

**BECAUSE IT HAD RAINED:
A STUDY OF GEN 2:5-7
WITH IMPLICATIONS FOR GEN 2:4-25 AND GEN 1:1-2:3**

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In 1958 the *Westminster Theological Journal* published "Because It Had Not Rained," an exegetical study of Gen 2:5 by Meredith G. Kline.¹ The article demonstrated that according to Gen 2:5 ordinary providence was God's mode of operation during the days of creation. Since God's mode of operation was ordinary providence, and since, for example, light (Day 1) without luminaries (Day 4) is not ordinary providence, the arrangement of the six days of creation in Genesis 1 must be topical not chronological. The current article is complementary to Kline's.²

Why does Gen 2:5 bother to tell us that certain kinds of vegetation were absent "*for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth?*" This question has intrigued and perplexed me for some time. Is the absence of rain mere geographical decoration or quasi-irrelevant data that sets the stage for the really important material that follows? Or is this information that is foundational to the narrative and its theology? The answer to this question has played a major role in my interpretation of Gen 1:1-2:25.

In this article, I intend to examine the logic, structure, and semantics of Gen 2:5-7, and to draw out several integrated conclusions: 1) It rained at the time of creation according to Gen 2:5-7. So we should discard the idea that the Bible teaches that it did not rain until the flood of Noah's day. 2) The structure of Gen 2:5-7 provides the key to understanding the structure of the whole of Gen 2:4-25, which turns out to be topical not chronological. 3) The structure and topical arrangement of Gen 2:4-25 in turn supports the argument that the arrangement of Gen 1:1-2:3 is also topical not chronological.³ 4) These structural considerations lead to new insights

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¹ Meredith G. Kline, "Because It Had Not Rained," WTJ 20 (1958) 146-57.

² My article is also complementary to the more recent article, Meredith G. Kline, "Space and Time in the Genesis Cosmogony," *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 48 (1996) 2-15. These two articles often arrive at the same conclusions from different lines of argumentation, and each contributes details left undiscussed or undeveloped in the other.

³ There may be some chronological sequence in these chapters, but such chronology is "accidental," i.e., the author's primary intention is to narrate the material topically.

into the polemical theology of Genesis 1-2. Genesis 1-2 serves, among other purposes, as a polemic against Canaanite Baalism. In sum, Gen 2:4-25 and Gen 1:1-2:3 are topical accounts that polemicize against Baalism, because it had rained.⁴

I. The Argument of Gen 2:5-7

Many of the details of Gen 2:5-7 have been studied and correctly interpreted, but in my estimation an interpretation that integrates all parts into a coherent whole has not yet been set forth. When the parts are interpreted in the immediate and broader literary contexts, as well as the geographical context of the Ancient Near East and the theological context of Canaanite religion, puzzles are solved and a coherent picture emerges. Verses 5-7 articulate a two-fold problem, reason for the problem, and solution to the problem.⁵ Verse 5a articulates the problem: "No *siah-hassadeh* had yet appeared in the land, and no '*eseb-hassadeh* yet sprung up." Some commentators make

⁴ Some might object that there is a methodological problem from the beginning: letting a latter text (Gen 2:5-7) control the interpretation of an earlier text (Gen 1:1-2:3). I could have written this paper in the exact opposite order, examining the structure of Gen 1:1-2:3, drawing out the implications for the parallel structure in Gen 2:4-25, and then using this material to answer the question regarding "no rain" in Gen 2:5. My starting with Gen 2:5-7 reflects the point at which I entered the interpretive process some time ago. 2) All Scripture is to be used to interpret all Scripture. We often know more about the beginning of a story once we have gotten to the end. An excellent example of this is found in Numbers 19, which describes the water of purification ritual. Verses 1-6 describe the burning of the heifer; vv 7-10 describe the removal of the ashes to a purified place outside the camp; vv 11-13 describe the use of the waters of purification for those who have come in contact with a dead body. At this point the reader is bewildered as to the relationship between the ashes and the water, since the text makes no connection between the two. In vv 14-19 it becomes clear, however, that in the ritual some of the ashes are put in ajar to which water is added, then this water is sprinkled on the unclean people and/or objects to bring about the ritual cleansing. It is only in the light of the latter material (vv 14-19) that the earlier material (vv 11-13) is comprehensible. The question is not, "Ought one to begin in Genesis 1 or Genesis 2?" The question is, "What is the interpretation that does most justice to both texts?"

⁵ The *NIV*, *NLT*, and *NAB* treat vv 5-7 as part of the same literary unit, and they begin a new paragraph at v 8; so too Victor P Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 150-60. From a text linguistics point of view the use of the waw+subject+predicate construction at the beginning of v 5 marks this material as background information; see Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose* (JSOTSup, 86; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990) 35-41. There is not unanimity as to where the background information ends and the main action begins. Some scholars take the waw-relative in v 7 as the marker for the first main action; see Niccacci, *Syntax*, 39; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987); and C. John Collins, "Exegetical-theological Notes for Christian Faith in an Age of Science," unpublished (1997) 10 n50, who follows Niccacci and Wenham. But this is not necessary, since the waw-relative can be used to represent sequence within backgrounded material; see, e.g., Gen 47:13-14; Judg 11:1-3; 1 Sam 5:1. That v 7 belongs with vv 5-6 will become clear as the argument unfolds. For now, note the chiastic arrangement of the clause types that ties v6 (the reason) to v 7 (the solution): verbal (*ki lo' himtir 'lohim* + nominal (*w^e'adam 'ayin*) + nominal (*w^e'ed ya^aleh*) + verbal (*wayyisir*).

no attempt to specify the kinds of plants these two phrases have in view, but take them as general references to vegetation.⁶ Claus Westermann, on the other hand, has provided some specificity:

siah describes mainly but not exclusively shrubs or the wild shrubs of the steppe (Gen 21:15; Job 30:4, 7), and *'eseb-hassadeh* plants that serve for food or domestic plants.⁷

But even greater specificity is attainable. The phrase, *siah-hassadeh*, refers to the wild vegetation that grows spontaneously after the onset of the rainy season, and *'eseb-hassadeh* refers to cultivated grains.

At the end of the dry season, and after five months of drought, the hills of Israel are as dry as dust, and the vegetation is brown. The farmer's field is as hard as iron, so plowing and planting are impossible. Then come the rains, resulting in the hills of the steppe being clothed with verdure (Job 38:25-27). The rains also soften the soil and allow the farmer to plow and plant (see Ps 65:9-10). It is in this geographical context that we must understand *siah-hassadeh* and *'eseb-hassadeh*.⁸

The word, *siah*, occurs only four times (Gen 2:5, 21:15; Job 30:4, 7). From the three texts outside Gen 2:5 it is clear that *siah* refers to desert vegetation, i.e., to uncultivated vegetation that grows spontaneously as a result of fall

⁶ E.g., Ronald F Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1991), 34.

⁷ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Augsburg: Minneapolis, 1984) 199. See also Hamilton, *Genesis*, 154.

⁸ The account in Gen 2:4-5 is being narrated from the perspective of one living in the Syro-Palestinian Levant, as is clear from v8 where we are told that the garden was planted "in Eden, *in the east*." "In the east" presumes a fixed reference point somewhere in the west. Since the garden was located somewhere in Mesopotamia, the western reference point is the Syro-Palestinian Levant in general and the land of Canaan in particular, the land in which the audience for whom the story was originally written was about to live. In a complementary fashion, Theodore Hiebert, *The Yahwist's Landscape: Nature and Religion in Early Israel* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 36, makes the following point: "One key detail is the reference, in the epic's opening sentence, to rainfall as essential for the growth of vegetation.... Yet when the beginning of the Yahwist's epic is compared to the beginnings of origin narratives from other cultures, this mention of rain stands out as a distinctive characteristic of J's narrative. In the great river valley civilizations of the ancient Near East, Egypt and Mesopotamia, where agriculture was dependent on the inundation of lowlands by flooding rivers and on irrigation systems related to them, narratives focus on these phenomena rather than on the rainfall that is the ultimate source of the rising rivers. A creation text from Ur, in just such a series of introductory clauses describing not yet existent realities as those that begin the Yahwist's epic, focuses on the key phenomena of irrigation agriculture:

In those days no canals were opened,

No dredging was done at dikes and ditches on dike tops.

The seeder plough and ploughing had not yet been instituted
for the knocked under and downed people.

No (one of) all the countries was planting in furrows.

By contrast, J's reference to rain alone reflects the rain-based, dryland farming characteristic of the highlands on the shores of the Mediterranean where biblical Israel came into being." Hiebert's point is well taken, apart from his views on Pentateuchal sources.

rains. In Gen 21:15, for example, Hagar placed her young son under "one of the bushes (*siah*)" in the desert of Beersheba. The two occurrences in Job 30:4 and 7 are similar,

- ³Haggard from want and hunger,
they roamed the parched land
in desolate wastelands at night.
- ⁴In the brush (*siah*) they gathered salt herbs,
and their food was the root of the broom tree.
- ⁵They were banished from their fellow men,
shouted at as if they were thieves.
- ⁶They were forced to live in the dry stream beds,
among the rocks and in holes in the ground.
- ⁷They brayed among the bushes (*siah*)
and huddled in the undergrowth.

The "parched land" and "desolate wastelands" of v 3 make clear that *siah* refers to uncultivated vegetation of the desert or steppe.

So Westermann was being too cautious when he said "*siah* describes mainly but not exclusively shrubs or the wild shrubs of the steppe." There is no evidence to suggest that *siah* refers to anything other than "wild shrubs of the steppe."⁹

On the other hand, 'eseb-hassddeb occurs in texts like Exod 9:22, 25 which have cultivated grain in view,

- ²²Then the Lord said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky so that hail will fall all over Egypt--on men and animals and on everything growing in the fields ('eseb-hassadeh) of Egypt. . . ." ²⁵Throughout Egypt hail struck everything in the fields both men and animals; it beat down everything growing in the fields ('eseb-hassadeh) and stripped every tree.

Verses 31-32 provide specificity for the more general 'eseb-hassddeb,

- ³¹The flax and barley were destroyed, since the barley had headed and the flax was in bloom. ³²The wheat and spelt, however, were not destroyed, because they ripen later.

Here 'eseb-hassddeb clearly refers to cultivated grains like flax, barley, wheat, and spelt. Similarly, and closer in context to Gen 2:5, cultivated grains ('eseb-hassddeb) are in view in Gen 3:18 where the farmer will eat the grain that is the result of his arduous labor.¹⁰

⁹ Hiebert, *Landscape*, 37, is thus correct when he says that *siah-hassadeh* "is used for vegetation that grows in semiarid and arid regions, the low bushes and dwarf shrubs characteristic of areas that lack enough rain to support intensive agriculture." But his explicit connection with pasturage of sheep and goats has no support in the context.

¹⁰ See Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 169. The New Living Translation translates 'eseb-hassadeh in Gen 2:5 as "grain," as does Hiebert, *Landscape*, 37; but contra Hiebert, the contrast between *siah-hassadeh* and 'eseb-hassadeh is not

This proposed contrast in Gen 2:5 between wild vegetation and cultivated grain finds immediate confirmation in v 5b.

Verse 5b articulates the two-fold reason for the problem with impeccable logic: "because the Lord God had not sent rain on the land, and there was no man to cultivate the ground." There was no vegetation that springs up spontaneously as a result of the rains, *because there was no rain*. And there was no cultivated grain, because *there was no cultivator*. So that the reader will not miss the two-fold reason corresponding to the two-fold problem, the Hebrew text focuses the reader's attention on the two-fold reason, *the absence of rain* and *the absence of anyone to cultivate* the fields, by placing *himtir* ("sent rain") and *'adam* ("man") in the clause-initial position in their respective clauses. A coherent picture is emerging: there was no wild vegetation because there was no rain, and there was no cultivated grain because there was no cultivator.

By this point the author has created an expectation in the mind of the reader: the two-fold problem with its two-fold reason will be given a two-fold solution. Yet, here is where virtually all interpretations fail for lack of coherence.

Verses 6-7 provide the two-fold solution: "So [God] caused rain clouds to rise up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground, and the Lord God formed the man. . . ." Verse 7 says, "the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." Here lies the solution to the second prong of the two-fold problem and reason. The logic is cogent and the picture is coherent: "no cultivated grain had sprung up ... for there was no one to cultivate the land ... and the LORD God formed the man." This is all rather straight forward and uncontested.

The crux is the meaning of the word *'ed* in v 6. Scholars have proposed numerous meanings for *'ed*,¹¹ but "stream" seems to have won the day.¹² "Stream" can not possibly be correct for two reasons: 1) The text does not say that the problem was a lack of water in general, a problem which could be solved by water from any one of a variety of sources, for instance, a stream. The problem was a lack of rain in particular, because in the ancient Syro-Palestine Levant rain was the sine qua non of vegetation, especially wild vegetation. 2) "Stream" makes nonsense out of such a well-constructed and tightly argued text. If "stream" is understood, the sense is something like "no wild vegetation had appeared in the land ... for the LORD God had not sent rain ... but a stream was arising to water the whole surface of the land." If a stream was present to water the whole surface of the land, then

between animal husbandry and agriculture, but between vegetation that requires rain only and that which requires a farmer in addition to rain.

¹¹ See Westermann, *Genesis*, 200-201, for an overview.

¹² See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 17; Youngblood, *Genesis*, 35; Westermann, *Genesis*, 201; John J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers, and Preachers* (The Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 1992), 44.

there was ample water for the appearance of wild vegetation, and the reason clause ("for the Lord God had not sent rain") is completely irrelevant and illogical.¹³

Though Gen 2:5-7 primarily connects rain with wild vegetation, in reality rain is also the prerequisite for cultivated grain in the life of the ancient Hebrew farmer (see Deut 11:8-17). Since rain is the prerequisite for *'eseb-hassadeh* as well as for *siah-hassadeh*, and since Adam will eventually *'eseb-hassadeh* according to Gen 3:18, Adam must have experienced rain. Once again, if "for the LORD God had not sent rain" is to make any logical sense, rain must have fallen in Adam's experience.¹⁴

So v 6 is begging to be interpreted as a reference to rain. The expectation is for something like, "no wild vegetation had appeared in the land ... for the LORD God had not sent rain ... so God sent rain." On this point Mitchell Dahood was right. Stimulated by the association of the obscure Eblaite NI.DU with rain (*ga-sum*; Hebrew *gesem*) and the association of Hebrew *'ed* with rain (*mtr*), Dahood proposed reading NI.DU as Semitic *i-du* and understanding both the Eblaite *i-du* and the Hebrew *'ed* as "rain cloud."¹⁵ Whether or not Dahood is correct in his interpretation of the Eblaite evidence,¹⁶ he is correct in taking Hebrew *'ed* as "rain cloud," as can be demonstrated from the literary and climatic contexts in which *'ed* occurs in the MT itself.¹⁷

The only other recognized occurrence of Hebrew *'ed* is Job 36:27,18 which the NIV translates,

¹³ Kline, "Space," 12, says, "Gen 2:6 tells of the provision of a supply of water, the absence of which had previously delayed the appearance of vegetation.... Verse 6 must then be relating a new development, not something concurrent with the situation described in verse 5. For otherwise verse 6 would be affirming the presence of the supply of water necessary for the survival of vegetation at the very time when verse 5b says the absence of vegetation was due to the lack of such a water supply."

¹⁴ It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine other biblical accounts of creation that testify to the presence of rain from the beginning, but see, for example, Ps 104:13 and Prov 3:19-20, and Mark D. Futato, "Sense Relations in the 'Rain' Domain of the Old Testament," in Mark S. Smith, ed., *Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association, forthcoming) and idem "Dew," in Willem G. VanGemeren, ed., *The New International Dictionary of Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2.363-64.

¹⁵ Mitchell Dahood, "Eblaite I-Du and Hebrew 'Ed, 'Ram-Cloud'," *CBQ* 43 (1981) 534-38.

¹⁶ See David Toshio Tsumura, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis I and 2* (JSOTSup, 83; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) 95-97, for a recent criticism of Dahood's proposed Semitic etymology. The only criticism offered by Tsumura that has any bearing on my argumentation is his third point, "[Dahood's] translation, 'So he made a rain cloud come up' is not syntactically acceptable" (96); but the consecutive nature of this clause is not an essential part of the argument, and see my footnote note 29, which counters Tsumura's assertion regarding its acceptability.

¹⁷ The biblical evidence can stand on its own and does not need support from comparative Semitics.

¹⁸ Dahood, "Rain Cloud," 537-38, also reinterprets the personal name *matred* (Gen 36:39; 1 Chr 1:50) as "Rain of the Cloud," with an elided aleph. He cites several theophoric names with a "rain" component. There is also the simple Hebrew name *gesem* (Neh 2:19).

He draws up the drops of water,
which distill as rain to the streams ('*ed*).

The *NIV* translates '*ed* here with "streams" in keeping with its rendering in Gen 2:6. A footnote, however, offers an alternative: "distill from the mist ('*ed*) as rain." The alternative in the footnote is certainly closer to the true sense. It correctly recognizes the sense "from" for the preposition *l^e*,¹⁹ but "mist" ("water in the form of particles floating or falling in the atmosphere at or near the surface of the earth and approaching the form of rain") cannot be the sense of '*ed* here, since mist does not "distill as rain (*matar*)," especially as "abundant rain" (see v 28). The ancients knew as well as we that rain distills/drops from clouds, as Eccl 1:3 makes clear,

If clouds are full of water,
they pour rain upon the earth.

Dahood, translates Job 36:27,

When he draws up drops from the sea,
they distill as rain (*matar*) from his rain cloud ('*ed*).²⁰

Such a rendering not only makes sense in the narrow confines of the verse and Syro-Palestinian meteorology, but note how well it fits the context,

²⁷When he draws up drops from the sea,
they distill as rain from his rain cloud. (Dahood)

²⁸The clouds pour down their moisture
and abundant showers fall on mankind. (*NIV*)

Note how a hinge is formed by v 27b ("rain cloud") and v 28a ("clouds"). This hinge connects the beginning of the cycle (evaporation in v 27a) with the end of the cycle (abundant rain on the land in v 28b). Clearly, the text does not picture mist distilling as rain or drops of water distilling to streams, but abundant rain falling from rain clouds.

Given that '*ed* has the sense "rain cloud" in Job 36:27, where it is collocated with rain (*mtr*), it is certainly plausible that *ed* has the same sense in Gen 2:6, where it is likewise collocated with rain (*mtr*; Gen 2:5). The plausibility of this conclusion is confirmed by the fact that Dahood was not the first to understand '*ed* in the sense of "rain cloud;" the ancient Targums consistently render '*id* with Aramaic '*nn* ("cloud")!²¹

¹⁹ See John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 475, and Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (AB 15; Carden City, NY: Double Day, 1965), 273.

²⁰ Dahood, "Rain Cloud," 536.

²¹ Tsumura, *Earth*, 94. For Onkelos, see Alexander Sperber, ed. *The Bible in Aramaic, Based on Old Manuscripts and Printed Texts* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 1.2; for Pseudo Jonathan, see E. G. Clarke, ed. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of the Pentateuch: Text and Concordance* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1984), 2; for *Neophiti I*, see Alejandro Diez Macho, ed. *Neophyti 1: Targum Palestinense Ms de la Biblioteca Vaticana* (Madrid: Consejo Superior De Investigaciones Cientificas, 1968) 1.8.

An immediate objection arises, however, if we translate Gen 2:6, "A rain cloud came up (qal of 'lh) from the land," since rain clouds do not literally come up from the land. So, for example, David Tsumura has said,

On the other hand, ed is described as "coming up" (*ya'aleh*) from the earth ('eres), either from the surface of the earth or from underground. Thus, 'ed, the water from below, is clearly distinguished from rain water, the water from above, in Gen 2:5-6.²²

But consider a text like Ps 135:7,

He makes clouds rise from the ends of the earth ('eres);
he sends lightning with the rain
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

The verb translated "makes rise" in v 7a is the hiphil of 'lh, and the word for rain in v 7b is *matar*. Ps 135:7 thus provides a close parallel for Gen 2:5-6, showing that clouds do rise from the land, at least in terms of how things appear to an observer standing on the land. Clouds appear on the horizon, whether the horizon is a plain or a mountain, and thus give the appearance of rising from the land. The seventh time Elijah's servant looked out over the Mediterranean he said a "cloud as small as a man's hand is rising ('lh) from the sea" (1 Kgs 18:44), not literally rising from the sea, of course, but rising in terms of appearance, since the cloud was rising in relation to the sea that formed the western horizon. Compare also Jer 10:13 || 51:16,

When he thunders, the waters in the heavens roar;
he makes clouds rise (hiphil of 'lh) from the ends of the earth ('eres).
He sends lightning with the rain (*matar*)
and brings out the wind from his storehouses.

In light of these texts, I am also inclined to agree with Dahood²³ when he takes *ya'aleh* in Gen 2:6 (used in the context of *mtr* and 'eres) as a hiphil with God as the subject for the following reasons: 1) Ps 135:7 and Jer 10:13 use the hiphil of 'lh + "clouds" as the direct object with God as subject in the context of *matar* and 'eres, and thus the legitimacy of collocating the hiphil of *dh* + "clouds" is established, 2) God is the subject of the preceding *himtir* (Gen 2:5) and the following *wayyiser* ("formed;" v 7), so continuity of the subject would result,²⁴ and most significantly 3) God would be the

Pseudo Jonathan says, "But a cloud of glory came down from beneath the throne of glory, and was filled with water from the ocean, went up again from the earth, and sent rain down and watered the whole surface of the ground;" periphrastic elements are italicized in Michael Maher, trans. *Targum Pseudo Jonathan: Genesis* (The Aramaic Bible IA; Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 1A.22.

²² Tsumura, *Earth*, 93.

²³ Dahood, "Rain Cloud," 536.

²⁴ While continuity of the subject is not required (see 2:21 and Collins, "Exegetical-theological Notes," 13 n79), such continuity is a consideration along with the other two factors.

explicit *solver* of both the problem of no rain and the problem of no cultivator--God caused the rain clouds to rise and God formed the cultivator.

A second objection to taking 'ed as a reference to rain (cloud) would be that Gen 2:10 says a "river" watered the garden, not rain. In fact, the repetition of the hiphil of *sqh* in v 6 and v 10 is part of an argument for taking 'ed as a reference to the river of v 10.²⁵ The repetition, however, can be explained as a means of connecting the source ("rain clouds;" v 6) with the result ("river;" v 10). But even if 'ed is defined by the "river," the presence of rain simply becomes an unargued presupposition of the text. This is so because the ancients were as well aware as we are that precipitation is the source of river water (see, for example, Matt 7:25, 27). Moreover, the word for "river" in our text, *nahar*, is typically used for perennial rivers like the Euphrates. Since such rivers are fed by rain (and melting snow in the surrounding mountains), the presence of a *nhr* would be proof of the presence of rain rather than an objection to it. The burden of proof rests squarely on the one who would wish to argue that something other than a precipitation-fed river is in view in the use of the word *nahar* in Gen 2:10, since the word is never used for anything other than a precipitation-fed river in the Hebrew Bible. But ultimately the resultant illogical text (as discussed above) when 'ed is taken as "stream" outweighs all other considerations and precludes understanding 'ed as a reference to a river or stream.

Meredith Kline has adopted Dahood's interpretation of 'ed as "rain cloud" and has further suggested taking the imperfect of 'Ih in an inceptive sense,²⁶ "he began to make rain clouds²⁷ arise." Grammatically the inceptive sense is possible,²⁸ and contextually the inceptive sense is required, for if there had been rain clouds previously, there would have been rain and the reason clause ("for the LORD God had not sent rain") would be irrelevant and illogical.

As with the second prong of the two-fold problem and reason, so also with the first prong, a coherent picture emerges: "no wild vegetation had appeared in the land ... for the Lord God had not sent rain ... so²⁹ he began to make rain clouds arise from the land and water the whole surface of the ground."

²⁵ See Cassuto, *Genesis*, 104.

²⁶ Kline, "Space," 12.

²⁷ I am taking the singular as a collective.

²⁸ Bruce K. Waltke, and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 31.2c.

²⁹ For the use of waw + non-predicate + predicate in a consecutive clause, see GKC §166a; while most of the examples are of volitives, Prov 30:3b is not, *w^eda'at q^edosim 'eda* ("so I do [not] know the Holy One"), waw+direct object+imperfect. The consecutive nature of the clause is not essential to the argument; the clause could (with less likelihood) be adversative; for an adversative clause introduced with waw following a negative clause, see GKC § 163a and Paul Jouon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Subsidia Biblica 14; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), §172a.

1. Summary

Gen 2:5-7 is quite logical, highly structured, and perfectly coherent:

Problem	Reason	Solution
1) No wild vegetation	--> 1) No rain	--> 1) God sent rain
2) No cultivated grain	--> 2) No cultivator	--> 2) God formed a cultivator

II. *Implications for the Reading of Gen 2:4-25*

The narrative of Gen 2:4-25 flows at a steady pace, moved along by a sequence of waw-relative verbs. The "most obvious and frequent" use of the waw-relative is "that of simple chronological succession."³⁰ "That is, when a *wayyiqtol* verb is used, the story usually takes an incremental step forward along a timeline."³¹ So, the *prima facie* reading of Gen 2:4-5 is chronological. A clear exception to the apparently chronological sequencing of material is the information provided in vv 10-14, pertaining to the river; this section is marked as non-sequential and circumstantial in the normal manner: by the use of the waw + subject + predicate construction (*w^e nahar yose*).³² External considerations (comparing Gen 2:4-25 with Gen 1:1-2:3) and internal considerations (the flow of the narrative in Gen 2:4-25), however, disallow a strictly chronological reading of Gen 2:4-25.

An external example of *dischronology* is found in Gen 2:19a, "Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them."³³ The Hebrew verbs translated "formed" and "brought" are waw-relatives, resulting in the *prima facie* sequence of God's forming (*wayyiser*) of Adam (v 7a), followed by God's forming (*wayyiser*) of the animals (v 19a). A straightforward reading of Gen 2:19, in other words, puts Gen 2:4-25 in conflict with a chronological reading of Gen 1:1-2:3, where the animals were formed before the man (Gen 1:24-27). One may resort to the use of the waw-relative for a past perfect in this case to harmonize the two texts,³⁴ but a

³⁰ S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew: And Some Other Syntactical Questions* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1881), 80. See also Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, §33.2.1a.

³¹ Randall Buth, "Methodological Collision Between Source Criticism and Discourse Analysis: The Problem of 'Unmarked Temporal Overlay' and the Pluperfect/Nonsequential *wayyiqtol*," *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (ed. Robert D. Bergen; Dallas, TX: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1994), 138.

³² See Buth, "Collision," 140, and Niccacci, *Syntax*, 35-41. See also C. John Collins, "The *Wayyiqtol* As 'Pluperfect': When and Why," *TB* 46 (1995) 118. Sequence would have been expressed by the waw-relative, *wayyese*; see Jouon and Muraoka, *Grammar*, § 159d-e.

³³ NASB. The same sense is found in the *KJV*, *NKJV*, 1901 *ASV*, *RSV*, and *NRSV*

³⁴ See Collins, "Wayyiqtol," 135-40, for a discussion of the issue in general and his application to Gen 2:19 in particular. The waw-relative can be used for the pluperfect in a limited set of environments: when there is lexical repetition or when knowledge of the real world leads to the conclusion that an explanation of a previous event or situation is being provided; see Buth, "Collision," 147. Buth, "Collision," 148-49, argues that Gen 2:19 does not meet the

waw-relative is not the *obvious syntactic* choice for dischronologized material, as Gen 2:10 has already shown. The point is that while the *prima facie* reading is chronological, a closer reading (aided by an external comparison with Gen 1:1-2:3) leads us to the conclusion that the *prima facie*, chronological reading is not correct. The author is guided at this point by concerns that are not chronological.³⁵ For, in keeping with the style of the text, had Moses been concerned about strict chronology and the chronological harmony of Gen 1:1-2:3 with Gen 2:4-5, he could have syntactically signaled the dischronology of Gen 2:19 with the waw + subject + predicate construction, as in Gen 2:10, or with a relative clause containing a perfect verb for the past perfect, as in Gen 2:8 (*“ser yasar, ”*whom he had formed”).

A key internal consideration confirms that strict chronology is not the organizational control for Gen 2:4-25. Having formed Adam (v 7a), God proceeded to place Adam in the Garden (v 8b),

⁷Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being. ⁸And the Lord God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed the man whom He had formed.³⁶

But then in v 15 we read,

Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.³¹

Again, the verb translated "took" in v 15 is a waw-relative, that, if taken to indicate chronological sequence, would result in Adam being placed in the garden in v 8 and then being placed in the garden a second time in v 15. I suppose one could argue that Adam was put in the garden in v 8, was removed from the garden or that he left the garden without our being told, and was subsequently put back in the garden in v 15, but such straining to maintain a chronological reading of the text is unwarranted, especially

criteria for temporal overlay. See also Waltke and O'Connor, *Syntax*, §33.2.3 for a general discussion.

³⁵ Using the waw-relative for the pluperfect instead of the usual constructions (waw + subject + predicate or the perfect in a relative clause) serves to elevate the material to a main-line situation in the narrative, rather than demoting the material to a subordinate level; see Buth, "Collision," 148. An author may use the unexpected waw-relative form for a variety of reasons. Collins, "Wayyiqtol," 139, argues that the communicative effect in Gen 2:19 is to emphasize the anthropocentric nature of the story. A better explanation seems to be that introducing the forming of the animals at this point creates dramatic tension by raising the question, "Will a suitable helper for the man be found among the animals?" The answer is, "But for the man, no suitable helper was found!" (v20b). Then, after this dramatic delay, the suitable helper is made, and the man exclaims, "*zo't* (This one [as opposed to the previous animals])! *happa'am* (This time [as opposed to the previous parade])!" (v23).

³⁶ NASB. The same sense is found in the *KJV*, *NKJV*, 1901 *ASV*, *RSV*, and *NRSV*.

³⁷ *NASB*. The same sense is found in the *KJV*, *NKJV*, 1901 *ASV*, *RSV*, and *NRSV*.

since there is an easier solution, one that is explicable within the conventions of Hebrew style.

Gen 2:4-25 provides an example of the Hebrew stylistic technique of synoptic/resumption-expansion.³⁸ A Hebrew author will at times tell the whole story in brief form (synopsis), then repeat the story (resumption), adding greater detail (expansion). Such is the case in Gen 2:4-25.

Gen 1:1-2:3 is the prologue to the entire Book of Genesis,³⁹ and Gen 2:4 is the heading to Gen 2:4-4:26, the first of ten "*toledot*" sections that provide the structure for the Book of Genesis as a whole.⁴⁰ Gen 2:5-7 provides the setting for Gen 2:8-25 in particular. Gen 2:8 is a synopsis of the whole that is resumed and expanded in Gen 2:9-25.

The synopsis has a two-fold nature, in keeping with the two-fold nature of the introductory vv5-7. First, God planted a garden (v 8a), then he placed in the garden the man whom he had formed (v 8b). This synopsis with its focus on vegetation and the man in the garden is clearly integrated with--and flows from--the preceding concern with the lack of vegetation and the lack of a man to cultivate the ground. In other words, the coherent picture that emerged in vv 5-7 continues to manifest itself in the synopsis of v8. Gen 2:4-25 is not a second account of the creation of the heavens and the earth, but is rather an account that focuses on the planting of a garden and human life in that garden (vv 9-25), as the introduction anticipates and the synopsis articulates.⁴¹

Verses 9-14 resume and expand v 8a, the planting of the garden. Verses 15-25 resume and expand v 8b, the putting of the man in the garden.

Verses 9-14 resume and expand v 8a. In v 9a the planting (*nt'*) of the garden is detailed in terms of God causing to sprout (*smh*) from the ground "every tree that is pleasing to the sight and good for food." Pleasing to whose sight and good for whose food? The man's sight and his food, obviously. In addition, God caused the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to sprout (v 9b); both of these trees find their meaning in relation to the man as well. Not only does v 9 pick up the first half of the two-fold synopsis in v 8a, but it also picks up the first half of the two-fold problem in v 5a: there was no vegetation. Verses 10-14 go on to describe the river that waters the garden and that then divides and flows through such places as Havilah, Cush, and Ashur: places where *people* live. The gold and precious stones are of value to the *people* who would live in these places and

³⁸ Herbert Chanan Brichto, *Toward a Grammar of Biblical Poetics: Tales of the Prophets* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1992), 13-19.

³⁹ Ian Hart, "Genesis 1:1-2:3 As a Prologue to the Book of Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 46 (1995) 315-36, and Kline, "Space," 11.

⁴⁰ See Meredith G. Kline, in Donald Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, ed., "Genesis," *The New Bible Commentary* (3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 83, and Sarna, *Genesis*, 16-17.

⁴¹ I understand Gen 2:5 as having a global reference that would parallel the situation prior to Days 3b and 6b, i.e., before God created vegetation (Day 3b) and people (Day 6b); see below.

to those with whom they would trade. Gen 2:9-14 describes a garden of *vegetation* clearly designed for *human habitation*.

Verses 15-25 resume and expand v 8b. Verse 15 repeats v 8b with different vocabulary and adds the explicit purpose for placing the man in the garden: "to cultivate ('*bd*) it." Not only does v 15 pick up the second half of the two-fold synopsis in v 8b, but it also picks up the second half of the two-fold reason in v 5b: "there was no man to cultivate ('*bd*) the ground." Verses 16-17 explicitly connect the man and the vegetation, as the two were implicitly connected in v 9. The remainder of the text (vv 18-25) provides the details of how God created a suitable helper for the man in the garden. By the end of Genesis 2 the man and the woman are living blissfully in the garden.

1. *Summary*

Gen 2:4-25 is a highly structured topical account with a two-fold focus on vegetation and humanity. The two-fold problem of no wild vegetation and no cultivated vegetation (v 5), owing to the two-fold reason of no rain and no cultivator (v 6), provisionally solved in a two-fold way by the sending of rain clouds and the forming of a man (v 7), is roundly resolved in the two-fold synopsis of God planting a garden and putting the man in the garden to cultivate it (v 8), and the two-fold expansion with the same focus on vegetation and humanity (vv 9-25).

III. *Implications for the Reading of Gen 1:1-2:3*

Gen 1:1-2 and 2:1-3 form a frame around the creation account. The initial sentences of the opening and closing sections with their repetition of "the heavens and the earth" form an inclusio.

Genesis 1 begins with the grand affirmation that in the beginning God created everything. Like Gen 2:5-7, Gen 1:2 provides the setting for the following material. Parallel to Gen 2:5 with its two-fold problem, Gen 1:2 presents a two-fold problem: 1) the earth was "unproductive and uninhabited"⁴² and 2) "darkness was over the surface of the deep." Both of

⁴² Bruce K. Waltke, "The First Seven Days: What Is the Creation Account Trying to Tell Us?," *CT* (August 12, 1988) 43 and Cassuto, *Genesis*, 22, argue against over interpreting this phrase as having two distinct referents. But Tsumura, *Earth*, 17-43, has made a compelling case for understanding the phrase to refer to the earth as unproductive and uninhabited; note that at the end of Day 3 the earth is productive ("The earth produced vegetation;" 1:12), and at the end of Day 6 the earth is inhabited ("And God said, 'Let the earth produce living creatures;" 1:24), and thus the problem of the earth being "unproductive and uninhabited" has been resolved in a symmetrical way. The topic of another paper would be to trace this protology of "unproductive and uninhabited" through the typology of Israel as the new people in the new fertile land to the eschatology of the new creation inhabited by a people no one can number.

these problems are resolved in the following material, just as the two-fold problem of Gen 2:5 was resolved in the text that follows it.

Gen 2:1 signals the end of the account by means of the repetition of "the heavens and the earth." Gen 2:2-3 then brings us to the *telos* of the text, God's Sabbath rest.

Gen 1:3-31 tell the story of God's eight creative acts in six days.⁴³ Day 1 recounts the first creative act ("And God said, 'Let there be light'"), Day 2 recounts the second ("And God said, 'Let there be an expanse'"), then Day 3 recounts the third and fourth ("And God said, 'Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry ground appear'" plus "And God said, 'Let the land produce vegetation'"). Like Day 1, Day 4 recounts a single creative act, the fifth ("And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky'"); like Day 2, Day 5 recounts one, the sixth ("And God said, 'Let the water teem with living creatures and let the birds fly above the earth'"); like Day 3, Day 6 recounts two, the seventh and the eighth ("And God said, 'Let the land produce living creatures'" plus "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image'"). This arrangement of 1 + 1 + 2 followed by 1 + 1 + 2 makes the parallel nature of Days 1 through 3 and Days 4 through 6 obvious.

The parallels go beyond that of the number of creative events and days, however. There are other obvious parallels between Days 1 through 3 and Days 4 through 6. The creating of light on Day 1 parallels the creating of the luminaries on Day 4. The creating of the waters below and the sky above on Day 2 parallels the creating of the fish and the birds on Day 5. The creating of dry land on Day 3a parallels the creating of land animals on Day 6a, and the creating of vegetation on Day 3b parallels the creating of mankind on Day 6b.

It may seem that the parallelism breaks down at the end, because vegetation and mankind may not seem like much of a parallel. But when one recalls the two-fold focus on vegetation and humanity in Gen 2:4-25, the parallelism becomes evident. The parallelism between vegetation and people is not only evident in the text but is highly significant for the theology of the text (see below).

The first three days find their *telos* in the creation of vegetation on Day 3b, and the second three days find their *telos* in the creation of humanity on Day 6b. Thus Gen 1:1-2:3 has the same two-fold focus as Gen 2:4-25, a focus on vegetation and humanity. Rather than being two disparate accounts from two disparate sources, Gen 1:1-2:3 and Gen 2:4-25 form a highly integrated literary unit. Rather than being a second creation account, Gen 2:4-25 is properly read as a resumption and expansion not of Day 6 but of Days 3b and 6b taken together as a unit.

⁴³ For a schematic presentation of this well known point see Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: the Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984), 54-55.

Day 3b speaks of the creation of vegetation (*dese'*) in two broad kinds: "seed-bearing plants" (*'eseb mazria' zera'*) and "trees that bear fruit" (*'es p^eri'oseh p^eri*).⁴⁴ Day 6b specifies that people are permitted to eat from both kinds of vegetation: "seed-bearing plants" (*'eseb zorea' zera'*) and "every tree that has fruit with seed in it" (*kol-ha'asaser-bo p^eri-ha'es*). So Days 3b and 6b are bound together by linguistic repetition as well as by thematic conception. So too, the people of Day 6b are bound to the vegetation of Day 3b through the motif of food.⁴⁵

Gen 1:3-31 is topically arranged. Granted 1) the common focus in Genesis 1 and 2 on vegetation and humanity, 2) the general parallels between Days 1 through 3, 3) the specific parallels between Days 3b and Day 6b, 4) the fact that Gen 2:4-25 resumes and expands Days 3b and 6b taken together, and 5) the topical nature of Gen 2:4-25, we should not be surprised by the suggestion that the coherent reading of Gen 1:1-2:3 (that is, the reading that coheres internally as well as externally with Gen 2:4-25) is topical rather than chronological. Such a reading is confirmed by some further details from Days 1 and 4, as well as by the theology of Gen 1:1-2:25.

The parallelism between Days 1 and 4 goes beyond the general correspondence between the creation of light on Day 1 and the creation of the luminaries on Day 4. What did God accomplish on Day 1 by means of the creation of light? "God divided the light from the darkness" (*wayyabdel^e lohim ben ha-'or uben hahosek*), and the result was "day" (*yom*) and "night" (*layla*). So by the end of Day 1, God had successfully divided the light from the darkness and established the sequence of day and night. Now, what was God's purpose in creating the luminaries on Day 4? We are given a variety of purposes, e.g., they will serve as signs and will rule the day and the night. But what is the overarching purpose? The overarching purpose is indicated by the repetition of "to divide" (*l^ehabdil*) in v 14 and v 18, a repetition that forms an inclusio around Day 4. In v 14 we are told that God created the luminaries "to divide the day from the night" (*lehabdil ben hayyom uben hallayld*). But God had already divided the day from the night on Day 1! In v 18 we are told that God created the luminaries "to divide the light from

⁴⁴ Whereas Gen 1:11-13 divides all vegetation into two general groups (non-trees and trees), Gen 2:5 divides all vegetation into two other groups (uncultivated and cultivated); both divisions are based on ordinary observation. It is clear by this point, moreover, that Gen 2:5 interfaces with Gen 1:1-2:3 at the end of Day 3a (when there was 'eres but no vegetation) and the end of Day 6a (when there was no man); see David Toshio Tsumura, "Genesis and Ancient Near Eastern Stories of Creation and Flood: An Introduction," *I Studied Inscriptions From Before the Flood: Ancient Near Eastern, Literary, and Linguistic Approaches to Gen 1-11* (ed. Richard S. Hess and David Toshio Tsumura; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 28-29, who situates Gen 2:5 at Gen 1:9-10, when the waters were cleared from the land but there was not yet any vegetation, but does not see the connection with Day 6b.

⁴⁵ The man and the woman being permitted to eat from the trees in Genesis 1 is an obvious setting of the stage for Gen 2:16-17, where prohibition regarding eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is added to permission regarding eating from other trees; see Kline, "Space," 11.

the darkness" (*l'habdil ben ha' or uben hahosek*). But God had already divided the light from the darkness on Day 1! These linguistic parallels between Day 1 and Day 4 must not be overlooked. Either God's work on Day 4 is redundant, reaccomplishing the same thing he had already accomplished on Day 1, or the accounts of God's work on Days 1 and 4 are two different perspectives on the same creative work.

The forming and stationing of the sun, moon, and stars are attributed to day four. Their functions with respect to the earth are also stated here, first in the fiat section (Gen 1:14,15) and again (in reverse order) in the fulfillment section (Gen 1:16-18). They are to give light on the earth and to rule by bounding light/day and darkness/night, as well as by demarcating the passage of years and succession of seasons. These effects which are said to result from the production and positioning of the luminaries on day four are the same effects that are already attributed to the creative activity of day one (Gen 1:3-5). There too daylight is produced on the earth and the cycle of light/day and darkness/night is established.⁴⁶

The repetition of language binds the work of the Days 1 and 4 together into a single activity.

In terms of chronology, day four thus brings us back to where we were in day one, and in fact takes us behind the effects described there to the astral apparatus that accounts for them. The literary sequence is then not the same as the temporal sequence.⁴⁷

But the account of Day 4 adds information to that given on Day 1: the luminaries are the sources of the light created on Day 1, and there are subordinate purposes for the creation of the luminaries as well. In other words, Days 1 and 4 are another application of the synopsis-resumption/expansion technique employed on a variety of levels in Genesis 1 and 2. There is a consistent style of narration employed in both texts: just as Gen 2:15 is not chronologically sequential to Gen 2:8b, but is a repetition with additional information regarding the placing of the man in the garden, so Day 4 is not chronologically sequential to Day 1, but is a repetition with additional information regarding the creation of light.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Kline, "Space," 7-8.

⁴⁷ Kline, "Space," 8.

⁴⁸ A rarely discussed but important text that bears on the question of a chronological reading of Gen 1 is Job 38:4-7,

4Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

Tell me, if you understand.

5Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know!

Who stretched a measuring line across it?

6On what were its footings set,

or who laid its cornerstone-

7while the morning stars sang together

and all the angels shouted for joy?

This text assumes the creation of the stars before the founding of the earth and before the separation of the seas and dry land; see Ps 104:5-9 for this same architectural picture of the

One might object that had Moses wished to represent Gen 1:14-31 as an overlay of Gen 1:3-13 he would have begun v 14 with the expected *we'elohim 'amar* (waw + subject + predicate), and that the use of the waw-relative indicates that the events of Day 4 are temporally sequential to those of Days 1 through 3. But as we have already noted, the waw-relative (here *wayyo'mer*) can be used for temporal overlay when either lexical repetition or knowledge of the real world signals such an overlay.⁴⁹ Here both criteria are met: lexical repetitions abound between Day 1 and Day 4, and light without luminaries is not part of the real world in which the original audience lived.⁵⁰

1. Summary

Gen 1:3-31 is a coherent account of creation that has been arranged topically to focus the reader's attention on vegetation and humanity. This focus sets the stage for the sequel, Gen 2:4-25, which resumes and expands upon this two-fold focus in a variety of ways, one in particular being the role that rain plays in the production of the vegetation that people eat. These literary conclusions have significant implications for understanding one key aspect of the theology of the text.

IV. Implications for the Theology of Genesis 1-2

The literary structure of Genesis 1 and 2 is significant for the theology of the text in a variety of ways. The primary reason for lifting the event of Day 4 to the main event-line (rather than marking it grammatically as a temporal overlay) and shaping the account after the pattern of a week is clearly the sabbatical theology of the text. The theology of the Sabbath is certainly central to the theology of Gen 1:1-2:3. In his self-published work, "Kingdom Prologue," Meredith G. Kline spells out the sabbatical theology of Gen 1:1-2:3 and its relation to the parallel arrangements of Days 1 through 3 and Days 4 through 6.⁵¹ He also articulates the sabbatical theology of Gen 1:1-2:3 in his recent article.⁵² Here I

founding of the earth and the separation of the seas and dry land. Job 38-39 should give us all pause, if we think we fully comprehend God's ways at the time of creation.

⁴⁹ Buth, "Collision," 147.

⁵⁰ The objection that supernatural light (e.g., the light of God's glory as in Rev 21:5) is in view in Days 1 through 3 has been adequately countered by Kline's argument that such an interpretation "distorts the eschatological design of creation history, according to which the advent of God's Glory as the source of illumination that does away with need for the sun awaits the Consummation" ("Space," 9); see footnote 30 where Kline points out that in the consummation there will be light from the Glory and not from the sun, but that this is also joined with the absence of night, a situation that clearly does not pertain to Days 1 through 3, thus undermining the attempt to use Rev 22:5 to explain the light without luminaries of Days 1 through 3.

⁵¹ Meredith G. Kline, "Kingdom Prologue," 26-32; see also Hart, "Prologue," 315-16, 324-30.

⁵² Kline, "Space," 10-11.

want on focus on a different but vitally important aspect of the text's theology by answering the question, "Why the concern with rain and the resultant vegetation that people eat?"

Who is the presumed original reader of Genesis 1–2? Assuming a late date of composition, many read Genesis 1 against the backdrop of Mesopotamian religion with a presumed post-exilic reader in view. Genesis 1 is consequently read as a theological polemic against Mesopotamian religion. What difference for the theology of the text would it make, if we presume the original reader to be a pre-exilic Israelite and the polemic to be against Canaanite religion?

The dominant religious threat for pre-exilic Israel was Baalism. "The agrarian peoples of the ancient Middle East were acutely aware of the most basic equation: water = life." So water played a major role in the theologies of ancient Near Eastern peoples. Canaan, however, was not like Egypt or Mesopotamia, where agriculture was based on irrigation from rivers. Canaan was a land where agriculture was dependent on rain,

The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven (Deut 11:10–11).

Canaanite religion was consequently not concerned with river gods, as were the religions of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The primary god of the Canaanites was Baal, "the rider on

⁵³ I am not the first to suggest a Canaanite background for Genesis 1–2. In *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), John Day read Genesis 1 as a demythologized Canaanite *Chaoskampf*: "In so far as *tehom*'s mythological background is concerned this is not Babylonian at all, but rather Canaanite . . ." (50) and "The wind of Gen 1:2 derives ultimately from the wind of Baal employed against the sea monster" (53). In "The Canaanite Background of Gen I-III," *VT* 10 (1960), F. F. Hvidberg said, "At the back of the narrative is the prophet's struggle against baal. It is against him the story fights" (286) and "My aim has been to call attention to what they [Gen 1 and 2] have in common: a glimpse of the life-and-death struggle with Baal of the Canaanites for the soul of Israel" (294). In "Interpreting the Creation and Fall Story in Gen 2–3," *ZAW* 93 (1981), N. Wyatt said, "We may then accept F. F. Hvidberg's general theory that the story is intended as a polemic against Canaanite religion, with the proviso that it is the cult of El and Asherah and not that of baal which is attacked" (19).

⁵⁴ John Day, "Baal," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (6 vols., New York: Double Day, 1992) 1.547.

⁵⁵ Fred E. Woods, *Water and Storm Polemics Against Baalism in the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Peter Lang, 1994).

⁵⁶ Yehuda Karmon, *Israel: A Regional Geography* (London: John Wiley & Sons, 1971), 27, says of Israel, "Rainfall is the decisive climatic factor in the physical existence of population and for plant life and agriculture."

⁵⁷ Woods, *Water*, 1, suggests that the unpredictable nature of the Tigris and Euphrates over against the predictability of the Nile helps to explain some of the fundamental differences between Mesopotamian and Egyptian religion.

the clouds,” the storm god whose rain was considered absolutely necessary for the growth of crops and hence for life itself.

When the Hebrew tribes left the stable environment of Egypt and headed toward the land of Canaan, they encountered a people who worshipped the storm god called Baal and his retinue. Such an encounter created a culture conflict. Israel had been led by Yahweh through the sea and the desert, but as she entered the new land, Israel asked, “Was Yahweh also the god of Canaan?” As the Israelites settled in Canaan, they were tempted to ask their Canaanite neighbors, “How does your garden grow?” Such inquiry was seen by later writers as having led to eventual apostasy and exile as Israel became idolatrous and eventually drowned in Baalism.

This struggle against Baalism is part of the fabric of Genesis through Kings. The contest on Mt. Carmel brought this struggle into sharp relief. The alternatives were clear: “If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kgs 18:21). The means of determination was clear: “The god who answers by fire—he is God” (1 Kgs 18:24). When Baal failed to answer by fire and the Lord sent fire from heaven, the conclusion was clear: “The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!” (1 Kgs 18:39).

But this contest was not about which deity controlled fire. The issue at hand was, “Who controls the rain?” The struggle began with Elijah’s words, As the Lord, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word (1 Kgs 17:1).

And the struggle ended when the Lord God of Israel sent rain,
The sky grew black with clouds, the wind rose, a heavy rain came on. . . .
(1 Kgs 18:45).

The polemic against Baalism is at the heart of OT covenant theology. Having quoted Deut 11:10–11 above, let me now quote those verses again in the context of a few of the verses that follow:

The land you are entering to take over is not like the land of Egypt, from which you have come, where you planted your seed and irrigated it by foot as in a vegetable garden. But the land you are crossing the Jordan to take possession of is a land of mountains and valleys that drinks rain from heaven. It is a land the

⁵⁸ Day, “Baal,” 1.545, says that Baal “is clearly the most active and prominent of all the Canaanite deities . . . the great storm god: the fertility of the land depends on the rain this god supplies. . . .”

⁵⁹ Woods, *Water*, 2.

⁶⁰ Of his own book Woods, *Water*, 17, says, “this study will demonstrate that the Deuteronomic History supplied the Israelites with polemical literary material, especially dealing with water and storm, in order to fight Baalism rather than to conform to it.”

LORD your God cares for; the eyes of the LORD your God are continually on it from the beginning of the year to its end. So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—*then I will send rain* on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, *so that you may gather in your grain*, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. Then the LORD's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens *so that it will not rain* and *the ground will yield no produce*, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you (Deut 11:10-17; emphasis added).

The land of Canaan was not a land that just "naturally" drank in rain from the sky. It was a land that drank in rain from heaven because YHWH Israel's God, cared for the land. Covenant loyalty to YHWH would result in rain, vegetation, and life. Worshiping other gods would result in no rain, no produce, and death. Now, what god in particular would Israel have been tempted to turn to with a view to procuring rain and the resultant vegetation? Baal, of course.

Reading the OT, it becomes clear that it was the Baal cult that provided the greatest and most enduring threat to the development of exclusive Yahweh worship within ancient Israel. The fact that the Israelites were settled among the Canaanites, for whom the worship of Baal was so important, and that Palestine is a land utterly dependent for its fertility upon the rain, accounts for the tempting nature of this cult as well as the strength of the OT polemic against it.⁶¹

The ubiquitous threat of Baalism provides the theological context in which Genesis 1-2 is to be read.

Genesis 1-2 proclaims that YHWH, the God of Israel, is the Lord of the rain, the resultant vegetation, and life. This central aspect of the message of Genesis 1-2 is embedded in the structure of the accounts. Why the two-fold focus on vegetation and the people that live on that vegetation? Why even bring into consideration the lack of vegetation owing to a lack of rain? Is this simply geographical decoration?

No, for the Book of Genesis serves as the prologue to the history of Israel.⁶² Genesis makes the point that the God of the nation of Israel is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12-50), and that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1-11). The God of Israel is the Creator. From the beginning the God of Israel, not Baal, has been the provider of the rain that is the prerequisite of life. *YHWH God of Israel has been the Lord of the rain from the beginning!* Redemptive theology, as exemplified in texts like Deut 11:10-17 and 1 Kings 17-18, is rooted in the creation theology of Genesis 1-2. Redemption is rooted in creation. YHWH God of Israel claims to be the true and living

⁶¹ Day, "Baal," 1.547.

⁶² Youngblood, *Genesis*, 10-11.

God, the God whom Israel must serve to the exclusion of all rival deities, Baal in particular. This claim is most deeply rooted in the fact that YHWH God of Israel created all things by his powerful word (Ps 33:6), including the sending of the very first rains in the beginning, and has ever since sustained all things by his powerful word (Heb 1:3), including the sending of all rains subsequent to the beginning.

V. Conclusion

One central aspect of the kerygmatic message of Genesis 1-2 is now clear: Not Baal but "*The LORD he is God! The LORD he is God!*" This is true simply *because it had rained.*⁶³

⁶³ With this article I wish as a student and colleague to express my appreciation to Dr. Kline for the scholarly service he has rendered and continues to render to the Church.

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