

Genesis 2: A Second Creation Account?

Randall W. Younker

Introduction

Even to the casual reader, the conclusion of the first chapter of Genesis gives the impression of a completed creation: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made" (Gen. 1:31-2:3).

Several verses in the second chapter of Genesis, however, appear to list four things that God had *not yet* created, thus perplexing some readers. After reiterating in Genesis 2:4 that the Lord God had finished making "the earth and the heavens," verse 5 goes on to say that He had *not yet* made: (1) the "shrub of the field"; (2) the "plant of the field"; (3) "a man to work the ground"; and (4) "rain to water the earth." Does not chapter 1 clearly depict the creation of human beings and plants prior to the end of that first week of creation? Do we have a contradiction between chapters 1 and 2?

Before we answer such questions, however, it is necessary to digress for a moment. Historical-critical scholarship has long held that the first two chapters of Genesis contain two different and somewhat contradictory creation stories.⁽²⁾ Such scholars regard the first account as consisting of Genesis 1:1-2:4a, and generally assume it to have been written by, or derived from, "priestly" authors or sources somewhere between the seventh and fifth centuries

B.C. Historical-critical scholars refer to this hypothetical author or source as P (for "priestly"). Genesis 2:4b-25, according to the same scholars, represents a second creation account that, although it appears second in the order of our present Bibles, is thought to have been written earlier by either a hypothetical author or derived from a source named J (J derives from the name of God, Jehovah, but scholars usually refer to it as the "Yahwist" source), or it represents the combined work of two authors or sources, E (J still referring to the "Yahwist" and E to the "Elohist"). Critical scholars have generally assumed that the Yahwist lived in Judah and wrote his portion of Scripture c. 950 B.C., while the Elohist lived in Ephraim (or northern kingdom) and made his contribution to the scriptural tradition c. 850 B.C.

Some of the evidence offered as proof of the priestly authorship of Genesis 1:1-2:4a involves the careful organization of the chapter. God does creation in uniform blocks of time--in six 24-hour days. The language is concise and ends the discussion of each day in a similar orderly fashion: "and there was evening and morning, day [fill in the number] ..." The priestly author, however, supposedly employed a more impersonal view of God--not surprising since the priests would want people to maintain a proper distance, reverence, and respect for the Deity. Thus chapter 1 refers to God as *Elohim*, or simply, God. By contrast, critical scholars believe the hypothetical author of Genesis 2:4b-25, the Yahwist, intended to portray a more "personal" picture of God. Thus the Yahwist has God down on His hands and knees, so to speak, forming the first man with His own hands and breathing His breath directly into the being's nostrils. God here receives a personal name. He is not simply *Elohim* (God), but rather is *Yahweh* (Lord) or *Yahweh-elohim* (Lord God).

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to deal with all the claims of the historical critics concerning the first two chapters of Genesis. A number of scholars have examined the various arguments that two or more authors or sources lie behind the composition of Genesis 1 and 2 and have not found them compelling. (3) For example, we can illustrate the use of

different divine names for the same Deity within the same text (such as *Elohim* and *Yahweh* in Genesis 1 and 2) from extrabiblical Near Eastern documents. Similarly, the stylistic differences between chapters 1 and 2 are not necessarily atypical in ancient Near Eastern literature and can be explained as reflecting the different subject matter within each chapter. The focus of this brief study is, rather, on the alleged contradiction between Genesis 1 and 2 that some presume to be the result of the different authorships of the two chapters--the idea that Gen. 1:1-2:4a contains one creation story written by a priestly author (or authors) writing sometime between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C. and that Genesis 2:4b-25 reflects a second creation story composed by a Yahwist author c. 950 B.C. (or later).

Obviously, such an assumption raises a lot of questions for those who have traditionally held a high view of Scripture. Such a perspective not only necessarily denies a Mosaic authorship c. 1450 B.C., it also leaves open the question of divine inspiration and the historicity of the Genesis creation account, as well as the general overall reliability of Scripture. The critical view of a noninspired, non-Mosaic authorship of Genesis has certainly not been the traditional view of either Jews or Christians. As Dillard and Longman point out, early Jewish and Christian tradition virtually unanimously ascribed Genesis to Moses.(4) Support for a Mosaic authorship appears in Ecclesiasticus 24:23, Philo, Josephus, the Mishnah, and the Talmud. The numerous references by the apostles and Christ to various portions of Genesis that they specifically ascribe to Moses (e.g., Rom 4:17; Gal 3:8; Heb. 4:4; James 2:23) have been particularly authoritative for Bible-believing Christians. Especially interesting are Jesus' comments in His dialogue with the Pharisees about the permissibility of divorce (Matt. 19; Mark 10). In His response, Jesus asked, "What did Moses command you?" (Mark 10:3, NIV). When they replied by quoting Deuteronomy 24:1-4, Jesus countered by citing Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 (Mark 10:6-9; Matt. 19:4, 5). Clearly, Jesus' counterargument, derived from Genesis 1:27; 2:24, rested on the assumption of a Mosaic

authorship of the passages-an understanding His antagonists shared--otherwise, His argument would have lacked authority.

Adventists have also long accepted the Mosaic authorship of Genesis. (5) Ellen G. White wrote that while Moses sojourned in Midian, "Here, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, he wrote the book of Genesis." (6) Based on both the internal evidence of Scripture, including the inferred and explicit testimony of the apostles and Jesus, as well as the understanding of Ellen White and the Adventist pioneers, the overwhelming majority of Adventists have understandably been reluctant to adopt a view that would deny a God-inspired, Mosaic authorship of Genesis, including the first two chapters. But what does one do, then, with the apparent contradictions between Genesis 1 and 2 that some scholars attribute to different authors or sources? The answer, I would suggest, is to take a closer look at the text, as, indeed, many scholars have done.

A closer look at the text

Anyone who carefully reads the first chapter of Genesis can readily see that the account of the seven days of creation does not really end at verse 31 of chapter 1. Rather the description of God's activities during this first week of the world's history actually continues into the first few verse of chapter 2. Most scholars and advanced students of the Bible realize that the original authors of the biblical text did not create the chapter and verse divisions. These originated much later and often break the text in an arbitrary fashion. Indeed, to compensate for such arbitrary organization, many modern English translations indicate where the actual, natural break occurs by placing a gap or a heading between 2:4a and 2:4b--right in the middle of this verse!(7)

The theme of chapter 2, therefore, properly begins at 2:4, and as noted above, the first point this new section makes is that there were four things that did *not yet* exist after God had

complete the earth and the heavens--the shrub of the field, the plant of the field, the human being to till the soil, and rain. How is it that these four things did *not yet* exist after God announced His creation complete? Are they, especially the plants and man, somehow different than those mentioned in chapter 1? If so, how and why did these things come into existence? The answer to such questions is the point of chapter 2.

Hebrew Terms for Vegetation in Genesis 1 and 2

Although most scholars who have studied the first two chapters of Genesis appear to have assumed that the words and phrases for plants and vegetation used in Genesis 1:11, 12 and Genesis 2:5 carry the same meaning, the fact is that the Hebrew terms employed in the two chapters are not the same! Genesis 1:11, 12 actually reads: "Let the earth produce vegetation (*deshe*): seed-bearing plants (*'esev matsry' tsr'*) [according to its kind], and fruit-bearing fruit trees (*'es pry asa pry*) with seed "according to its kind." Genesis 2:5, on the other hand, reads that prior to man's creation there was no shrub of the field (*siah ha-sadeh*) and no plant of the field (*'esev ha-sadeh*) "had yet sprung up." Even those who cannot read Hebrew can see that the words are not identical.

However, we can still ask, Do the Hebrew botanical expressions *siah hasadeh* and *'esev ha-sadeh* of Genesis 2:5 mean the same thing as the terms that occur in Genesis 1:11, 12? It appears that many commentators have assumed so. Dillman (1892), for example, argued that the "*siah* of the field" and the "*'esev ha-sadeh*" of Genesis 2:5 represented the two major plant categories of the botanical world and thus stood for the plant kingdom in its entirety. Other commentators have generally followed a similar approach.

However, as Cassuto has shown, a closer reading of the text reveals that the botanical terms of Genesis 1:11, 12 and Genesis 2:5 do not have identical meanings. The Genesis 2 word *siah* appears only two other times in the Hebrew Bible--Genesis 21:15 and Job 30: 4, 7,

while the full expression *siah ha-sadeh* is unique, occurring only in Genesis 2:5. The contexts of both Genesis 21:15 and Job 30: 4, 7 make it clear that the *siah* is a xerophyte, that is, a plant adapted to dry or desert environments. As such, it is most likely a spiny or thorny plant. Such an understanding of the *siah* receives support from Genesis 3:18. The text couples the expression *'esev ha-sadeh* ("plant of the field") with "thorns and thistles" (*weqos we-dardar*), rather than *siah ha-sadeh*, as was the case in Genesis 2:5. Apparently the writer intended "thorns and thistles" as a parallel expression for the earlier *siah ha-sadeh*. The apparent substitution of *siah ha-sadeh* for "thorns and thistles" in Genesis 3:18, along with the contexts of Genesis 21:15 and Job 30:4, 7, thus make it most likely that we should understand the *siah* to be a thorny xerophyte.

According to M. Zohary, an Israeli botanist, more than 70 species of spiny plants grow in Israel.(8) Scripture mentions 20 of them, although no other plant group is so frequently misidentified and arbitrarily translated. Such plants, while essential to the fragile ecosystems of dry desert regions, agriculturists generally classify as intrusive, "obnoxious" plants. They are not the type of plant that a farmer of the ancient Near East would deliberately cultivate in his garden, nor were such plants likely included among the species God planted in the garden east in Eden, which was filled with all sorts of "trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (Gen. 2:8, 9, NIV). Thus one of the plants that did *not yet* exist as we begin the narrative of Genesis 2:4b was the thorny xerophyte--the agriculturist's bane. What is that point the author is trying to make here? To better understand, we first go on to the next plant that was *not yet*--the "plant of the field."

Plant of the Field

While the other botanical term in Genesis 2 (*'esev*, plant) is fairly common in the Hebrew text, it appears in the full expression *'esev hassadeh* ("plant of the field") only in

Genesis 2:5 and Genesis 3:18. Cassuto points out that Genesis 3:18 specifically designates "plants of the field" as the food Adam will have to eat as a result of his sin and that he will obtain them only through "painful toil" and the "sweat of [his] brow." In other words, "plants of the field" are those plants grown through the labor humanity became burdened with *because of the fall of sin*. As Cassuto observes, "these species did not exist, or were not ofund in the form known to us until after Adam's transgression, and it was in consequence of his fall that they came into the world and received their present form."(9) The fact that Genesis 3:19 explicitly states that these plants were used to make *bread* would indicate that the expression "plants of the field" specifically refers to wheat, barley, and other similar grains. Raising such crops requires the "tilling of the ground," another inherent feature of such plants specifically mentioned in the text.

Taken together, then, these two botanical term--"shrub of the field" and "plant of the field"--encompass not the entire plant kingdom, as Dillman assumed, but rather that part of the plant kingdom that the cultivator is particularly concerned with--food crops and weeds. Wenham notes that part of the distinction between *siah* (thistle?) and *'esev* (grain?) within the context of Genesis 2 lies in whether human beings can eat them or not. (10)

No Man to Till the Ground

The necessity of human labor in the production of the "plant of the field" leads to the next item that did *not yet* exist--someone to till the ground. Again some scholars have assumed that Genesis 2:5 contradicts chapter 1 because, while the first chapter depicts the creation of human beings on the sixth day, Genesis 2:5 seems to imply that God had not yet brought man into existence after "the earth and heavens were made." However, this results from an oversimplified reading of the text that ignores the critical modifier "to till the ground."

It is important to observe that God did not intend the being He created in Genesis 1:26-30 to work the ground in the fashion described in Genesis 3. Rather, he was to "rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air...over all the creatures that move along the ground" (NIV). Further, God had given him "every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it" (NIV) for food. The passage says nothing of deriving food from "working the ground."

A being who "works the ground" does not come into view until *after* Adam's fall. Then, *because of Adam's sin*, God tells him, "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it [the ground] all the days of your life" (Gen. 3:17). Thus like the "plant of the field" of Genesis 2:5, the "man to work the ground" does not exist until *after* the fall and only as a direct result of sin (note also that Cain, also described as one who "worked the soil" [Gen. 4:2, NIV], was the first murderer).

Genesis 2:5, therefore, is not claiming that human beings did not yet exist after God had made the earth and heavens. Rather it is speaking of the absence of a *sinful* person (i.e., one who must work the ground for food). Such an individual would not enter the scene until after the fall, an event not discussed until chapter 3. Genesis 2 thus sets the stage for what comes later in Genesis 3.

Support for such an interpretation appears in ancient Mesopotamian primeval histories. The Sumerian account of creation, the so-called Eridu Genesis, tells us that the gods immediately forgot about humans after creating them, leaving the humans miserable.⁽¹¹⁾ Specific indications of their condition include the absence of irrigation canals (no water for crops), seeder plows (no grains), and domesticated animals (no wool for clothes--people were naked). One goddess, Nintur, remembers humanity, however, and solves their dilemma by providing "culture" that included the "gifts" of cities, cult places, and kings. The kings will make the common people "work like cattle," dredging canals and growing crops. As a result, humans were no longer miserable. It is interesting to compare the biblical attitude about

"culture" with the Sumerian. In Genesis, kings, cities, the need to wear clothing, and the requirement to irrigate and work the ground for food receive a negative slant. The origin of cities, kings, the necessity to wear animal skins, and to work the ground by irrigating and plowing are the direct result of sin. Prior to sin, it was God who took care of all human needs--He was not a God who forgot His people or left them to their own devices. Rather He provided everything they had to have! The Sumerian version of creation, however, views the same items--kings, cities, animal clothing, and tilling the ground--positively and as gifts from the gods/goddesses. Several scholars have commented on the polemic nature of Genesis in contrast to Mesopotamian "primeval histories."

Some have pointed out that in Genesis 2:5 prefall human beings were to "work the garden," and thus Genesis 2:5 simply anticipates the activity described in the later verse. Indeed, the Hebrew word for "work" is the same in both verse (*aved*). However, working a garden is not the same as working the ground. Whereas the English word "garden" evokes images of neatly hoed rows of carrots, radishes, turnips, etc., the Hebrew word for garden (*gan*) has a wider meaning. Although archaeological and ethnographic evidence suggests that vegetables often played an important role in the diet of people of the ancient Near East, people did not think highly of vegetable gardening.(12) Indeed, the Old Testament refers to a vegetable garden (*gan yaraq*) only once (1 Kings 21:2). Rather the ancient Hebrew *gan* (usually translated as garden) was generally understood to be an enclosed, nonirrigated fruit tree orchard or vineyard, and was considered a possession of great value. Even though both orchard and field cultivation are initially highly labor intensive, once an orchard matures it provides a high, stable yield for a minimum amount of labor.(13) Field cultivation, on the other hand, continues to be more labor intensive on an annual basis.(14) Hence, people considered healthy, mature orchards as prized possessions. That the garden of Eden was a fruit tree orchard is clear from Genesis 2:9, which specifically mentions that it contained "all

kinds of trees" "good for food." When ancient Israelites heard or read that God gave Adam a *gan*, or orchard, they recognized it as a truly wonderful gift, suitable even for a king.

Finally, we should remember that Genesis 3 explicitly associates the expression of "working the ground" with the entrance of sin. Rather than laboring in the garden which God provided, and then eating the fruits of its trees, sinful human beings must now obtain their subsistence by the sweat of their brows through the working of the ground.

Rain

The final thing that Genesis 2:5 indicates did *not yet* exist after God finished the earth and the heavens is rain. Following the same pattern clearly set for the three previous categories, it is logical to assume that rain does not make its appearance until *after* the entrance of sin. That is indeed the case. However, unlike the first three items that appear immediately after humanity's fall, Scripture does not mention rain until Genesis 7: 3, 12, at the commencement of the flood, although the context clearly indicates that rain too comes as a consequence of sin.

Although the thorny shrubs, cultivated plants, and the act of cultivation were immediate judgements brought upon human beings for their sin, God permitted the human race to continue living. The final judgement of rain arrives only after antediluvian humanity's condition worsens to the point that God regrets giving them a second chance and determines to terminate the rebellious members of the human race. Rain makes its entrance into the world, not as a water source for agriculture, but as an agent of God's judgement.

Conclusion

A closer reading of the text suggests that chapter 2 does not offer a creation account that contradicts chapter 1. Rather, the point of the introductory verses of chapter 2 is to explain the origin of four things that did not form part of the original sin-free creation described in chapter 1. The four things included: (1) thorns, (2) agriculture, (3) cultivation/irrigation, and (4) rain. Chapter 2 informs the reader that each one directly resulted from the entrance of sin. Genesis 3:17, 18 introduces thorns, plants requiring cultivation, and a human race that must work the ground for its food as curses or judgements immediately after the fall. Although Scripture does not mention rain until the flood, rain too represents a curse--a judgement against humanity's sin. Thus, rather than a contradiction of chapter 1, the early verses in chapter 2 actually serve as a bridge between the perfect creation of chapter 1 and the introduction of sin into the world in chapter 3. Chapter 2:4b-7 essentially asks the ancient Hebrews how these four undesirably elements of their lives--(1) the need to deal with thorny plants, (2) the annual uncertainty and hard work of the grain crop, (3) the need to undertake the physically demanding plowing of the ground, and (4) the dependence on the uncertain, but essential, life-giving rain--come to be part of humanity's lot?

After posing his vexed question in Genesis 2:4b-7, the author proceeds to answer it, beginning in verse 2:8, by recapping in more detail the creation of the original sin-free human being who would bring about the conditions that would result in the four things that *were not yet*. The remainder of chapter 2 thus leads naturally and directly into chapter 3, with its description of the fall and the events that led to how things got the way they are now--an account that actually continues right through to the flood account.(15)

If one were to argue that Genesis 1 and 2 were the result of different authors, it should not be done on the basis of the alleged contradictions of Genesis 2:4b-7. The verses actually tend to support the unified and integrated nature of the early chapters of Genesis.(16)