

# **Genesis 1–3: Science? History? Theology?**

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## **Abstract**

This is the 1966 Tyndale Lecture given in Melbourne, reproduced with the author's permission. The creation accounts in Genesis are analysed, considering their language, literary forms, relation to history, and theological interpretation.

## **Key words:**

Genesis, creation, Biblical language, literary form.

## **Introduction**

On any view of the Bible it would be widely accepted that Genesis 1–3 gives expression to some of the most fundamental views of ancient Israel about God, humankind, and the world. Indeed it might fairly be claimed that for Israel these three chapters together with the other chapters in the so-called *primaevae* history set out in Genesis 1–11 gave expression to what Israel held to be the essential prelude to her own particular story which began with Abraham. Her existence as a people had meaning only against a background which was cosmic in its scope and universal in its sweep. Her own history could only be properly understood in relation to a broad sweep of historical events commencing with the creation and moving through all the ages of God's continuing preservation of all life everywhere until his final goal was achieved. In that grand design Israel had a significant part to play and her supreme function was understood in terms of a universal broken relationship between God the Creator and humankind his creatures. Genesis 1–11 gives definition to the universal need of humanity which made it necessary for God to act in a redemptive way so that the broken relationship might be restored. In that great plan of redemption Israel had a key role to play.

## **The central affirmations of Genesis 1–3**

The chapters under consideration in this lecture form only part of the larger prelude to the Bible. In particular the central affirmations of Genesis 1–3 are basic to the whole of biblical revelation. I think it is not claiming too much to say that whatever one's view of the literary nature of these chapters reasonable agreement could be reached as to what were the basic assumptions which find expression here. One person may affirm that these chapters should be read quite literally denying all use of

metaphorical or symbolic language. Another may affirm that the chapters are in the style of poetry, being full of symbolic language, figures of speech, and artificially constructed literary forms. But whatever view is adopted in regard to the literary nature of the chapters the definition of the central affirmations should be approximately the same for they present important beliefs about the nature of God, of human beings, and of the world. God stands alone and is the sole originator of all things, animate and inanimate. Human beings, unlike the animals, are capable of holding converse with God and are responsible beings because, to use the language of Genesis 1:26, they are made in the image of God. But human beings are also in a state of alienation from God, and this alienation goes back to their very beginnings. In that state humankind is under judgment though not beyond the mercy of God nor beyond his redemption. The world of things animate and inanimate is secondary. God alone is primary and eternal. The pagan concept of pre-existent matter out of which God might fashion the world has no place in these chapters. The world is not independent of God but is his handiwork.

It may be that these affirmations are rejected by some modern thinkers, but that they are clearly enunciated in Genesis 1–3 as part of the faith of Israel can hardly be denied.

It is my contention in this lecture that the primary importance of these three chapters for Christian and Jew alike is that they set forth in unmistakable terms, certain great affirmations about God, Humankind, and the World. The manner in which this is done is secondary. That is not to say that the literary form in which the affirmations are made is unimportant. Nor is it to say that we should not make serious endeavours to ask what kind of language the Bible uses to describe the phenomena of nature. Nor again is it to say that it is unnecessary to ask serious questions about the precise manner of history writing used in these chapters. Indeed these questions and the answers given to them are basic if any reasonable exegesis of the chapters is to be obtained. And it is proposed to devote some little space to a consideration of these matters presently. But, for myself at any rate, the primary importance of Genesis 1–3 lies not in any specific historical or scientific value, but in their theological value, that is, in their great assertions about the nature of humanity and the world. And these I accept as part of my own faith because I hold them to be a vital part of God's revelation to humankind.

Before we look more closely into these chapters there are some preliminary questions to settle. And to these we turn first of all.

## **The language of the Bible in reference to the phenomena of nature**

Bernard Ramm in his *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Ramm 1954 pp. 45–54) makes four useful observations about the nature of biblical statements about natural phenomena.

First, *Biblical language is popular but not scientific*, that is to say, complex terminology of the scientist which is necessary and proper in scientific discussions, is absent from the Bible which was written for men and women who spoke the language of the home and the market place. If such a book is to find acceptance among all peoples (which incidentally it does), its language in regard to natural phenomena must be simple, popular and understandable to all. The opinion of Bernard Ramm in this regard is worth pondering. It is:

highly improper for scientists to seek technical terminology in the Bible. It is also reprehensible for exegetes to try to find recondite references to modern scientific terminology in the Bible

(Ramm 1954 p. 46).

Secondly, the language in the Bible in such matters is *the language of appearances*. Complex scientific explanations are not out of place but we do wrong to seek them. A few illustrations will make the point obvious. To the naked eye the sun 'rises' each morning and 'sets' each evening. Heavenly bodies may be classified roughly into sun, moon, and stars—nothing more. That is the language of observation which is necessarily limited since the eye cannot distinguish such refinements as asteroids, nebulae, planets and the like without a high degree of sophistication. Broadly speaking, animals are of two kinds, wild and domestic. Fish are of two kinds—large and small. Living creatures may be classified into human beings, animals, reptiles, fish and birds. Numerous expressions which arose out of simple observation such as 'the circle of the earth', 'he hangs the earth upon nothing', 'the mountain falls and crumbles away and the rock is removed from its place' etc. neither require revelation, nor anticipate the findings of modern science. They require only the careful observation of natural phenomena (Ramm 1954 pp. 86–95).

Thirdly, *the Bible has no theories about natural phenomena unless it be the constant assertion that God lies behind all*. One looks in vain for a theory of relativity, an atomic theory, a theory of evolution, a Quantum theory, and so on. The Bible is silent as to the 'inmost constitution of visible things' (Ramm 1954 p.48).<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 11:3 which reads in the A.V. 'We understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear' is not an anticipation of the modern atomic theory but merely the affirmation that God did not need to take pre-existent matter in order to fashion his universe. Whereas the scientists working in the areas of astronomy, geology, physics, chemistry, biology, zoology, botany etc. postulate theories to account for the phenomena they observe, the Bible is content with descriptive language. Should the scientist discover a 'scientific law governing certain phenomena, he has not thereby explained God away. He has only expounded one more of the wonders of God's universe' (Spanner 1966 pp. 20–23). But as far as the Bible is concerned it has the

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<sup>1</sup> Ramm is quoting the wording of the *Biblical Commission* of Pope Leo XIII.

broad view that God is the 'Ground' of all nature. He was at its beginning. He will be at its end. He is both above nature, and in nature. That is, if you like, an all embracing theory. But it can never be proven wrong. Whatever the scientist discovers about God's world may be accommodated to such a concept.

Finally, the language of the Bible is *in terms of the culture of the times in which the Bible was written*. God chose to reveal himself through Hebrew and Aramaic speaking Jews, and through Greek speaking Christians. The language they used in reference to psychological, medical, mathematical, geographical, legal, social etc. matters was that of the people of their times. Our task is to discover exactly what they were saying and to express the same great truths in our age. In that case every energy must be bent and no effort of scholarly research must be spared to discover what God was saying through his servants of a past age. But the words of these inspired writers were meaningful for their times even if they were not expressed in the more exact language of modern science. It may not always be easy for us to decide what is cultural and what is trans-cultural in the sacred record. But the effort should be made for the biblical writers spoke to people of two, three thousand years ago and more and not directly to the twentieth century AD. We do wrong therefore to expect the biblical records to have all the insight into scientific areas which we now have, and we do well to study the culture of biblical times as a preliminary to discovering the permanent message of the Bible.

To sum up therefore, the language of the Bible in regard to natural phenomena is popular and not scientific, it is the language of appearances, it is not expressed in terms of theories and hypotheses (unless it be held that the belief that God lies behind all is a theory), and finally, it is expressed in terms of the culture and times. These propositions seem to be almost self-evident and even the mention of them seems to be to mouth truisms. Yet unless these facts be recognised we are in serious danger of misinterpretation in the realm of natural phenomena and of making the Bible speak a language it does not know.

## **Literary forms and literary language**

In attempting to interpret Genesis 1–3 it is equally important to come to some conclusions about the literary form and language in which the chapters are written.

Broadly speaking, literature may be classified into prose and poetry. Some prose, to be sure, because of its heightened form of expression might almost be classified as poetry. At least it might be termed poetic. In Hebrew as in other Semitic languages poetry is distinguished by its parallelism in thought, by some degree of metrical regularity, and in some measure by its distinctive language. The interpreter needs to make some serious attempt to recognise the literary nature of the passage before him not only by deciding whether the passage is prose or poetry, but also by deciding what kind of prose and what kind of poetry. For example, if it has been decided a particular passage is a parable then it must be approached

as one should approach a parable. Its central message should be understood and applied to life. The details of the parable, however, though necessary as providing the setting in which the central point is made clear, ought not to be pressed.

In Hebrew, as in all languages, there is a wide range of figures of speech—those expressing comparison like simile and metaphor, those involving association like metonymy and synecdoche, those representing personal dimensions like personification and apostrophe, those which have a certain opaqueness like fables, riddles and enigmatic sayings, extended figures like parable and allegory and so on. All of these and others besides occur in the Bible and the careful interpreter must isolate these where they occur in order to ensure sound biblical interpretation.

Some distinction should be drawn between the terms 'literal' 'figurative' and 'symbolic'. When we refer to the 'literal' meaning of a word we mean the basic customary social designation of the word. When we say that a word is used in a 'figurative' sense we mean that one idea is represented in terms of another because some aspect of the two ideas allows an analogy to be drawn. The literal, ordinary meaning is transferred from one sphere to another so as to convey by analogy or comparison a different meaning. Thus to say 'the animal devoured his food' is a literal statement, while to say 'the flame devoured the house' is to make a figurative statement. The figurative is based on the literal, but the action is transferred into quite another sphere, although both spheres are in the earthly realm. When an animal devours a meal it chews it, swallows it, digests it, and assimilates it. But the flames have not teeth, mouth or digestive organs. However, in either case what is devoured is removed from the scene (Mickelson 1963 p. 307).

In general, figures of speech and figurative language come out of the life of the speaker or writer who uses them. It is thus necessary to understand the background of the writer if his figurative language is to be understood. It ought to be stressed that the literal interpretation of a passage allows for figurative language. Literal interpretation does not mean the rigid, wooden and unbending understanding of every single word or phrase in its customary sense. For the literal meaning of a figurative expression is determined by the accepted grammatical and linguistic understanding of such a figure. For that reason it is essential to take note of simile, allegory, metaphor, paradox, irony, hyperbole, synecdoche, euphemism, fable, allegory, parable, proverb, etc. Clearly to call something literal which is figurative is likely to be a source of error. Likewise to call what is literal merely figurative, is also a potential source, of error.

A third term that needs definition is 'symbol'. By 'symbol' we mean a sign which suggests rather than states a meaning. Where symbols are not explained or are only partly explained, ambiguity may result. And even where some explanation of the symbol is given one can easily read more into it than is warranted. All interpreters are liable to be subjective, and any means of holding subjective interpretations in check is to be

welcomed. Some help is available if the interpreter will study the cultural situation in which the symbol was originally given. One must always avoid the temptation of forcing the symbols into a complex maze of theological speculations. Simple interpretations would seem to be nearer the truth. In general the symbol is a literal object—a boiling pot, baskets of good and bad figs, a ram or a he-goat, a tree in a garden, a snake etc. In some cases the symbol is actually defined in a later discussion. The symbol is used to convey some lesson or truth. Thus in Jeremiah 24, the good figs are later explained to represent those who were carried off to Babylon, while the bad figs represent those who were left behind in Judah. The connection between the literal object and the lesson taught is clearer when the intention of the original speaker can be discovered. Where that is not possible the interpreter must strive to discover what the symbol was intended to teach originally. No doubt interpretation was easier for those who lived in the times of the original writers. Today much of the background has been lost and our problem is made more difficult.

Now in the biblical accounts of creation, and the fall, and also of the climax of the ages we have to do with figurative language and the use of symbols. That is not to say that the events portrayed by the figurative language and the symbols were not or will not be real events. What has happened is that earthly language drawn from a known sphere of existence is used to describe what took place or what will take place in areas of experience that are beyond our grasp. But God has attested through his inspired writers, and in language taken from the daily experience of the people of Israel and the early Christians, both what took place at the beginning, and what will take place at the end. In this way God gave to people of faith things which far transcended all they ever knew, or for that matter all we know today despite our tremendous advances in scientific knowledge.

Interpreters who approach the biblical accounts of creation, the fall of humanity, or the end of the age, must realise that the language used was originally directed to men and women who knew nothing of the vastness of space or the minuteness of the world revealed by the microscope or the delicate intricacies of physical organisms. Indeed the vast majority of men and women in the world today still know little of these things. The biblical narratives centre their attention firstly on God as the ultimate cause of all things rather than on the chain of secondary causes and effects. Then, secondly, these narratives focus on humankind, the apex of God's creation, the object of God's redemptive purposes, and the subject of biblical history. Other aspects of the total picture are only secondary.

With all these facts in mind it is not surprising that the accounts of the creation, the fall, and the climax of the age should blend together the figurative and the literal aspects of language. Without the figurative and the symbolic little or nothing could be known about these areas. With their aid, God has given people a glimpse on the one hand into hidden areas and on the other hand he has indicated how much more there is to be known. In truth, we now know only in part and we see through a glass darkly. But because the whole is so much greater than the part, the

honest interpreter abandons all pretence of being able to present the whole picture. The part he knows is meaningful enough, and an understanding of its import has profound consequences for life (Mickelson 1963 pp. 178f., 265f., 306ff.).

## History recording in the Bible

Israel had a deep sense of history. She insisted that God had always been active in the historical process and that his acts of salvation and judgement could be discerned there. In a particular way God had been active in Israel's own history. The call of Abraham, the story of the Exodus and the Conquest, were but a few illustrations of the divine activity on behalf of Israel, albeit significant ones. God graciously gave to Israel inspired interpreters of the significance of events. It was their strong belief in the fact of God's activity in the human story that led Israel to speak in historical terms even in areas which could not be tested by recourse to annals, written records or the words of eyewitnesses. Hence the treatment both of the beginning and of the end of the historical process was presented by the men of faith in Israel in narrative form at least in some degree.

There are, of course, many ways of recording history, and neither in the ancient world nor in the twentieth century AD could it be said that one method is standard. Indeed it would be truer to say that every history writer chooses his own method to suit the purpose he has in mind.

Some writers are concerned merely to record a list of events without any serious attempt to relate them to other events or to explain their significance. These lists constitute the annals of men. They have parallels in the biblical world both among Israelite writers and in the surrounding nations. Such recording makes uninspiring reading,

More generally, historians select from the mass of events, those which are significant for their purpose and seek to indicate the progress of the human story in some respect by a selection of representative facts. Thus the economic historian lays emphasis on the economic factor, the political historian on political factors, the Church historian on the story of the Church, the medical historian on medicine, the writer of a history of science on science. Clearly some attention must be paid to the broader historical movements in each case. In the Bible, the writer(s) of the books of Kings falls into the class of historians who select from the records of the past information that will illustrate their thesis, in this case the proposition that when Israel's king and people were true to their covenant with God they enjoyed his blessing, where they were disobedient, judgment befell them.

The recording of speeches, sermons and the like presents its own problem. One may record the speech in full and thus retain the *ipsissima verba* of the speaker. Alternately a summary only may be recorded, either with extracts from the actual speech, or by means of a free rendering which preserves the heart of the speech. In the Bible the method of

recording speeches, prophetic oracles, sermons etc. varies. A comparison of Jeremiah chapter 7 and chapter 26, where the same address is recorded, will show how different the treatment can be for the same sermon. And what of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost? Did Peter preach for only the two to three minutes that it takes to read the sermon recorded in Acts 2? Similar questions may be asked about our Lord's parables, or about the Sermon on the Mount. A comparison of the same parable in two different gospels will show how different a treatment can be given to the same parable. But in either case the heart of the message our Lord wished to deliver is preserved.

But historical events can be presented in yet other ways for particular purposes, such as to provide some startling statement of the event which commands immediate attention. Thus David's enticement of Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite warrior is told in the more direct narrative form in 2 Sam. 11, and in striking parable form in 2 Sam. 12:1–4. Again the story of God's dealing with Israel is presented in the more normal narrative form in the historical books of the Old Testament, or in the compressed symbolic stories of the choice vine in Isaiah 5, or of the foundling girl in Ezekiel 16. Or again, the story of the alliances which Israel and Judah made with Assyria and Babylon and Egypt is given in the books of Kings and Chronicles, or in the vivid parable of Ezekiel 23.

Then there are the fables of Judges 9:8–15 and 2 Kings 14:9 where trees are represented as speaking. But behind the fable lies an actual event in each case, and the words of the trees are merely veiled reference to the words of men.

The point should be clear. Within the pages of the Old Testament there are many ways of recording historical events. To be sure, the normal method of recording history is either the annalistic or the method of selecting events with interpretative comment. But there is a significant number of cases where the language is figurative or symbolic, enough indeed to show that the figurative, the symbolic, the descriptive form of presentation was an acceptable medium in Israel for recording historical events particularly when it was not so much the intimate details of the event that mattered, but some broad underlying issue which could be emphasised and highlighted by a parable, a fable, or a vivid presentation in highly figurative language.

I have laboured this point because it is important for the proposition that in Genesis 1–3 we are dealing with events, the exact nature of which may escape us as to detail, but the fact of which, and the import of which for all future generations of people, are by no means obscured by the symbols, and by the figurative and descriptive language used in their presentation.

There is another important aspect of this argument. It is that, while people might freely use symbolism and figurative language for events which were well known and for which the details could be obtained from written records or from eyewitnesses, it was impossible to call on either



witness or written records either for the dawn of human history or for its end. In the realm of the *proton* or the *eschaton*, the use of symbolic and figurative language was the only possible way of approach. Let me illustrate. When the Old Testament prophets, despairing of their own age and sensing the inevitability of judgment but nevertheless looking beyond the day of judgment to the day of restoration and redemption, wanted to describe that great day, they broke into the highly figurative language which is familiar to us, e.g. Isaiah 11:35, Amos 9:11–15, Ezekiel 37:22–38, Zechariah 8:4–8 to select only a few passages. Similar language occurs also in the New Testament, for example 1 Cor. 2:9, 1 Peter 1:4, Rev. 21:1–5 etc.

Many of the aspects of the pictures of the day of redemption, which occur in the Old Testament prophets, were taken up by our Lord and the early Christian writers and brought to a focus in himself in whom they reached their true meaning and 'fulfilment'. But, that the Jews of the early years of the Christian era were puzzled to know how to interpret all the thrilling symbolism of the Old Testament, is clear from the fact that even the disciples were slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had written, no doubt because they did not know how to interpret them. And, of course, the people of the Qumran community gave their own meaning to the symbols, but their meaning was wide of the mark.

Despite the lack of exact understanding of the meaning of the symbols, the believing Israelite would not for one moment say that there was no meaning in the prophet's words, nor that the hope he held out was merely a thing of the mind. For him the symbol would one day become actual in a real event, even if he had to await the day before the symbol could be accurately understood. Meanwhile the symbol gave him hope to live by.

Now I want to argue that just as it was believed that at the *eschaton* the symbol would be realised in event, so, at the *proton*, there were real events even if the exact nature of these could never be known. But the heart of the events, and their significance for posterity, may be clearly discerned behind the symbol. The fact that the event is represented in symbolic form is no more a denial of the fact of the event than the representation of a known historical event elsewhere in the Old Testament was a denial that it ever took place.

## **Genesis chapter 1:1–2:4a**

Genesis 1:1–2:4a has a beautiful, symmetrical structure which is important for the understanding of the chapter. There is an introductory statement in 1:1–2 which stands apart from the main argument of the chapter, and a concluding statement in 2:1–4a which also stands apart, although, to be sure, both introduction and conclusion form a unity with the central core of the chapter in verses 2–31 of chapter 1. The central portion of the complete literary unit is woven around eight occurrences of the phrase 'And God said'. The total impression conveyed by the chapter is that the whole of the universe, animate and inanimate, owes its origin to God. This would seem to be the central affirmation of the chapter.

In asserting that God's creative activity lies behind all things the writer made use of a variety of verbs. In verses 1, 21, 27 the verb *bara* is used. Its use is, however, limited to the creation of heaven and earth, the great sea monsters, and humankind. Elsewhere in the Bible this word is used only of God and never of a human being. But one ought not to draw any special conclusion from the fact that it is used of only three areas of God's universe, for other verbs are used in other verses to say the same thing, namely, that it was God who brought things into being. The verb *asah* occurs in verses 1:7, 16, 25f., 31; 2:3,4 where it is used of the firmament or expanse, the two great lights, the wild beasts, the domestic animals and the reptiles. In verses 3, 6, 14 the phrase that is used is 'Let there be...', in reference to the light, the firmament and the lights in the firmament. In verses 1:11, 20, 24 various areas of God's creation are addressed and commanded to produce something, the earth 'to sprout sproutage' the waters 'to swarm with swarms', and the earth 'to bring forth living creatures, domestic animals, wild animals and reptiles'. In some cases two verbs are used of the same creative act. Thus humankind is both 'created' (Gen. 1:1, 27) and 'made' (Gen. 1:26). Indeed a third verb is used of humankind in 2:7, 8 namely 'fashion', *yasar*. Again, the heavens and the earth are both 'created' and 'made' (Gen. 1:1, 2:4). In the light of this considerable range of verbs it would seem to be wrong to place undue emphasis on any one verb, since, in any case, God is the author of all and, in each case, the subject of the sentence is God.

The literary arrangement of the chapter may be set out in diagrammatic fashion as follows.

<b>INTRODUCTION</b> 1:1-2. THE WHOLE UNIVERSE	
<b>DAY I</b> ACT 1 LIGHT (1:3-5)	<b>DAY IV</b> ACT 5 LIGHT BEARERS (1:14-19)
<b>DAY II</b> ACT 2 FIRMAMENT DIVIDING WATERS ABOVE AND BELOW (1:6-8)	<b>DAY V</b> ACT 6 BIRDS AND SEA CREATURES (1:20-23)
<b>DAY III</b> ACT 3 WATERS AND LAND SEPARATED(1:9-10)  ACT 4 VEGETATION (1:11-13)	<b>DAY VI</b> ACT 7 LAND ANIMALS & REPTILES(1:24-25)  ACT 8 HUMANKIND (1:26-31)
<b>DAY VII</b>	

CONCLUSION: 2:1–4a  
 GOD RESTS

There is a certain parallelism between the two groups of three days as well as between the introduction and the conclusion. The light of Day 1 is paralleled in a general way by the light bearers of Day 4: the firmament and waters of Day 2 are paralleled by the birds and sea creatures of Day 5, and the water, land, and vegetation of Day 3 is paralleled by the land animals, reptiles, and humankind of Day 6. The parallelism is not exact either in the precise literary form of the verses involved or in the content (Young 1964 pp. 68–73)<sup>2</sup>. But no special reason for this need be sought since the parallelism is of a very general kind only, and evidently suited the purpose of the writer well enough. It was his aim, we judge, to gather up into one broad; succinct statement, the main areas of God's handiwork and to present them in some simple schematic form.

The Introduction provides the broad setting to the activity of God as far as the earth is concerned. What then is asserted in verses 1–2? It is as though a child should ask a parent 'Who made everything?' and the parent should reply, 'God made everything'. So Genesis 1:1 commences with the simple assertion that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, that is, God made the whole universe. No indication is given of how He did this. There are no theories here, no 'steady state' theory, no 'expanding universe' theory indeed, no theory at all. However it was not the intention of the writer to expatiate on the vast universe but to be concerned with the earth on which he, and his fellows lived. All else was either neglected or related to this focus. Verses 2 to 31 are concerned therefore with the earth. In fact, the word 'the earth' stands first in the sentence in verse 2, an unusual position for a noun in Hebrew, unless the word is to be emphasised. This is the case here. Having provided the broad setting of a universe created by God, the writer continues 'Now as to the earth, it was a desolate waste'. The verb 'was' ought not be translated 'became' so as to lend support to a theory that there was a gap between God's initial perfect creation and the time to which verses 2–31 refer. The gap theory has no scientific support, and is not required by the grammar and syntax of the Hebrew text. In reference to the earth then, three observations are made about the state of affairs when God took up his original creation to commence its transformation. It was a desolate waste, there was darkness above its primeval water, and the *ruah* (wind, Spirit?) of God was moving about over the waters until God was ready to continue his work. The rest of the chapter gives various facets of the divine activity by which the uninhabited and uninhabitable 'desolate waste' was transformed into a habitation for plants, fish, birds, animals, reptiles and human beings.

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<sup>2</sup> E J Young makes much of this lack of parallelism and uses it as an argument against the present thesis that we are not concerned with chronology. Young argues that the arrangement of Genesis 1 is indeed chronological.

An important question now arises as to the nature of the information set out in verses 2–31. Do these verses set out a chronological account of what God did, or do they simply define six areas in which God was active? The assumption that they give a chronological account of God's creative activity has given rise to a wide variety of attempts to align the biblical narrative with the scientific account of the order of events which brought the world into its present state, as expounded by the geologist and palaeontologist. The argument of the concordist who seeks to show that there is concord between the scientific story and Genesis 1 is that God's record in the rocks should be parallel to God's record in the Bible (for example, Beasley 1955). But this whole procedure is fraught with danger. It assumes that there is a certain finality about the present state of the geological knowledge. However, it is well known that science is forever investigating, adjusting its theories to account for new facts, and unwilling to allow that finality has been reached anywhere. But there is a second objection to the concordist method. It is that science is somehow made to be the yardstick by which to judge the reliability of the Bible. The Bible needs no such yardstick to justify its authority, and in any case it is a very doubtful procedure to seek to align biblical statements about natural phenomena, with exact modes of expression adopted by modern scientists.

But ought we to be thinking in terms of chronology at all? There are not wanting in the Bible examples of the fact that the biblical writers were more interested in facts than in chronology. Thus the order of our Lord's temptations is different in Matthew 4:1–11 from what it is in Luke 4:1–13. Again, from Psalm 78:15–20a, and 20b–25 it would appear that God caused water to flow from the rock before he sent the manna, which is the reverse of the order in Exodus 16 and 17. In fact, we cannot be certain in some summarising passages whether the material is arranged in chronological order or is simply collected into convenient sections to portray events that were spread out over an uncertain period. The events portrayed in the book of Joshua, or the reforming activities of Josiah in 2 Kings 23:4–20 are of this kind. If we can be relieved of the necessity of accepting a chronological view for Genesis 1, we may be relieved of some genuine difficulties (Young 1964 pp. 93–97)<sup>3</sup>. The statement that the sun, moon and stars were 'made' on the fourth day when the whole universe was created at the beginning, presents serious difficulties on any chronological view. Nor do I think that special translations of the verb 'give', overcome the statement that God 'made' these heavenly bodies on the fourth day (Beasley 1955). Again, without in any way making the scientists the arbiters, the record in the rocks indicates that the waters teemed with life (invertebrates and amphibia) very early in the geological record, long before the era of luxuriant vegetation in the carboniferous era. In Genesis the swarm of living creatures do not appear till Day 5, whereas the vegetation appears in Day 3. In the light of such difficulties,

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<sup>3</sup> E. J. Young insists that our difficulties arise from our ignorance of all the facts. See pp. 93–97 in reference to the fourth day.

it may be that we should abandon the chronological approach to Genesis 1 and treat the chapter as a schematic presentation of the broad divisions of natural phenomena which are observable in the world about us, in which God carried out his creative work. It is true that the arrangement follows some kind of chronological development, but it may be argued that this is only incidental, being logical and verbal. The inspired ancient writer need not have been less under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit if he conceived of things in a non-chronological fashion. He might have thought in some such fashion as the following. God would begin with the dispersal of darkness (Day 1) as a fundamental divine activity. Then before anything else could happen the expanse above the earth would need to be established to separate the waters above (clouds) from the waters below (lakes, seas, oceans). Then land and water would need to be separated. Thereafter vegetation might appear, and then the other orders of creatures. The first triduum (three day unit) with its four works might thus have been worked out on some kind of logical basis which was also chronological in some measure. But chronology was not the basis of the chapter.

The second triduum of four works shows that the writer ranged as far as he would over the remaining areas of the world scene not already touched upon. In that pursuit a matching of features in the first three 'days' with areas as yet untouched, still preserved a roughly chronological order but without the embarrassment of an exact chronology. The scheme was, after all, literary and artistic, not chronological and scientific. And the voice of the artist can speak just as clearly in some areas as the voice of the exact scientist. Light bearers might be matched with light, birds and sea creatures with the firmament and the waters, land animals, reptiles and human beings with water, land and vegetation. But chronology apart, and complete consistency apart, the main areas of the created universe and of the world in which the sacred writer lived, were all gathered up and combined into a simple, easily remembered pattern. And as each area was defined, it was introduced by the simple, strong assertion 'God said "Let there be..."', or some similar phrase. It would hardly be possible to make the assertion more clearly that all that is, owes its origin to God. But the method by which God achieved all this is not given. Was it by the separate instantaneous creation of each and every creature? Or was it by some process which, in the case of living things, began with some simple organism and arrived finally under the hand of God at the completed product—that is by some evolutionary process? In my view, the narrative in Genesis 1 yields no information about the divine method, only that, whatever the method, it was divine, so that any concept of a purely naturalistic evolution without God is ruled out. But there are alternatives to the two extreme positions of fiat creationism and naturalistic evolution, and people of deep Christian conviction can be found who hold such intermediate positions as *theistic evolution* (Ramm 1954 pp. 197–205) or *progressive creationism* (Ramm 1954 pp. 76–79).

We have been arguing that Genesis 1 is a simple literary scheme written in exalted semi-poetic language, though not strictly poetry, but displaying a certain broad parallelism both in literary arrangement and in content. In

this literary scheme the word 'day' acts as a kind of symbol (Ridderbos 1957 pp. 10ff.). Once having chosen his symbol, the writer used the associated symbols 'evening' and 'morning'. The first use of the term 'evening' in verse 5 might be taken to refer to the evening that preceded the first appearance of light, in which case it was only a figure. Thereafter 'evening' and 'morning' appear in the manner that was customary in Israel (Neh. 13:19, Dan. 8:14). Alternately, 'evening' might be taken to mean the end of the first light period, and 'morning' to be the beginning of the second. If it be granted that the terms 'day', 'evening' and 'morning' are merely literary symbols, then there is little value in arguing whether 'day' means twenty-four hours or a period of a million years (Ridderbos 1957 p. 10). No doubt the literal sense of the word *yom* is simply twenty-four hours. But in the context of Genesis 1 it is merely a literary device.

It is not possible to do more than comment briefly on several other important aspects of this remarkable chapter.

The phrase 'after its kind' which occurs in verses 11, 12, 21 24, 25 has been taken by some writers to refer to one of the areas of biological classification like phylum, species, genus etc. There seems to be little warrant for this. In Genesis 1 we have only a broad general sketch of the botanical and biological areas of life. To try to give some specific meaning to the term 'kind' or to prove that some detailed point of botanical or biological theory occurs in Genesis 1 is to attempt to force the record to speak in details beyond its real purpose. Plant life is classified very simply into plants that bear seed and fruit trees that bear fruit with seeds in the fruit. The whole is described as 'vegetation' (Hebrew *desh*). The classification is a very simple one indeed. It would be more in keeping with the whole tenor of the chapter to regard the word 'kind' as a very broad term not to be identified with any one of the more exact terms of modern botany. A similar argument would apply in the case of the classification of the animals, birds, reptiles and fishes. Possibly the term 'kind' was never intended to connote any specific classification at all. Indeed the phrase 'after its kind' (Hebrew *mīn*) might mean simply 'of various kinds'. At most it indicates that just as the hand of God should be recognised behind the disposition of earth and sky, sea and land, sun, moon, and stars, so his hand should be recognised behind the many varieties of plants and animals known to humankind. There is no subtlety in such a statement. Nor does the use of the term 'kind' either support or deny one or other of the concepts of special creation or some kind of evolution.

What then of humankind? They are clearly at the apex of God's creation. They are made, (note the verb '*asah*' ) in the image and likeness of God, that is, unlike the animals they are capable of fellowship with God, being in God's image, and are responsible to answer to God. In that capacity they have the power to bring fish, animals, birds and reptiles into

subjection. One further significant feature is added in verse 27 in what is really a brief poetic utterance.<sup>4</sup>

And God created man in his image.  
In the divine image he created him.  
Male and female he created them.

(Gen. 1:27 Speiser 1964, p. 4)

The term 'man', *ādām*, in this verse seems to mean 'humankind' in a generic sense. 'He', *ādām*, is defined as 'male', *zākar*—and 'female' *neqēbāh*. This is a noble concept. Humankind is *both* male and female, and both male and female are made in the divine image, a concept which rules out every attempt to degrade woman to the level of the animal or even to an inferior level. She is a vital element in 'humankind' and shares the divine image with man. The unity of man and woman is expressed in another more figurative way in Genesis 2:18, 21–25.

The picture of humankind is a noble one. But despite the nobility of the picture, all that we are told about the origin of human beings is that God 'made' them and God 'created' them. How God performed his work is not declared. Hence, provided that we are persuaded of the fact that humankind, like everything else in the universe, is the work of God, it would seem that in our present state of knowledge, we must allow for diversity of opinion among Christians. So far as I am aware the scientists do not know the origin of humankind. An attitude of reverent agnosticism is the only reasonable attitude to adopt.

Our final comment takes us into chapter 2:14, and concerns the seventh day. The whole range of creation has now been passed in review. The initiator and agent of it all was God. What then? Simply, that God now ceased from work in the enjoyment and maintenance of what he had done. The seventh day is, like the six previous days, merely a literary symbol. But it has other dimensions, for it is also a symbol of the Sabbath. In the literary presentation of the fact of creation, the culmination is the seventh day, which, in the literary framework, stands by itself, paralleled only by the introductory section in Genesis 1:1–2. The introduction spoke of God's creating the heavens and the earth. The conclusion of the matter is:

So the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their company.  
And on the seventh day God brought to a close the work he had been doing. So God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy for on it he ceased from the work which he had undertaken.

(Taken from Gen. 2:1-2 Speiser 1964, p. 5)

The verb *shabath* has a range of meanings but one significant meaning is 'cease', 'stop'. The sense may be that God, having brought the world from

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<sup>4</sup> 'Image of God' is translated as 'divine image'.

the uninhabitable and unformed state of verse 2 to the well-ordered world of verse 31, could now stop and take delight in his work.

God looked at everything that he had made and found it very pleasing.

(Gen. 1:31 Speiser 1964, p. 5)

The end result was work 'brought to a (gratifying) close' (Speiser 1964 p.8), or 'declared to be finished' (Heidel 1951 p.127). Thereafter there remained the task of maintenance and supervision. Although this latter point is not made in Genesis 2 1–3 it is gathered from elsewhere in the Bible. But the passage in Genesis gives expression to the concept of the Sabbath, asserting in this simple fashion that the idea of the Sabbath is written into the constitution of the universe.

Finally, in what sense may Genesis 1 1–2:4a be regarded as an historical statement? Not in the sense that it is something reported by an eye-witness, nor in the sense that it is an account based on annals, but in the sense that, for Israel, there must have been a beginning to all things, and that God must have been the agent. Hence to write an account of creation taking note of the fact that God had been active in every area of the world, and to paint a picture on a broad canvas with a very few bold strokes of the artist's brush, was, at least in the eyes of Israel, to write a proper introduction to the great history of redemption. Even that introduction was a piece of history writing, albeit of a special kind.

## **Genesis 2:4b–3.24**

These two chapters now take up the story of humanity. There is a narrowing of the field of interest. In Genesis 1:1 the writer having stated that God made the whole universe moved to a narrower field of interest, namely the creation of the world in which people lived, and of humankind, the climax of creation. Now in chapter 2 the story of humankind is taken up by the narrator in some detail. The key to humanity's future and the reason for God's redemptive activity is now given. It lies in the fall of humankind. Humanity, made in the image of God, aspired to occupy a place which was God's alone, namely to be the possessor of universal knowledge. Forbidden by God to reach after such a status they disobeyed, only to discover, not only their own creaturely status, but also, through disobedience they had lost their fellowship with God. Once they had embarked on a rebel course the stage was set for the whole future of humankind. By contrast, humanity's rebellion set in train redemptive and reconciling processes which found their initiative and their execution in God alone.

But to speak in these terms is to make the narrative in Genesis 2–3 yield up the theological meaning which lies behind the symbols, and even as we make use of the word 'symbol' we have taken a step which needs to be justified. Let it be stated at once that the use of the word 'symbol' does not indicate that the incident narrated is stripped of everything factual and that it becomes one with the myths of ancient Mesopotamia. The symbol



is a symbol of something that happened even if the exact nature of what happened escapes us in detail. However, the use of the word 'symbol' does indicate that in these two chapters there is a blend of figurative and literal language which obscures many of the precise details of the incident.

We can only touch on a few facets of these two remarkable chapters in the exposition of which a vast literature has grown up.

In the first place it is here suggested that we do not need to think in terms of a full scale creation story in chapter 2. The focal point of the story is humankind, their creation, temptation, fall and judgment. The reference to other creatures is not as part of a creation story but in reference to humankind.

As to literary form, there is a certain parallel between Genesis 1:1–2 and Genesis 2:4b–6. In either case there is a temporal clause, interrupted by a parenthesis, and resumed after the parenthesis. Thus Genesis 1:1–2 reads:

When God set about to create heaven and earth—the world being then a formless waste, with darkness over the seas and only the Spirit of God moving over the water—God said 'Let there be light'.

By comparison Genesis 2:4b–7 reads:

At the time when Yahweh, that is God, made the earth and heaven—no shrub of the field being yet in the earth and no vegetation of the field having yet sprouted, for God had not sent rain upon the earth, and no man was there to till the soil; instead, a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the soil—Yahweh, that is God, formed man of dirt from the earth and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living being.

There is no reference here to other aspects of God's creative activity. The focal point of interest is man for whose sustenance plants were required. Yet, the plants themselves needed man to till the ground and to cultivate them, as well as rain to water the ground. Well, in the beginning things were not ordered in that way. But with the coming of man the ground could be cultivated. Here is how man came into being. God fashioned him (the verb is *yasar*)—out of the soil of the ground, and then blew into his nostrils the breath of life. We are involved here in forceful figurative language. The verb *yasar* normally means 'form' or 'fashion' and is commonly used of the potter who fashions his vessel out of clay. The same word is used in verse 19 of the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky. But the verb is really a synonym for 'create'. It is used here, however, to stress the fact that just as the potter is involved in his creation in an intimate and personal way, so God was involved in his creation of man. From what material did God fashion man, birds and beasts? From the soil of the ground. That was matter of common observation since the bodies of human beings and beasts alike returned to dust after death. On the physical level, therefore, human beings, birds, and beasts have a common base. But these are more than mere physical elements. They have life and breath. Whence came their life? From God.

Here is another vivid figure. The impartation of life by God is described in terms of God 'breathing into his nostrils the breath of life'. This made man, and the beasts, a 'living being' (*nepesh hayyâh*). If these words be understood in their normal, customary sense, then God must be understood to have taken soil from the ground in his hands, to have worked it into the shape of man etc. and then to have blown breath into it from his own nostrils. But the literal sense here is the sense that such expressions have in a figure of speech where symbols are used to describe something else. The verb 'formed' is a figurative expression to describe God as being personally involved in the creation of man. The phrase 'soil from the earth' is a figurative expression for the basic elements of which the man is composed. The phrase 'He breathed into his nostril the breath of life' is a figurative expression for God's personal activity in creating and communicating physical life to human beings. 'Breath' and 'breathing' are figures for 'life'. And even the seemingly very literal words 'nose' and 'nostril' in no way make the whole statement literal except in the sense that their literal meaning here is the meaning they have as part of a figure of speech. Hence, in regard to the creation of man, Genesis 2:7 indicates that man as a living creature among the other living creatures was the result of God's personal creative activity. The basic elements of his physical composition and the life associated with his physical being were alike the result of God's creative activity. Nor is there any hint of God's method of working. This lies hidden behind the figure although some kind of process may be envisaged if the verb 'fashion' is used. Yet strictly this is to take the word too literally. What is true of man is also true of the animals and the birds that were also 'fashioned' from the soil of the ground and became 'living creatures' (Gen. 2:19). That human beings are different from them is stated in another figure in Genesis 1:26–30. The point may be made again here, that, even if mystery surrounds the origin of humankind so that we can only resort to symbols and to figurative language, we ought not conclude that the symbols are symbols of nothing. If the details of God's creation of humankind escape us, the fact does not. And it is the fact and not the detailed explanation of the means that God used that is important.

Time will not permit the analysis of every symbol in these remarkable chapters. Two others only will be discussed briefly, namely the creation of woman and the fall of humanity. Once again it is here argued that the actual details of these two events lie beyond our grasp because they belong to the *proton*, to the very beginning of the human story which lies beyond the reach of either written records or eye-witnesses. Nevertheless by the use of symbols certain important facts which are significant for faith and for life may be quite clearly discerned.

Reverting for a moment to Genesis 1:26–27 we recall that in these verses the dignity of man, '*adam*', is stressed. He was created in the divine image and was granted dominion over all living things. The total entity 'humankind' is here defined as 'male and female', an important concept. Humankind is thus a unity in diversity. The second chapter of Genesis begins with the male, here called '*adam*' and proceeds to describe how God, in his desire to provide a helper and counterpart for the man (Gen.

2:18) brought a woman into being. Animals would not fulfil that role. Now it is evident that in many of her features woman is the same as man. She has the same physical basis; she has breath, and is a living being. Yet she is different. She is the bearer of children, and is necessary for the continuance of life. Even when man was under the sentence of death he called his wife *Hawwah* (Eve), that is, 'Life'. So there is both unity and diversity between man and woman, a fact declared in Genesis 1:26–27. How may this fact of unity and difference be asserted? In Genesis 2:21–24 there is a beautiful symbol in which both the unity and the difference of man and woman is emphasised. At the same time it is admitted that there is mystery, for man was in a deep sleep when God took part of man's own anatomy and built (Hebrew *bânâh*) it into woman, closing up the flesh at that point. Thereafter we must suppose following the picture, the original man having lost part of his anatomy, was something other than what he had been originally, part of him having become woman. But to speak like this is to press the words into a literalism they were never meant to have. Can we really take these words in their customary, social sense? If we do it is hard to see how we can escape some such picture as the one I have drawn. What was it in any case that God took from man in order to make woman? It was a *sela'*. This word is translated elsewhere in the Old Testament as the 'ribs' of a building, the 'side' of an altar, a mountain, or an ark, the 'side rooms' of the temple, etc. Its meaning in the context of this story is not at all clear. But whatever the picture was intended to mean, it was from this part of man that woman was made or built by God and presented to the man who recognised her as 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh'.

But is not the literal meaning of the words here the meaning they have in reference to a figure? In my view it is. If it be asked how we may give definition to the various elements of the picture we shall have to admit that we cannot. Nor does it matter that we should. It is more important to discern beneath the figure those features which are significant for faith and for life. Among these features I suggest the following are important—that woman like man owes her origin to God; that woman and man though separate are yet one; that woman is both man's helper and his counterpart; and that any particular man who takes a particular woman to be his wife should recognise that in that union there is, in some sense, a remaking of the original unity of man and woman.

The other picture which we shall analyse briefly is that of the fall of humanity in Genesis 3. Already in Genesis 2:16, Yahweh, that is God, having placed the man in a beautiful garden has commanded him in plain simple language—'You are free to eat of any tree of the garden, except only the tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. To eat of that tree was to be doomed to death. The story of how Adam and his wife ate of that tree and were indeed doomed to death with the judgment of God resting upon them is told in Genesis 3.

Now there are in this story many elements hard to be understood. What was the tree of life? What was the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Who was the serpent? In what sense could a man be said to hear the

sound of God as he walked in the garden at the breezy time of the day? In what sense might a man or a woman taste and eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? How might a human being by eating such fruit become like God, discerning everything or the possessor of all knowledge? What is the meaning of the final picture of cherubim wielding a flaming sword to guard the way to the tree of life? One may take the whole story and treat each word as having its common everyday meaning and hold that the 'literal meaning' lies clear on the surface. On the other hand one may hold that the whole story is couched in symbols and that the literal meaning of the words is the meaning they have inside the symbol. In that case there is mystery and much remains unknown. It becomes important therefore to grasp the truth behind the symbols since this truth is important for faith and for life. It is here proposed that Genesis 3 is indeed a figurative presentation under symbols, of the Fall of humankind. This is not to deny that there was a Fall. But it is to say that the precise details of the Fall lie beyond our grasp. In adopting such a view the conclusion at which one arrives is no different from that arrived at by the interpreter who adopts the simple view that the narrative tells us exactly what happened. For in either case the conclusion is that the first man in his desire to be independent of God and to grasp after powers and knowledge that were God's alone, disobeyed God's command and brought about thereby a breach of fellowship with God. Thereafter he lay under divine judgment. All the sorrows and burdens he now bears are a result of his rebellious rejection of God's sovereignty. In short, he became a sinner who rebelled, turned aside, and missed the goal for which God intended him. In that state he came to be in need of redemption and reconciliation.

By regarding Genesis 2 and 3 as presenting under symbolism some basic truth about human beings, we lay stress on the truth and not on the symbols. But we thereby confess that we are in ignorance about the precise character of the temptation and the Fall. However in accepting humbly such a view we are still open to the spiritual impact of a powerful narrative. What is here portrayed? It is a picture of the first man and woman placed in a beautiful garden where God made bountiful provision for their life, forbidding to them access only to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In the outcome it was precisely at the point of God's prohibition that they were faced with the question of obedience to God's command. Yet despite the abundance of God's fatherly care, despite the wide area over which they had perfect freedom, and despite the fact that the prohibition was not oppressive in the light of the freedom they had, man and woman defied the divine command in an act of disobedience, which, far from bringing them the powers they hoped for only worked for their downfall and their alienation from God. Nor may we, the descendants of the first man and woman, blame them as though we were free from the same rebellious attitude. What was found in them has occurred in every human being that ever lived.

The process by which this act of disobedience was brought about is described in Genesis 3 which is one of the most remarkable analyses of the process of temptation in all literature. It is a process that can easily be

recognised by modern man as well. Concerning this story in Genesis 3, E.A. Speiser recently wrote

There is action here, and suspense, psychological insight and subtle irony, light and shadow—all achieved in two dozen verses. The characterization is swift and sure, and all the more effective for its indirectness.

(Speiser 1964, p. 25)

The sovereignty of God was at stake. The central figures are God, man and woman, and the serpent. God we know. The man and the woman we know—and note that it is man and woman, both of them, mankind in totality, here united again, but in an act of disobedience—but who is the serpent? He is a symbol for the Tempter who was identified in both Jewish and Christian tradition with Satan. But whether the serpent can be identified with certainty or not, it is the words that come to expression here that are important, for it was the subtle suggestion that came to the woman and her husband that gave rise to their disobedience. And finally, the responsibility must be sheeted home to the man and his wife rather than to the serpent. God's question was a direct one—'Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?' (Gen. 3: 11). It is little use to attempt to attach the blame to another, either to his wife or to the serpent. The end of it all was judgment upon all the parties involved. The repercussions were to reach to all humankind.

The story as it stands is transposed into human terms. The serpent speaks. God speaks and walks in the garden so that the sound of his footsteps can be heard. The woman picks the fruit from the forbidden tree and both she and her husband eat. They sew fig-leaves together to make loincloths for themselves, having become aware that they were exposed before God and seeking to cover their nakedness from his sight. One senses symbolism in almost every line. Yet it is not the symbolism that matters finally, nor the point by point identification of every detail in the symbolism, but the main thrust of the whole narrative. And this is plain to see for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

## Conclusion

We have touched on a variety of important topics during this lecture. It may seem that some extremely important aspects of the whole subject have been glossed over or not even mentioned. This is inevitable. On one occasion I gave a lecture a week for two terms of ten weeks each in Genesis 1–3 and felt at the end of the course that so much had been left unsaid. Small wonder therefore that something of the same feeling is left after this lecture is completed.

However the task as I saw it was primarily to talk over several important principles of interpretation and to apply these to three important chapters of the Old Testament. In particular three main principles have been enunciated and three broad conclusions have been drawn.

*The first principle* is that the language of the Bible in reference to natural phenomena is popular and not scientific, it is the language of experience and appearance; it is not expressed in terms of theories and hypotheses; it is expressed in terms of the culture of the times in which the writers lived. In the light of this broad principle of interpretation we may give the answer to the first question posed in this lecture—'Is Genesis chapter 1 a scientific statement?'. The answer I am bound to give is 'NO!', at least, not in terms of the scientific statements of the twentieth century AD. It is difficult to see that this great chapter was ever intended to become anything other than a tremendous affirmation of the fact that God is the creator of all things. However, it can be confidently affirmed that Genesis 1 is devoid of the fanciful and bizarre ideas that are to be found in the mythologies of the ancient Near East. Once we can agree that Genesis 1 describes the whole range of created things, animate and inanimate in terms that are meaningful to anyone, anywhere, at any time and that these are described in terms which anyone may observe with his own natural eyes, then there need be no embarrassment in them for any scientist. Genesis 1 will always be correct whatever changes may take place in scientific theories or formulations.

*The second principle* we have discussed is that it is fundamental to proper interpretation of the Bible to give attention to the literary form and language of every passage under study. Attention to this principle in the study of Genesis 1–3 has led to the recognition of an interesting literary pattern in Genesis 1, and to a recognition of the considerable use of figurative language in Genesis 2 and 3. In reference to chapter 1 the artificially constructed literary pattern has led to an abandoning of any kind of chronological arrangement and to the acceptance of a schematic arrangement of the main areas of God's creation so as to make available to the people of Israel a simple and easily remembered formulation. In Genesis 2 and 3 the recognition of symbolic language has led to the conclusion that it is not so much the details of the symbolism that should concern the reader, but the central truths which are brought to expression by means of the symbolism, for it is these that constitute some of the most important elements of the faith of Israel, elements which have passed over into the Christian faith.

*The third principle* concerns the nature of history writing in the Bible. It has been argued that not only did Israel have a deep sense of history, but also that she made use of a variety of literary means to give expression to her belief in the activity of God in the history of people and of the world in which people live. In particular, it has been argued that in those areas which lie beyond the reach of humankind in the *proton* and in the *eschaton*, history writing is of a special kind. Israel believed that God would be active at the end of time; just as he was at the beginning. He was active in creation. He was active in the confrontation of the first man with His own sovereign demands. This raises the question of whether Genesis 1–3 is history. The answer is 'Yes!', providing we recognise what it is to which we answer 'Yes'. For Israel it could not be otherwise than that God created the world, and humankind, or that the first man rebelled against God, even if no-one was present to record the fact. Yet the fact of

creation and the fact of the fall could be recorded in symbolic language. If it be asked whether things happened precisely as the narrative portrays them, then the answer is that in Genesis 2 and 3 the exact details of the event lie hidden behind the symbols. Yet it is of small consequence that we are unable to spell out the details once we are assured of the fact.

In this matter of history writing the question of the existence of Adam and Eve as individuals is bound to be raised. It is easier for some people to accept Adam and Eve as symbols of the whole human race and to leave the precise identity of these figures unexplained. Let it be said that the scientists themselves are by no means certain about the origin of the human race, so that from the scientific angle there is no reason to abandon the belief that the human race began with an original pair. Paul's argument in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 certainly seems to require a first Adam to contrast with the last Adam.

Our last question is the easiest to answer—Genesis 1–3: Theology? The answer is 'Yes!'. Whatever questions may remain in the areas of science and history the central affirmations of these chapters for faith stand out clearly enough. The primary importance of these chapters is not for their scientific information, nor for their detailed historical information about events, but rather for what they teach about God, human beings, and the world. In the elucidation of these doctrines due regard should be paid to the treatment of the themes of Genesis 1–3 in the New Testament. Great truths which are merely adumbrated, or only partly developed in the Old Testament are expounded there in the light of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Indeed already in this lecture the doctrines of Genesis 1–3 have been expressed with some New Testament overtones. But this whole question requires a full discussion in itself—perhaps in some future, Tyndale Lecture. But these three chapters as they stand, quite apart from New Testament exposition, and despite their literary form, present several fundamental doctrines. It may be that at times theologians have read more into the chapters than is warranted, and have pressed some of the details of the symbols to yield doctrines which are not there to be discovered. Nevertheless these great assertions stand clear—'God is the Creator of all that is', 'Human beings are creatures, made in the image of God, and authorised to exercise dominion over all other creatures', 'Humankind, in its totality, comprises both male and female', 'Human beings are fallen, out of fellowship with God their Creator, rebels and sinners and under divine condemnation'. However much such doctrines may be expanded and elucidated in the light of other Old Testament writings, and in the light of the New Testament, they are, in themselves important doctrines in the faith of any person.

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