human being is reaffirmed after the Flood as made in the *image of God (tselem 'elohim, 9:6)*.

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29 Torleif Elgvin, "The Genesis Section of 4Q422 (4QPara Gen Exod)," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1 (1994): 180–196, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851794X00275>.

30 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, vol. 1 (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), 383.

- Day 7. Just as God *rested* (*shabath*) on the seventh day of creation (2:2), so God smells the *restful* (*nichoach*) aroma of Noah's sacrifice after the Flood (8:21).

## The Two Creation Traditions

Before we explore the significance of these parallels, it is important to examine the wider biblical context of the Genesis 1 creation story (up to Genesis 2:4a). For example, this account is immediately followed in Genesis 2 (verses 4b to 25) by a very different account of creation. Whereas Genesis 1 has a cosmic viewpoint, is impersonal in style, and is highly systematic in organisation, Genesis 2 has a local viewpoint, is anthropomorphic in style, and has a vivid story-like character. Beyond these differences in perspective, the accounts describe acts of creation in a different order and in very different environments. Whereas Genesis 1 begins in water and describes the creation of plants, then animals, then humanity, Genesis 2 begins with dry dust and describes the creation of the human being, then plants, then animals.

Recognising Genesis 1 and 2 as the products of two distinct traditions goes a long way to explaining their different character. However, because the creation stories of Genesis 1 and 2 are so different, and apparently contradictory, it is difficult to see how they could have been passed down orally in the same religious community—the two stories would have become intermingled. This means that if the story of creation was handed down through Noah and his family, it probably involved only one of these traditions. And although Genesis 2 now forms the second creation story, there is strong evidence that it originally stood alone. This comes from the presence of “not yet” statements in the introduction to the Genesis 2 creation account (2:4b-5, NIV): “When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the earth and no plant of the field had yet sprung up.” This usage is typical of the beginnings of Sumerian literary works, and is found in the opening lines of the *Enuma Elish*: “When skies above

were not yet named nor earth below pronounced by name... When yet no gods were manifest.”<sup>31</sup>

Genesis 2 also displays other evidence of being an early tradition, such as the primitive concept of animals not yet having names (Genesis 2:19). And because it has the style of a vivid etiological account of human experience, it would have been particularly suitable for oral transmission by Noah and his descendants.

According to the Documentary Hypothesis, Genesis 2–4 forms the beginning of the Yahwist source (originally abbreviated in German as J).<sup>32</sup> This J tradition could have remained in oral form for thousands of years, eventually being combined with a second oral narrative source (E) and written down in the time of Solomon. William F. Albright suggested that this type of material in Genesis formed part of an early epic tradition, possibly brought to Canaan by Abraham:

J and E must reflect two recensions of an original epic narrative, the nucleus of which had presumably been recited by Hebrew rhapsodists before the Exodus...

Much of the early high culture of the Hebrews as preserved in the books of Genesis and Exodus (rarely elsewhere), contains elements brought from Mesopotamia during the time of the Patriarchs, that is, no later than the sixteenth century B.C.<sup>33</sup>

In contrast to Genesis 2, the much more sophisticated account in Genesis 1 more likely originated in a Mesopotamian priestly setting. This is indicated by its formal structure, by the concept of God resting in his cosmic temple on the seventh day, and by a particular concern (Genesis 1:14–18) with the regulation of the liturgical calendar by heavenly lights (discussed further below).<sup>34</sup> Consistent with these characteris-

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31 Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*, 233.

32 Richard E. Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed* (San Francisco: Harper One, 2003).

33 William F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity: Monotheism and the Historical Process* (John Hopkins Press, 1940), 249; William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Doubleday & Co., 1968), 91.

34 Walter Vogels, “The Cultic and Civil Calendars of the Fourth Day of Creation

tics, Genesis 1 is identified as part of the Priestly source according to the Documentary Hypothesis.

## The Ages of Documentary Sources

Most modern adherents of the Documentary Hypothesis regard the Priestly source as the youngest part of Genesis, composed during or after the Babylonian exile.<sup>35</sup> However, this opinion was strongly influenced by Wellhausen, who linked the Documentary Hypothesis to his Development Hypothesis for the evolution of Israelite/Jewish religion. As discussed above, this model assumed that the Law came after the Prophets, and that most of the Pentateuch was invented history. However, some recent scholars have recognised that these two models must be disentangled, so that the Documentary Hypothesis can be taken back to its basic *literary* form.<sup>36</sup> This has been called the Neo-documentarian approach by some scholars.<sup>37</sup>

At its most basic level, the Documentary Hypothesis quite reasonably supposes that the Pentateuch was composed from earlier sources, just as the gospels of Matthew and Luke were assembled from multiple sources.<sup>38</sup> This in no way devalues the historicity of the documentary sources. On the contrary, the existence of minor contradictions between the sources suggests that they were handed down with such reverence that the redactor did not feel free to editorially harmonise them. For example, the Priestly and Elohist sources give different accounts of the birth of Jacob's son Benjamin, but these differences are consistent with the well-established character of these sources. Thus, the Priestly source describes the birth of Benjamin in Paddan Aram

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(Gen 1, 14b)” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 11 (1997): 163–180, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09018329708585113>.

- 35 Gordon J. Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament*, vol. 1: *A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 167.
- 36 Joel S. Baden, *The Composition of the Pentateuch: Renewing the Documentary Hypothesis* (Yale University Press, 2012).
- 37 David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 111.
- 38 Hermann Hupfeld, *Die Quellen der Genesis und die Art ihrer Zusammensetzung: Von neuem untersucht* (Berlin: Wiegandt und Grieben, 1853), 195.



as part of a regimented summary of the birth of all of Jacob's children (Genesis 35:23–26). In contrast, the Elohist source gives a dramatic account of the death of Rachel while giving birth between Bethel and Ephrath (Genesis 35:16–18). The reluctance of the redactor to edit such conflicting accounts was cited by Garret as a major problem for the Documentary Hypothesis:

It was assumed [by scholars] that each writer aimed to produce a single, continuous history but would tolerate no inconsistencies, repetition, or narrative digressions. The redactors, on the other hand, were said to be utterly oblivious to every kind of contradiction and repetition.<sup>39</sup>

But rather than undermining the Documentary Hypothesis, this observation provides important evidence for its operation. It suggests that the documentary sources had gained canonical authority over long periods of time before they were combined together, so that the redactor attempted at almost all costs to preserve them intact. This principle was well understood by Albright, who argued that the Documentary sources grew separately and alongside one another over a long period of time, before their combination during or after the exile: "Since many traditions embedded in our three sources were formed and even phrased at different times, we have a staggered chronological relationship between them which greatly enhances their historical dependability."<sup>40</sup> In fact, some of the differing character of the sources may reflect their parallel evolution as either oral or written traditions. Thus, J and E almost certainly represent epic oral sources that separately preserved the tribal traditions of Judah and Ephraim, whereas the Priestly source was probably written down at an early date.<sup>41</sup>

Because oral sources are easily updated, older names of God can be replaced by new names. For example, Genesis 4:26 claims that peo-

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39 Garret, *Rethinking Genesis*, 14.

40 Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity*, 252.

41 Alan Dickin, *A Scientific Commentary on Genesis 1–11*, third edition (Amazon, 2021).

ple “began to call on the name of Yahweh” in the time of Adam, even though Exodus 6:3 explains that the name Yahweh was a new revelation to Moses. Hence, we infer that an older name of God in Chapter 4 onwards was replaced by the name Yahweh. The propensity for people to be named after their gods supports this inference. Thus, no patriarchal names are compounded from Yah, whereas many (including Israel itself) are compounded from the older divine name El. This suggests that the early saga referred to God as El, but this name was replaced by Yahweh as the oral source evolved, in order to demonstrate that the God of the Patriarchs was the same as the God of Moses. Consistent with this kind of informal updating process, over a quarter of the divine names in the dialogue of the Yahwist source still refer to God by the generic name Elohim (a derivative of El), as the original speakers would have done. However, every single divine name in the Yahwist *narrative* has been updated, as we would expect from later narrators.<sup>42</sup>

The usage of divine names in the Priestly source of Genesis is very different: it never uses the divine name Yahweh in dialogue. Based on the argument above, the original speakers could not have used this name, and the written text was evidently never updated. In contrast, the Elohist source, although likewise not recognising the revelation of Yahweh before Moses, nevertheless uses Yahweh three times in dialogue (Genesis 22:15, 28:21, 31:49). This shows that the Elohist tradition underwent partial updating of its dialogue in a similar way to the Yahwist, as we expect for an epic oral source.

Additional evidence for the different evolution of the Priestly and the tribal epic sources comes from the distribution of the phrase “to this day” in Genesis. This expression implies that a source was updated by a narrator who was looking backwards to an earlier time. It is characteristic of an oral narrator who is contemporary with his audience. Hence, the phrase is found six times in the J/E sources in Genesis (19:37, 22:14, 26:33, 32:32, 35:20, 47:26), but never in the Priestly source. Again, this is indicative of a written source that was not being editorially updated.

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42 Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 11.

Further evidence for the different evolutionary histories of the Priestly and epic tribal sources comes from the variable degree of continuity in their narratives. For example, Richard Friedman argued that the Yahwist source can be fully reconstructed to provide a nearly complete history, as demonstrated by his *Hidden Book in the Bible*.<sup>43</sup> And although the Elohist source does not begin until Genesis 12, it is afterwards relatively coherent as a history.<sup>44</sup> In contrast, it has often been recognised that the Priestly source (when extracted from the Pentateuch as a separate document) is relatively incoherent as a historical narrative.<sup>45</sup> For example, the Priestly part of the Flood story notes the sinfulness of humanity, but since P lacks any account of the Fall, we do not understand how humankind's sinfulness arose.

However, expecting a coherent story from the Priestly source is a misunderstanding of its character. Its coherence comes from its *genealogical* continuity, based on its *toledot* statements ("these are the generations of"). This structure was so strong that the later redactor used it as the fundamental framework for the whole book of Genesis. In turn, the narrative sections of the Priestly source are not principally intended to tell a story, but to preserve important covenants and written agreements that were typically written down, even in the ancient world. These texts include the divine covenants of Genesis, but also some legal agreements between purely human parties (Genesis 1:26–30, 6:11–22, 9:1–17, 17:1–14, 23:3–19, 28:1–4, 35:9–15, 47:5–12, 49:29–33, 50:12–13).<sup>46</sup>

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- 43 Richard E. Friedman, *The Hidden Book in the Bible: The Discovery of the First Prose Masterpiece* (Harper San Francisco, 1998).
- 44 Antony F. Campbell and Mark A. O'Brien, *Sources of the Pentateuch: Texts, Introductions, Annotations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).
- 45 Friedhelm Hartenstein and Konrad Schmid (eds), *Farewell to the Priestly Writing? The Current State of the Debate, Ancient Israel and Its Literature 38* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2022), 18.
- 46 Dickin, *A Scientific Commentary*, 21.

## The Direction of Compositional Influence

The above evidence suggests that the Priestly document was only sparingly amended over time, but was *supplemented* by the addition of new episodes. This makes it reasonable that early Priestly accounts could have influenced the writing of later ones, but not vice versa. However, the influence is not necessarily in the direction expected from the “historical” order of the accounts. In other words, rather than the Flood story echoing the story of creation, Genesis 1 itself could have been inspired by the overwhelming experience of the cosmic Flood. And in fact, several lines of evidence suggest that this is the actual direction of compositional influence.

Firstly, the world of chaotic water in Genesis 1 is not an obvious basis for a creation story inspired in Mesopotamia, which is extremely dry for most of the time. The environment of Mesopotamia is captured perfectly by the creation story of Genesis 2, which begins with a world where there was no rain or vegetation, and where the human being was created from dry dust. On the other hand, the world of a Mesopotamian flood is indeed a world in chaos, consisting only of water.

A second basis for creation inspired by the Flood is the origin of light. Thus, one of the oldest enigmas of Genesis 1 is the claim that daylight existed before the sun. To solve this problem, creationists have proposed that the sun’s light was blocked for most of earth’s history by a long-lived atmospheric vapour barrier. But since no human being was there to see this, the explanation has no philosophical basis. On the other hand, the experience of the Flood suggests that what was being envisaged on Days 2 and 3 of creation was simply the experience of a heavily overcast sky that typically accompanies storms. Under these conditions daylight exists without any glimpse of the sun. This was a relatively rare phenomenon in Mesopotamia, where the sky is generally cloudless.

A third basis for creation out of the Flood is the idea of God separating the waters above and below the sky. Here, modern commenta-

tors have tended to over-interpret the text. For example, Richard Friedman reads too much into the Priestly conception of creation and Flood:

In the P creation story, God creates a space (firmament) that separates waters that are above it from waters below. The universe in that story is thus a habitable bubble surrounded by water. This same conception is assumed in the P flood story, in which the “apertures of the skies” and the “fountains of the deep” are broken up so that the waters flow in.<sup>47</sup>

By suggesting that the Priestly universe was a “habitable bubble surrounded by water,” Friedman is going well beyond the text. Rather than inferring that God made a bubble of air in what was previously solid water, we should simply conclude that God brought an end to a state of incessant rain. The experience of non-stop heavy rain that goes on for weeks or months is quite enough to seem like a return to cosmic chaos, in which the skies are unable to hold back the onslaught of waters from the heavens. To a person who has experienced that state, the end of the rain is apt to seem like a miracle of God. And with the end of incessant rain, those on the Ark were able to hope for the appearance of dry land, which follows on the next day of creation, accompanied by plants that sprout from the ground as if by spontaneous genesis.

When the clouds clear, the heavenly bodies appear as if suspended in the sky. Their installation is the first stage in populating the tiers of the cosmos that are established as chaos is pushed back. These acts of population continue on the fifth and sixth days of creation, just as birds and animals were released from the ark. However, the creation of humanity is unique. Only humankind is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26), closely paralleling God’s covenant with Noah, “for in the image of God has God made humankind” (Genesis 9:6).

The best explanation of all these observations is that the experience of the Flood inspired the Genesis 1 creation story. However, there are two aspects of the account that mark it out as a visionary experience.

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47 Friedman, *The Bible with Sources Revealed*, 44.

rience rather than a regular human composition. Firstly, the account is highly oral/aural, claiming that God spoke no less than ten times. Secondly, the account is highly visual, as remarked by the nineteenth century scholar John Kurtz: “The Mosaic record ... is improperly called the history of the creation; it should be called a picture of the creation. Every feature of it appears to betray the pencil of the painter, not the pen of the historian.”<sup>48</sup> Both of these attributes point to Genesis 1 as a visionary revelation, probably as a series of daily experiences over a period of a week. However, when the priestly recipient translated these experiences into words, he would have expressed them within an ancient prescientific worldview. In other words, God did not reveal an ancient cosmology. He revealed six visions of creation based on the earth emerging from the Flood, but these visions were described by ancient peoples in the context of their perceived cosmology.

## Order from Disorder

Given the above argument, it may be helpful to examine the first stages of unfolding creation in more detail, to see how they could have been inspired by the Flood Story. For example, it was already pointed out that the second creation story begins with “not-yet” statements that embody a kind of timelessness and formlessness that typically introduces ancient near-eastern (ANE) origins stories. However, the Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 creation stories deal with this formless state in different ways. In the anthropomorphic account of Genesis 2, God acts as an artisan to create order, whereas the more impersonal account of Genesis 1 describes acts of cosmic *separation* which create order. We will therefore examine each of the acts of divine separation to see how they resolve the disorder exemplified by the cosmic Flood.

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48 Quoted from Andrew J. Brown, *The Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3*. (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 245.

## Day One

The first of these acts involves the creation of light on Day 1 (Genesis 1:3). This verse often leads modern readers to equate the creation of light with the Big Bang. However, Walton argued that we must dispense with our modern understanding of light as electromagnetic radiation in order to take the intention of the ancient author seriously.<sup>49</sup> Arguing that to the ancient author, “light” and “day” were synonymous, Walton suggested that it was actually *daylight* that was the first created thing, not the Big Bang. Hence, in verses 4 to 5, “God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’”

Walton argued that rays of light cannot be separated from darkness, so it was the *duration* of light that was separated from darkness.<sup>50</sup> Hence, he suggested that time itself was created on the first day.<sup>51</sup> However, there seems little basis in the text for this interpretation, which appears to depart from the ANE concept of beginnings on an indeterminate “faraway day,” and instead reads Greek philosophical ideas of beginnings into the text. Nevertheless, we can still understand Genesis 1 as describing the creation of periods of day and night if we see day and night emerging from a previously disordered state in which the *passage* of time was unmarked. For example, if day and night were created from a previous disordered state of darkness (Genesis 1:2), we need to understand the relationship between this preexistent darkness and the creatively separated night of Genesis 1:5. To clarify this issue, we need to examine the breadth of meaning of the Hebrew word for darkness (*choshek*) in the Old Testament.

In Genesis 1, the word *choshek* is used four times—once to describe the preexistent darkness of verse 2, and three times to describe night (verses 4, 5, and 18). However, the majority of uses in the Old Testament refer to what we might call “indeterminate darkness.” For

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49 John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (New York: Zondervan, 2001), 79.

50 Walton, *Genesis*, 79.

51 Walton, *Genesis*, 79; Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 56.

example, six usages refer to darkness caused by extremely dark clouds during the daytime. These include heavy rainclouds (2 Samuel 22:12; Psalm 18:11; Zephaniah 1:15) or the cloud that covered Mount Sinai at the giving of the law (Deuteronomy 4:11; 5:23). Three other usages refer to the plague of darkness in Egypt, which resulted in darkness during the daytime (e.g., Exodus 10:22; Psalm 105:28). Other examples are the darkness of a mine (Job 28:3) and the shadow of death (Job 10:21). These usages confirm that *choshhek* can mean night, but they show that it can also describe an indeterminate state of darkness where daytime and nighttime cannot be distinguished. This kind of indeterminate darkness is what would have been experienced during the intense storm of Noah's Flood, thus inspiring the description in Genesis 1:2. In contrast, the creation of light in Genesis 1:3 describes the first clearly defined day, after the chaos of the storm has been brought to an end.

## *Day Two*

Similar principles can be applied to understand the strange act of separation on Day 2 of creation, between the waters above and below the sky. To understand this act of separation properly, we again need to re-examine the state described in Genesis 1:2. Here, we read of the “wind of God” sweeping over the face of the dark waters; but what exactly were these dark waters?

If we follow the geometry of Friedman quoted previously, God made a bubble on Day 2, in what was previously solid water. But in that case, the wind of God was blowing over the face of some unknown waters that were a few thousand feet above the earth's surface. This may make sense to the modern technical mind, but to the ancient audience it would have been absurd. Instead, they would have conceived that the wind of God was blowing over the same watery surface that would later form the sea.

The difference between the primeval waters and the later sea is that during the Flood, the space between the heavens and the watery earth was also “full” of water. Not solid water exactly, but a chaotic mix-



ture of air and water that resembles water, just as the chaotic mixture of light and darkness during the chaos of the Flood was more-or-less like darkness. Hence, the creative act on Day 2 involved constraining the chaotic waters that were filling the air behind a solid structure, described by the Hebrew word *raqia*.<sup>52</sup> This word is best translated as in the NRSV: “And God said, ‘Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters’” (Genesis 1:6).

This use of the word “dome” is consistent with the derivation of *raqia* from the verb “to hammer out a metal sheet” (Exodus 39:3), and is supported by the more detailed description in Job 37:18, where the heavens are described as “hard as a mirror of cast bronze” (NIV). This phrase in Job is intended as a literal description of the sky, and is not a spiritual metaphor. This nonscientific understanding of the dome of the sky is confirmed by the placing, on Day 4 of creation, of the heavenly lights “in the dome of the sky” (Genesis 1:14, NRSV). In other words, the sun, moon, and stars were conceived of as located *below* the upper waters. This nonscientific view of reality can be understood as a human *interpretation* of the God-given vision of creation, rather than a divine “accommodation” of humankind’s simplicity within the vision itself.<sup>53</sup> In other words, the visions of creation were inspired by re-creation after the Flood, but their actual substance did not contradict physical principles.

### *Days Three and Four*

The second act of constraining the cosmic waters (Day 3) involved God hemming in the waters below the sky to form the sea, a realm of chaos that will be excluded from the new earth (Revelation 21:1). Again, the context of the Flood helps us to better understand the creative separation of the third day. The brown colour of floodwaters shows that they

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52 Paul H. Seely, “The firmament and the water above,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991): 227–240.

53 Paul H. Seely, “Genesis 1–11 in the Light of Its Second Millennial Worldview: A Response to Carol Hill’s Worldview Alternative,” *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith* 60:1 (2008): 44–48.

represent a chaotic mixture of water and earth, but more-or-less like the sea. (The Flood had the appearance of an inland sea that covered Mesopotamia.) When God separates the components of these chaotic waters, we obtain dry land on one hand and sea on the other. This sea that remains after the Flood is clear, not brown. Although it is a realm of chaos relative to dry land, its population with sea creatures operating under God's blessing (Genesis 1:22) shows that the degree of chaos has been markedly reduced compared with the primordial state of the earth in Genesis 1:2.

The dry land that emerges from the waters is commanded to bring forth plants, which were evidently regarded as *part* of the earthly environment, in contrast to the animals that will later populate it. It is notable that the description of plants focuses particularly on their fruits and seeds that will function as food sources, in anticipation of the creation of animals and humanity.<sup>54</sup>

The chaotic mixture of states in the primeval earth having thus been separated into distinct ordered domains, these realms are populated on days 4–6, emphasising the cultic significance of the space. Walter Vogels pointed out that the creation of the heavenly “lights” in Genesis 1:14–18 is a complex process involving God first planning, then making them, then placing them in position. A specifically liturgical function is implied by their description as markers of the (liturgical) calendar.<sup>55</sup> These lights also seem to inspire the lamps of the tabernacle described in Exodus (27:20–21). The pre-Mosaic revelation of Genesis 1 proposed above makes it unlikely that the influence was in the opposite direction.

## Spiritual Intensification in the Creation Story

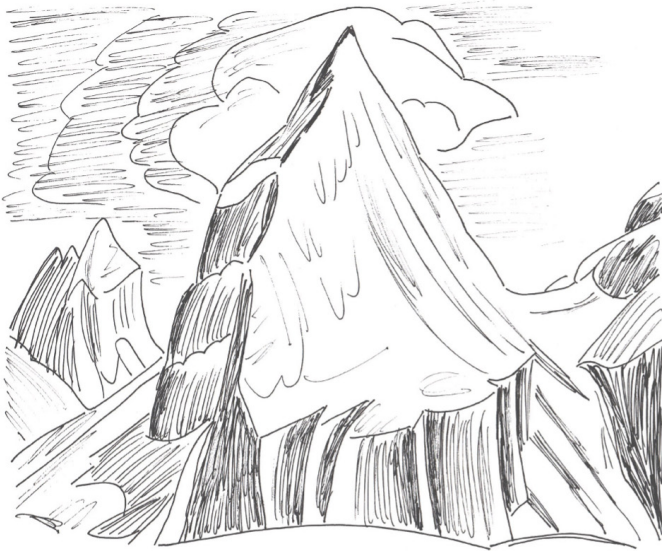
One might wonder why God would have used the experience of the Flood as the basis for a series of visions revealing the story of creation. I suggest that this was due to the spiritual intensification achieved by

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54 Walton, *Genesis*, 113.

55 Vogels, “The Cultic and Civil Calendars.”

using the overwhelmingly powerful experience of the Cosmic Flood as inspiration. As an analogy, we can consider the process of intensification that occurs when a natural scene is captured by an impressionist painter. One of the strongest exponents of this technique was the Canadian (Group of Seven) landscape painter Lawren Harris, who intensified the spiritual qualities of his paintings by emphasising the dramatic qualities of the northern landscape.<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 2.** Pen-and-ink rendition of a graphite sketch by Lawren Harris, in preparation for his major oil painting *Mt. Lefroy* (ca. 1930). Original in the McMichael Canadian Art Collection.

For example, Figure 2 shows a preparatory sketch for Harris' major canvas *Mount Lefroy*. The sketch demonstrates an exaggeration of the height of the peak, compared with the real world, and its setting against a numinous cloud. This technique allowed Harris to create powerful

56 B. Harris and R. G. P. Colgrove (eds), *Lawren Harris* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1976).

and even ethereal expressions of the spirituality of the natural world.<sup>57</sup> The dramatic experience of the Flood would likewise have provided inspiration for the creation story that was grounded in historical reality, but at the same time captured the essence of God's creative power with unsurpassed spiritual intensity.

## Genesis 1 as True Myth

Because the Genesis 1 creation story is both historically grounded, and at the same time artistically expressed, it brings together two deep human needs—of truth-telling and storytelling. In the modern world, these human needs often appear to be in conflict, since storytelling is generally associated with fictional works, whereas truth-telling is associated with coldly rational environments such as the law-courts and scientific journals.

In the ancient world, these genres were not so rigidly separated, since there was an intermediate genre that we call Myth. This word is derived from the ancient Greek word *muthos*, which to them simply meant a story. In its modern sense, the word has come to mean a fictional story that can nevertheless convey truthful principles. This suggests that mythology can be a useful vehicle for bridging the gap between storytelling and truth-telling, but it also raises awkward questions. Can deep truths about the human condition be grounded in fictional stories?

Two twentieth-century scholars of Medieval English literature, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien grappled with these issues more intensely than most others. For example, Lewis expressed his frustration about the gap between truth and myth as follows:

The two hemispheres of my mind were in sharpest contrast. On the one side a many-islanded sea of poetry and myth; on the other a glib and shallow “rationalism.” Nearly all that I loved I believed

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57 A. Davis, *The Logic of Ecstasy: Canadian Mystical Painting, 1920–1940* (University of Toronto Press, 1992), preface.

to be imaginary; nearly all that I believed to be real I thought grim and meaningless.<sup>58</sup>

Here, Lewis testifies that mythology connected with him on an emotional level that rational explanations of reality failed to match. However, Tolkien argued that the life of Jesus was a True Myth that could bridge the gap between mythology and rationalism, an idea that eventually led Lewis to faith in God.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Tolkien believed that the realities expressed by True Myth could have a deeper meaning than a rational account.<sup>60</sup> He convinced Lewis of this assertion, leading Lewis to express the value of True Myth as follows:

In the enjoyment of a great myth we come nearest to experiencing as a concrete what can otherwise be understood only as an abstraction... When we translate we get abstraction—or rather, dozens of abstractions. What flows into you from the myth is not truth but reality (truth is always *about* something, but reality is that *about which* truth is), and, therefore, every myth becomes the father of innumerable truths on the abstract level. Myth is the mountain whence all the different streams arise which become truths down here in the valley; in *hac valle abstractionis*.<sup>61</sup>

This analysis affirms that Genesis 1 is an example of True Myth, because it reveals the reality of God's creation in a deeper way than rational scientific explanations of origins. In other words, Genesis 1 was never intended to be a scientific account of the origins of the cosmos, and it is a mistake to look for mechanistic concordance between these accounts.

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58 Clive S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955), 170.

59 Alistair McGrath, "A Gleam of Divine Truth: The Concept of Myth in Lewis's Thought," *The Intellectual World of CS Lewis* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 55–81.

60 Richard L. Purtill, J. R. R. Tolkien: *Myth, Morality, and Religion* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003)

61 Clive S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact" in *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 66–67.

Even though the physical origins of the universe did not actually occur in the manner described in Genesis 1, I suggest that this True Myth has a real historical basis on two levels. Firstly, it was inspired by a real event (the Flood), which was recognised as a turning point of human history; secondly, it was revealed as a series of visions in a real priestly environment. These visions inspired by the Flood were themselves a sacred *enactment* of creation, so real that they could form the basis for the institution of the Sabbath described in the Fourth Commandment. Because True Myth bridges the gap between truth-telling and storytelling, it forms a solid foundation for biblical revelation. A scientific account of the origins of the cosmos would surely not have achieved the same emotional connection with ancient or modern audiences.

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