

BECAUSE IT HAD NOT RAINED

Note the NRS translation of Genesis 2:5;

When no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up-- for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground.

The meaning of this verse must be divined from its structure, not its semantics. Specifically, the verse is an example of Hebrew parallelism of the kind in which the biblical authors delighted. Note the parallelism between the two problem statements:

Problem Statement	Cause
Plants of the field did not yet exist (= wild plants)	Because rain had not yet fallen
Herbs of the field did not yet exist (= crops)	Because no man existed to cultivate them

In the Bible, parallelism of this sort is very common and is used by the biblical authors to convey causal relationships. In this case, the parallelism raises the question of what the ancient Hebrews understood to be the difference between “*plant*” and “*herb*”. The answer is crucial because God is telling us that *plants of the field* require rain whereas *herbs of the field* require man.

In the late 1950s, Dr. Meredith Kline at the Westminster Theological Seminary advanced that suggestion (which was later

confirmed) that “*plants of the field (seach)*” means wild plants, and “*herbs of the field*” (*eisev*) means cultivated plants, or crops. This coheres tightly with verses 6 and 7 in which God provides for the wild plants by causing rain and for cultivated plants by creating man. Here then is a reworked translation of these three verses that is more faithful to the ancient text of the Bible.

(When the LORD God made earth and skies, (5) all the wild plants were not yet present in the earth and the cultivated plants had not yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not yet caused the rain to fall upon the earth nor was there a man to cultivate the soil. (6) So, rain clouds arose from the earth and all the surface of the ground was caused to drink. (7) The LORD God then formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man came to life.

In the first creation story, mankind was created to rule over God’s created order. Here, mankind is created for the sole purpose of cultivating the ground – which, in the ANE, meant irrigation. Note also that mankind is restricted to the Garden of Eden while outside the Garden, a whole world of wild plants and [presumably] other creatures (including other humans) that depend on them exist.

Now go and study

¹ In the Ancient Near East, the requirement for the man was to provide irrigation.

² See <http://thussaidthelord.com/blog/translations-2/garden-of-eden-story/genesis-2-5-7/> for a detailed explanation, including footnotes, of the translation of these two words.