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A CASE FOR THE TRADITIONAL TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1:1 BASED UPON A MULTI-LEVELED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Joshua Daniel Wilson

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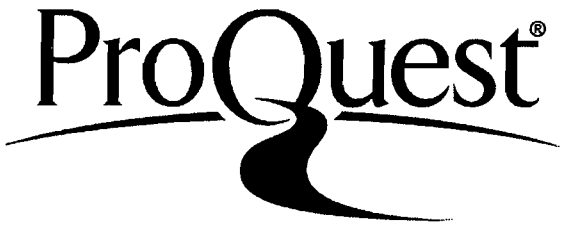

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A CASE FOR THE TRADITIONAL TRANSLATION AND

INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1:1 BASED UPON

A MULTI-LEVELED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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Date 9/17/2010

To my God and Savior, Jesus Christ,

who lifted me up out of the pit of destruction

and set my feet upon a rock,

and to Sarah, my wife, my friend, my encourager,

without whom I could never have completed this project,

and to my parents, Bob, Kathie, and Jeanne, my mother-in-law,

who also made such sacrificial contributions for me on behalf of this project.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers, ed. A Roberts and J. Donaldson (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885-96; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957)
BDAG	Bauer, W., F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt, and F. W. Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago 1999
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907
GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. Edited by E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1910
HALOT	Koehler, L., W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994-1999
IBHS	*An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, Indiana, 1990
Joüon	Joüon, P., and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. 2nd ed. Subsidia biblica 27. Rome, 2008
JPSV	Jewish Publication Society Version
LSJ	Liddell, H. G., R. Scott, H. S. Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford, 1996
NJPS	Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text
NPNF2	A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, 2nd series, ed. P. Schaff et al. (New York: Christian Literature, 1887-94; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957)
Sonc. Talm.	The Soncino Talmud, ed. I. Epstein. Limited Anniversary Edition. (London: The Soncino Press, 1978)

PREFACE

I could not have completed this project without the help of others. I am very thankful to my advisor, Russell Fuller, who turned me onto the issues surrounding the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1. They are linguistically oriented so as to play to my strengths, but they also relate to important issues in Christian theology. I was originally stuck in a year-long rut contemplating a dissertation on the Hebrew verb of being, which was drudgery in that it made no significant contributions to Evangelical thought. I would never have finished a project like this on the Hebrew verb of being.

I also want to thank my wife, Sarah, who has sacrificed so much for me during this process. She has lost her father, birthed four children (all boys), moved twice, and spent many nights without her husband. Amidst all of this, she always pushed me to continue my work even in the many moments when I doubted I could. I would not have finished this project without her unwavering support. God has truly blessed me with her.

Most importantly, I want to give all glory and praise for this work to my God and Savior, Jesus Christ. At the end of this road, I can look back and see the Hand of Providence as He has guided me through some difficult times, ensuring that this work would be completed. I can take no credit or praise; this work is His, and I am blessed to have been a part of it.

Joshua D. Wilson

St. Louis, Missouri

August 2010

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Context of the Issue

Genesis 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ׃[1] "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."[2] Genesis 1:1 is one of the most well-known verses of the Bible because it starts with the beginning of all things. Since Genesis 1:1 narrates and describes the beginning of the creation event, its translation and interpretation have a strong influence upon a reader's epistemology, philosophy, and theology. The creation theologies of various scholars today display this influence especially with respect to their views on the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has been the foundation of creation theology in the Christian church for many centuries, and Genesis 1:1 has been the cornerstone verse.[3] Even in this modern era, scholars continue to use this passage as the first and main verse in their defense of the doctrine. In his *Systematic Theology* Grudem states,

> The Bible clearly requires us to believe that God created the universe out of nothing. (Sometimes the Latin phrase *ex nihilo*, "out of nothing" is used; it is then said that the Bible teaches creation *ex nihilo*.) This means that before God began to create the universe, nothing else existed except God himself.
>
> This is the implication of Genesis 1:1, which says, "In the beginning God

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[1]All biblical citations from the original languages, including the passages from the Apocrypha and Pseudepigripha, are provided by *BibleWorks 6.0*. [CD ROM] (2003).

[2]Unless specified, all translations are this author's own.

[3]Irenaeus (2nd cent.) is one of the earliest church fathers to use Gen 1:1 to argue that God created the world *ex nihilo*. See Irenaeus *Adversus haereses* 2.10.4. A case might be made that the Shepherd of Hermas (1st cent.) utilized Genesis 1:1 in this manner as well. See Shepherd of Hermas *Mandate* 1.1.1.

created the heavens and the earth."[4]

Also Feinberg, in his work *No One Like Him*, focuses extensively on Genesis 1:1 to express a similar sentiment. Consider this excerpt:

> While it is not absolutely impossible that God created prior to Genesis 1, there is no evidence that this is so. Thus, if Gen 1:1 is the start of God's creative activity, it seems that this initial creative act was done *ex nihilo*. The verse says he created the heavens and the earth, a typical Hebrew way to refer to all there is. But if in the beginning God created everything, nothing could have existed before Gen 1:1 from which to make the heavens and the earth.[5]

However, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not just important for a theology of creation. It is also important for theology proper as well. Without the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the potential exists that God is a lesser being than first perceived. Grudem goes on to state,

> However, were we to deny creation out of nothing, we would have to say that some matter has always existed and that it is eternal like God. This idea would challenge God's independence, his sovereignty, and the fact that worship is due to him alone: if matter existed apart from God, then what inherent right would God have to rule over it and use it for his glory? And what confidence could we have that every aspect of the universe will ultimately fulfill God's purposes, if some parts of it were not created by him?[6]

Even Tertullian saw this dilemma many centuries earlier. He states,

> For when [Hermogenes] denies that Matter was born or made, I find that, even on these terms, the title Lord is unsuitable to God in respect of Matter, because it must have been free, when by not having a beginning it had not an author. The fact of its past existence it owed to no one, so that it could be subject to no one.[7]

If the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is so important to the theology of God, and if Genesis 1:1 is so foundational to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, then a proper translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 are necessary and vital for a correct theological

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[4]Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 262–63.

[5]John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton: Crossway Books, Good News Publishers, 2001), 554.

[6]Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 264.

[7]Tertullian *Against Hermogenes* 3, trans. D. Holmes, ANF 3:479.

understanding of the Creator God.

For many centuries a traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 have led Christian and Jewish scholars to conclude that God created the world out of nothing. According to this tradition, Genesis 1:1 introduces God's first creative act with an independent main clause. Genesis 1:2 then describes this first creative act as being in an incomplete state. The rest of the Genesis narrative then describes how God shaped, molded, and added to that initial creation. The narrative then culminates with God's consummation of the complete and ordered universe. Since the Genesis narrative does not describe anything as being in existence before the initial creation other than God, many interpreters have logically concluded that God created the world from nothing. Although it is not explicitly stated, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is inherent in the Genesis 1 text. This is the logical and theological conclusion of the traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1.[8] Again, the translation renders Genesis 1:1 as an independent main clause, and the interpretation makes Genesis 1:1 the first creative act. Within this last century, however, the traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 have been rigorously questioned.

The Dependent-Clause Translation

Many influences have caused a large number of modern scholars to argue that Genesis 1:1 should not be rendered with an independent main clause. First, nearly a thousand years ago, Rashi and Ibn Ezra, two Medieval Jewish scholars, argued that

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[8]Many scholars of varying positions refer to this reading of the passage as the traditional translation and interpretation. See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 13; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 141; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, in *The JPS Torah Commentary*, ed. Nahum M. Sarna and Chaim Potok (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 5; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (July 1975): 217. Westermann, however, contends that this interpretation is not traditional. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990), 95.

Genesis 1:1 should be understood as a dependent temporal clause.[9] Their understanding of the passage, however, was not widely adopted. However, centuries later, when the Babylonian creation account *Enûma Elish* was first published (1875),[10] scholars noted the thematic similarities between it and the creation account in Genesis 1. They also noted that much like Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's reading of Genesis 1:1, the creation account of *Enûma Elish* also starts with a dependent temporal clause, "When on high . . . ."[11] Later scholars concluded that the Babylonian creation account was the thematic and grammatical influence behind the Genesis creation narrative, and that like *Enûma Elish*, Genesis 1:1 should also begin with a dependent temporal clause.[12] Furthermore, with the popularization and adoption of the compositional theories of the Pentateuch, scholars began to argue that the creation accounts in Genesis 1:1-2:4a and 2:4b-2:25 were the products of two sources, separated by hundreds of years. Genesis 2:4b-2:25 was the product of the earlier Yahwist source, and Genesis 1:1-2:4a was the product of the later Priestly source.[13] Again scholars noted that the earlier Yahwist account also starts with a dependent temporal clause in Genesis 2:4b, and they concluded that Genesis 1:1 should start in the same manner.[14] Thus, because of the thematically similar creation accounts of

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[9]Rashi, *Genesis*, in *Pentateuch: With Targum Onkelos, Haphtorah and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary*, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1946), 2; Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 22.

[10]This is the date of the first published translation by George Smith. See Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 2.

[11]Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, 18.

[12]See E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 9–10.

[13]See Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 1; Skinner, *Genesis*, 1–2; Speiser, *Genesis*, LIV; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 18.

[14]See Skinner, *Genesis*, 14; Speiser, *Genesis*, 12.

the Yahwist and *Enûma Elish*, the divergent explanations of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, and the urging of sympathetic scholars, a few modern Bible translations changed the Genesis 1:1 text of previous editions from an independent main clause to a dependent temporal clause. The following traditions show this translational change:[15]

Protestant Translational Tradition

[1]In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. [2]The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters. [3]And God said, "Let there be light" (RSV - 1952)

[1]In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, [2]the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. [3]Then God said, "Let there be light" (NRSV - 1989)

Jewish Translational Tradition

[1]IN THE beginning God created the heaven and the earth. [2]Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters. [3]And God said: 'Let there be light.' (JPS - 1917)

[1]When God began to create heaven and earth—[2]the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—[3]God said, "Let there be light" (NJPS - 1985)

Catholic Translational Tradition

[1]In the beginning God created heaven, and earth. [2]And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved over the waters. [3]And God said: Be light made. (DRA - 1899)[16]

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[15]With respect to these translations, it is interesting to note that the change in the rendering of Gen 1:1 did not take place until after the 1960s. Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's alternate translations were in existence for a number of centuries; *Enûma Elish* was first published in 1875; Wellhausen's *Die Komposition des Hexateuch* was published in 1876. The early scholars of each version's tradition had access to these data prior to the publication of their translations, yet these influences are not reflected in the earlier translations. Furthermore, the 1917 JPS rendering of the first two words of Gen 1:1, all capital letters, seems to be a direct repudiation of the grammatical explanations of Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

[16]This is the Douay-Rheims American Edition (DRA). Unlike the later NAB, the DRA is translated mostly from the Vg rather than Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. See F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the Earliest English Versions to the New English Bible*, new and revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 113.

> [1]In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, [2]the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters. [3]Then God said, "Let there be light," (NAB - 1970)

This change in translation produces a change in interpretation. No longer is Genesis 1:1 the first act of creation. Rather, Genesis 1:1, along with 1:2, becomes a description of the context in which the first act of creation takes place: the creation of light in Genesis 1:3.[17] According to this interpretation then, the elements of Genesis 1:2 were already present before God began creating. Thus, one can logically conclude that since these elements, which God utilized in his later work of creation, were in existence before God created, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is *not* inherent in the text.

The Summary-Statement Interpretation

Other scholars argue that Genesis 1:1 should remain an independent clause. However, rather than interpreting the verse as the first act of creation, they argue that it should be interpreted as an introductory summary or title of the entire creation narrative.[18] In this proposal, the translation of Genesis 1:1 remains traditional, but the interpretation does not. Scholars of this summary-statement interpretation argue that a semantic discontinuity exists between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

These scholars explain this semantic discontinuity from two different, yet compatible, perspectives. One perspective focuses on the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ in Genesis 1:1. Scholars argue that because the phrase is always used in the Hebrew Bible as a merism describing the complete and ordered universe, and because Genesis 1:2 is a description of the earth in an incomplete and unordered state, then Genesis 1:2 cannot logically be a description of the product created in Genesis 1:1.[19] Other scholars go so far

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[17]For an early treatment of this view, see Skinner, *Genesis*.

[18]Franz Delitzsch was among the first modern scholars to argue this position. See Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), 72–81.

[19]Gunkel, *Genesis*, 103; S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 2nd ed., Westminster

as to argue that the merismic phrase takes on a tertiary meaning that distinguishes it from the meaning of its two individual words.[20] Thus, a semantic discontinuity exists between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and only the summary-statement interpretation can solve the dilemma and maintain the integrity of the traditional translation.

The other perspective focuses on the description of the earth in Genesis 1:2. According to many of these same scholars, Genesis 1:2 is a description of a chaos that is contrary to creation. God cannot create something that is contrary to creation. Such a notion does not make sense; it is a logical contradiction.[21] Because of this dilemma the chaotic scene of Genesis 1:2 cannot be a description of the product created in Genesis 1:1 either. Thus, again, a semantic discontinuity exists between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, and again, only the summary-statement interpretation can solve this dilemma and maintain the integrity of the traditional translation.[22]

Like the proponents of the dependent-clause translation, however, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation do not reckon Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of

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Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 3.

[20]Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 179. The TEV takes this view further and *translates* Gen 1:1 as "In the beginning, when God created the universe." Of course as a whole, the TEV renders Gen 1:1 with a dependent clause.

[21]Gunkel, *Genesis*, 103; Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Chatham, England: W. & J. MacKay & Co Ltd, 1960; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1960), 42; Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., rev., trans. John H. Marks, The Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 49.

[22]The two perspectives are neither exclusive nor incompatible. Rather, they offer two different means for achieving the same goal: semantic discontinuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. Since both perspectives are compatible, some scholars use both to argue for semantic discontinuity. See Gunkel, *Genesis*, 103; Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 217–21. However, others scholars are still able to achieve semantic discontinuity by arguing for one perspective and against the other. For example Young, in order to defend the summary-statement interpretation, argues that the phrase, "heavens and earth" in Gen 1:1 is a description of the complete and ordered universe. See Edward J. Young, "The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three," *Westminster Theological Journal* 21 (1958): 142. However, he argues against interpreting Gen 1:2 as a description of a chaos contrary to creation. See ibid., 144–45.

creation. According to this reading, the phrase "in the beginning" is not a reference to a specific point in time before creation, and it does not temporally precede Genesis 1:2. Rather, "in the beginning" is a description of the context in which all of creation takes place, and Genesis 1:2 is a description of the context prior to the first act of creation: the creation of light in Genesis 1:3. Speaking of Genesis 1:1, Waltke states, "If verse 1 is a summary, then 'in the beginning' must refer to the first six days of creation, not time prior to creation. The six days constitute 'the beginning.'"[23] Commenting on Genesis 1:2, he states, "The negative state of the earth reflects a situation in which the earth is not producing life. Chronologically, this must describe the state of the earth prior to verse 1 . . ."[24] Thus again, light is interpreted as the first act of creation, and there is no explanation for the origin of the elements in Genesis 1:2.[25] Since the elements of Genesis 1:2 were already in existence when God began to create, elements which God utilized in his work of creation, then the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is *not* inherent in the text.

Implications of Translation and Interpretation

The dependent-clause translation and the summary-statement interpretation of Genesis 1:1 can offer no explanation for the origin of the elements in Genesis 1:2. Thus, if the text does not say that God created them, then those same elements were already in existence before He created the world. Wenham states, "Theologically these different translations are of great consequence, for apart from #4[, the traditional translation and interpretation], the translations all presuppose the existence of chaotic pre-existent matter

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[23]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180 See also James Barr, "Was Everything That God Created Really Good?" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggeman*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 58.

[24]Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 60. The two excerpts from Waltke further demonstrate the semantic discontinuity between Gen 1:1 and 1:2. Gen 1:2 temporally precedes the time frame of Gen 1:1. Thus, there is also a temporal discontinuity between the two verses.

[25]For an early treatment of this interpretation, see Driver, *Genesis*; Gunkel, *Genesis*.

before the work of creation began."[26] Naturally then, this change in translation and interpretation causes most proponents of either view to reject the longstanding tradition that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is an inherent feature of the Genesis 1 narrative.[27]

Unfortunately, no verse is more central to the overall doctrine than Genesis 1:1, and consequently, no verse is more central to the theology of God. Without any explanation of the origin of the elements in Genesis 1:2, the dependent-clause translation and the summary-statement interpretation leave open the possibility that the coexistence of *eternal* matter with God is a theological concept inherent in the Genesis 1 narrative.[28] Brown aptly states,

> The vigor with which both ancient and modern commentators have argued opposing positions betrays the fact that more than simply syntactical precision is at stake; there are also deep-seated theological conflicts over the way in which God is to be viewed in relation to the cosmos.[29]

Once this center-piece verse has been removed, the foundation for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* erodes quickly, and opposing scholars are free to reinterpret other creation passages[30] and create new theologies of creation and of God.[31]

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[26]Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 11.

[27]The proponents of the dependent-clause translation who reject the idea that *creatio ex nihilo* is a logical and theological inference of the Genesis 1 narrative are the following: Skinner, *Genesis*, 15; Paul Humbert, "Trois Notes Sur Genese 1," *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 56 (1955): 88; Harry Orlinsky, foreword to *Genesis: The N. J. V. Translation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Harper Torch Books; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, The Temple Library, 1966), xv; William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, Dissertation Series/Society of Biblical Literature, no. 132 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 72. The proponents of the summary-statement interpretation who reject the idea that *creatio ex nihilo* is a logical and theological inference of the Genesis 1 narrative are the following: Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 79; Gunkel, *Genesis*, 104; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 109; Barr, "Was Everything That God Created," 59–60; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180.

[28]This does not mean that all proponents of either view believe such is inherent in the narrative.

[29]Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 62.

[30]Consider for example Waltke, whose summary-statement interpretation of Gen 1:1 causes him to reinterpret other creation passages also foundational to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. With

Translation affects interpretation; interpretation affects theology. The translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 shape scholars' theologies of creation and, whether knowingly or unknowingly, their theologies of God. With these theological implications on the line and with the translations of modern Bibles at stake, a proper translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is vital. Scholars and readers of the Bible have been left with many unsettled questions: Is Genesis 1:1 a dependent clause or an independent main clause? Is Genesis 1:1 a summary of the creation narrative or a narration of the first creative act? Are the elements in Genesis 1:2 chaotic? A serious and new investigation of these issues is requisite.

Thesis

This dissertation argues that although Genesis 1:1 has been translated and interpreted in differing ways, the traditional translation and interpretation of the verse are more faithful to the principles of Classical-Hebrew linguistics.

Methodology

In order to prove the stated thesis, this dissertation utilizes multi-leveled linguistic analyses that follow a straightforward methodological order. In the dissertation as a whole, the linguistic analysis of Genesis 1:1's translation methodologically precedes the linguistic analysis of its interpretation. In the individual chapters, the linguistic

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respect to John 1:1-3 and Heb 11:3 he states, "When the writer of Hebrews says, 'the universe was formed at God's command' (11:3), he must have excluded the dark abyss [Gen 1:2], for it existed apart from and before God's commands. John says, 'Through [the Word (Jesus Christ)] all things were made' (John 1:3), but are darkness and the abyss [Gen 1:2] ever conceptualized as 'made' in the Bible? The inspired author of Job represents the primeval sea as bursting forth from the womb of the earth and God as wrapping the sea in thick darkness (Job 38:8-9), but no clear biblical text testifies to the origins of chaos [Gen 1:2] or of the Serpent, nor to the reason for their existence." Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180–81.

[31]Naturally, if such a foundational verse as Gen 1:1 requires retranslation and reinterpretation, then a reinterpretation of other creation passages and a modification of older theologies is a necessary outcome. However, considering the theological implications, this retranslation or reinterpretation of Gen 1:1 must withstand the utmost scrutiny before traditional interpreters and theologians can be expected to change their views.

analyses start at the most basic level of investigation: the lexical level, which methodologically precedes the grammatical level, which then methodologically precedes the syntactical level. Thus, Chapter 2 presents a brief, introductory history of the translation, interpretation, and theology of Genesis 1:1. Chapter 3 presents a multi-leveled linguistic analysis of the translation of Genesis 1:1. Chapter 4 presents a multi-leveled linguistic analysis of the interpretation of Genesis 1:1. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

Introduction

This chapter examines the history of the translation, interpretation, and theology of Genesis 1:1 from the time of the Old Testament writings to the period of the Reformation. While this examination is by no means exhaustive, it does give the reader a sense of how "traditional" the traditional translation and interpretation are. It also gives the reader a sense of how the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* has been historically tied to Genesis 1:1. Even though many past scholars have dealt with the theological issues concerning the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, this chapter has avoided any such discussions that do not proceed from a direct interpretation of the verse.

The Hebrew Old Testament

There are a plethora of Old Testament passages that deal with the creation of the world, and many can be interpreted to fit certain creation perspectives. However, only the passages which offer clues into the translation, interpretation, and theology of Genesis 1:1 are analyzed.

Psalm 104:5-9

Psalm 104:5-9 undoubtedly draws from a particular interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It states the following:

5 יָסַד־אֶרֶץ עַל־מְכוֹנֶיהָ בַּל־תִּמּוֹט עוֹלָם וָעֶד׃
6 תְּהוֹם כַּלְבוּשׁ כִּסִּיתָו עַל־הָרִים יַעַמְדוּ־מָיִם׃
7 מִן־גַּעֲרָתְךָ יְנוּסוּן מִן־קוֹל רַעַמְךָ יֵחָפֵזוּן׃
8 יַעֲלוּ הָרִים יֵרְדוּ בְקָעוֹת אֶל־מְקוֹם זֶה יָסַדְתָּ לָהֶם׃
9 גְּבוּל־שַׂמְתָּ בַּל־יַעֲבֹרוּן בַּל־יְשׁוּבוּן לְכַסּוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

> [5]He established the earth upon its foundations, it will not be moved forever.
> [6]He has covered it with the deep like a garment, the waters were standing above the mountains.[1]
> [7]From your rebuke they fled, from the voice of your thunder they ran away.
> [8]The mountains went up, the valleys went down to the place you established for them.
> [9]You have set a boundary that they will not pass over, they will not cover the earth again.

Psalm 104:5-6 describe the creation of the earth prior to its appearance from out of the deep and prior to the bounding of the waters in 104:7-9. The author's parallelism of תְּהוֹם and מַיִם in 104:6 matches the parallelism of תְּהוֹם and מַיִם in Genesis 1:2, and the description of the waters standing over all the earth matches the description of the primordial watery state of the earth in Genesis 1:2. Psalm 104:7-9 then seem to be parallel to Genesis 1:9-10 where the earth first appears and the waters are bound up in the sea.

There are three important, interpretive implications with this passage. First, the parallelism in vocabulary and semantic content makes it likely that the author is drawing from the first chapter of Genesis and redescribing that creation event in his own poetic style and order.[2] Second, the author describes the creation of the earth as a separate and distinct event that is prior to the placement of the deep upon it and prior to its appearance out of the deep. Third, because the author claims that God placed the תְּהוֹם upon the earth after its creation,[3] he most likely interpreted the elements in Genesis 1:2 as

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[1]The first clause of this verse has some grammatical difficulty because the pronominal suffix of the verb is masculine, but its alleged antecedent, אֶרֶץ, is feminine. Hakham explains the dilemma as a case of attraction since the immediately preceding word לְבוּשׁ is masculine. See Amos Hakham, *Psalm 101–150*, vol. 3 of *Psalms*, The Koschitzky ed., The Bible with the Jerusalem Commentary (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 38 n. 8b. Whatever the explanation, almost all modern translations agree that אֶרֶץ is the antecedent of the pronominal suffix in 104:6.

[2]For a list of scholars that argue for a linkage between Gen 1 and Ps 104, see Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, World Biblical Commentary, vol. 21 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1983), 30–31.

[3]Waltke, a proponent of the summary-statement interpretation, originally interpreted verse 6 of the passage to be a description of the flood of Noah. See Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part V: The Theology of Genesis 1 - Continued," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 133, no. 529 (January 1976): 35. However, in his later commentary on Proverbs and in his recent theological work, Waltke has

parts of God's creation.[4] Based on these observations, the biblical author seems to have interpreted Genesis 1:1 similarly to the traditional interpretation where the incomplete earth was one of God's first acts of creation.

Proverbs 8:22-26

Another important passage that looks back to Genesis 1:1 is Proverbs 8:22-26. The larger focus of the chapter is on wisdom, but the finer focus of this section is on wisdom's temporal placement in relationship to the creation of the world. It states the following:

22יְהוָה קָנָנִי רֵאשִׁית דַּרְכּוֹ קֶדֶם מִפְעָלָיו מֵאָז׃
23מֵעוֹלָם נְסַכְתִּי מֵרֹאשׁ מִקַּדְמֵי־אָרֶץ׃
24בְּאֵין־תְּהֹמוֹת חוֹלָלְתִּי בְּאֵין מַעְיָנוֹת נִכְבַּדֵי־מָיִם׃
25בְּטֶרֶם הָרִים הָטְבָּעוּ לִפְנֵי גְבָעוֹת חוֹלָלְתִּי׃
26עַד־לֹא עָשָׂה אֶרֶץ וְחוּצוֹת וְרֹאשׁ עָפְרוֹת תֵּבֵל׃

[22]The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his way, before his works of old.
[23]From everlasting I have been established, from the beginning, from before the earth.
[24]When there were no depths I was born, when there were no springs heavy with water.
[25]Before the mountains were placed, before the hills I was born,
[26]When He had not yet made the land and the fields and the first of the dust of the world.

Aside from the creation theme of the passage, keywords such as רֵאשִׁית and תְּהוֹם indicate that the author is most likely drawing upon and expanding the literary concepts of Genesis 1:1ff.

In Proverbs 8:22, the word רֵאשִׁית, along with the semantically related words קֶדֶם, מֵאָז, מֵעוֹלָם, מֵרֹאשׁ, and מִקַּדְמֵי in 8:22-23, quickly draws the mind of the reader back

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corrected his original position and now acknowledges that verse 6 of this passage does refer to the state of the earth in Gen 1:2. See idem, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 412; *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 183.

[4]Hakham comments that 104:6 is an allusion to the first day of creation. See Hakham, *Psalms*, 38.

to the first word of Genesis 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית.[5] The author of the proverb seems to expand upon his understanding of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1, describing it as a time that *preceded* God's acts of creation in Genesis 1:1ff. Thus, the author has most likely interpreted בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 to be a specific point in time that temporally preceded any act of creation.[6]

In Proverbs 8:23 there are two options for interpreting the word אֶרֶץ. It can either be the earth of Genesis 1:2 or merely the dry land named in Genesis 1:10. Proverbs 8:24-26, however, continue to describe wisdom's state of preexistence, which is set up in Proverbs 8:22-23, by giving a step-by-step process of the earth's creation that parallels the first chapter of Genesis. Proverbs 8:24-25 parallel the early watery and unformed state of the earth described in Genesis 1:2,[7] and 8:26 parallels the appearance of the dry

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[5]Garrett suggests that the manuscript evidence supports prefixing the preposition בְּ onto רֵאשִׁית in Prov 8:22, thus strengthening the verse's parallel to Gen 1:1. See Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, The New American Commentary, vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 2003), 108 n. 163.

[6]Again, this is contrary to the summary-statement interpretation. Waltke, a summary-statement proponent, writes, "If verse 1 is a summary, then 'in the beginning' must refer to the first six days of creation, not time prior to creation. The six days constitute 'the beginning.'" Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180. Barr, another summary-statement proponent, also writes, "By option 3, [the summary-statement interpretation,] Gen 1:1 is a general statement of the total work of creation, prefixed to the entire detailed account. It does not tell of something that happened *before* the creation of light on the first day, but it is a summary of the entire creative activity from 1:3 up to 2:4a." James Barr, "Was Everything That God Created Really Good?" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggeman*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 58.

[7]Considering Waltke's interpretation of Genesis 1:1, his comments on this passage are most interesting. He states, "'*Depths*' (or floods, *t^{e}hômôt*) may refer to the primeval abyss or to the present oceans and/or floods that reside below the earth. The reference to 'springs' in verset B favors the latter interpretation, but the parallel in 3:20 suggests the former. Perhaps no distinction is intended. The ocean floods or seas trace their origins back to the primeval depth or abyss (*t^{e}hôm*) before it was split assunder (see 3:20). In Gen 1:1-3 the primeval depth was part of the earth before God's creative word intervened and transformed the chaos into the cosmos. Wisdom, however, preexisted this primordial depth and its remnants. Reymond denies this interpretation because according to him the idea that there was a time when the primeval deep did not exist is unparalleled in the Old Testament. Rather, he thinks, reference is made to 'springs,' as in Deut. 8:7. Each book of the Bible, however, should be allowed its own breath. The normal significance of 'depths' for the primordial body of water at the beginning of creation (Gen 1:2; Job 38:16; Pss. 33:7; 104:6; Prov 3:20) best suits this context featuring wisdom's existence prior to creation." Waltke, *Proverbs*, 412. Rabban Gamaliel also used this passage to argue, contrary to a philosopher's opinion, that God created the *t^{e}hôm* of Gen 1:2. See *Genesis Rabbah* 1.9.

and productive land described in Genesis 1:9-12. These findings suggest that the אֶרֶץ in 8:23 should be understood as the earth of Genesis 1:2.

Another peculiarity of this passage is that the "works," מִפְעָלָיו, described in 8:22 are in parallel with the "earth," אֶרֶץ, in 8:23. The creation of the "earth," however, was not the only "work" which the LORD performed in Genesis 1. The author could have used some other term besides אֶרֶץ to be more encompassing of these "works." However, the focus of this section of the chapter is on the preexistence of wisdom. If Genesis 1:1 truly narrates the first act of creation, then the "earth" is one of the first "works" of creation. Furthermore, the first mention of existence in the Bible is of the "earth" in Genesis 1:2. Thus, the author of the proverb seems to draw from the creation language of Genesis 1:1-2 to show that wisdom preceded or preexisted the first of God's "works" and the first existence of the "earth" in Genesis 1:2.

There are two important implications concerning this analysis of the proverb. First, the author most likely interpreted בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1, of which wisdom is a part, as a specific point in time. It is a *time when*, not a *time within which*. This point in time is prior to the act of creation and does not encompass it. Second, the author most likely interpreted this specific point in time to be temporally prior to Genesis 1:2. In Proverbs 8:22-26 the author describes this point in time as being before the watery, unformed state of the earth. Thus, if the author is linking the "not yet"[8] state of Proverbs 8:24-26 with the earth, אֶרֶץ, in Proverbs 8:23, then it would seem that he interpreted Genesis 1:2 as a description of an earth that was created in Genesis 1:1.

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[8]This is Tsumura's description of the state of the earth in Gen 1:2. See David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Choaskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 35.

The Septuagint

The Greek Translation of Genesis 1:1

After the final books of the Hebrew Bible had been completed, 70 Jewish scholars came together to translate the Hebrew text into Greek (285-247 BC).[9] The end result began a long tradition of translating Genesis 1:1 as an independent main clause. The following is the LXX translation of the verse:

[1]ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν

[1]In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

There are two important aspects to this translation. First, the LXX scholars translate the initial בְּרֵאשִׁית of Genesis 1:1 as a grammatical absolute rather than as a grammatical construct with the verb בָּרָא. Thus, the verse is rendered with an independent main clause. Second, the scholars do not translate the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ as κόσμος,[10] which suggests that either they did not perceive the compound phrase to communicate this meaning, or they did not consider it important enough to be translated as such.[11]

The Greek Apocrypha

There are only two references in the Greek Apocrypha that may offer insight into how the ancient Jewish writers may have interpreted Genesis 1:1-2. However, both

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[9]Alfred Rahlfs, "History of the Septuagint Text," in *Septuaginta* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979), LVI.

[10]This finding does not apply to just Gen 1:1. Nowhere in the LXX is the word κόσμος ever used as a substitute for אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. Furthermore, with the exception of the book of Wisdom, the term κόσμος is never used as an expression for the universe in the apocryphal books of the LXX either.

[11]This is contrary to the TEV which translates Gen 1:1 as "In the beginning, when God created the universe." There is no footnote suggesting an alternate reading of "heavens and earth." Proponents of the traditional interpretation argue that the "earth" in Gen 1:2 looks back to the "earth" of Gen 1:1. If the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ is rendered as κόσμος in Greek or as "universe" in English, then the γῆ or the "earth" of Gen 1:2 do not refer back to anything and the temporal and semantic relationship between Gen 1:1 and 1:2 is severed on the basis of translation alone.

of the passages are only theological statements concerning creation, so any attempt to create a direct link between them and Genesis 1:1-2 is working methodologically backward. Much caution is needed. Quite possibly, neither of these passages refer back to Genesis 1:1-2; however, both mark some of the first extra-biblical instances of theological pronouncements regarding creation.[12]

Wisdom 11:17. The first reference, from Wisdom 11:17, is most likely the later of the two Apocryphal passages (*terminus post quem* 30 BC).[13] It states the following:

> οὐ γὰρ ἠπόρει ἡ παντοδύναμός σου χεὶρ καὶ κτίσασα τὸν κόσμον ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης ἀπιπέμψαι αὐτοῖς πλῆθος ἄρκων ἢ θρασεῖς λέοντας
>
> For your all-powerful hand which created the world out of formless matter did not lack the means to send upon them an army of bears or brazen lions.[14]

This passage may refer to the earth in Genesis 1:2 as the unformed matter, ἀμόρφος ὕλη, from which God created the world. However, linking this passage to Genesis 1:1-2 is difficult.[15] None of the vocabulary of the passage, including the verb κτίσασα, matches that of the LXX's translation of Genesis 1:1-2. At the least, the passage is only a passing reference to the creation of the world and offers no broader explanation of the author's theology or interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2. At the most, the author intended to link together the ἀμόρφου ὕλης of the passage to the elements in Genesis 1:2.

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[12]Earlier in the chapter it is stated that passages not explicitly referencing Gen 1:1 would be avoided. This rule must be broken in this instance since these two references are sometimes used by scholars to argue for a particular interpretation of Gen 1:1.

[13]David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, The Anchor Bible 43 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1979), 23. Winston does state that the book has been dated by others anywhere from 220 BC to 50 AD. See ibid.

[14]Ibid., 230.

[15]Some scholars do, however, link the Wisdom passage and Genesis passage together. See Origen *De principiis* 4.1.33; Augustine *De genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 3.10; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Pre-creation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (July 1975): 218.

However, even if a direct link exists between this passage and Genesis 1:1-2, it is still unknown whether the author interpreted the ἀμόρφου ὕλης to be preexistent or created.[16] The passage only states that the world was made from it. Thus, the most that can be said about the passage is that it is the first extra-biblical, theological statement about the creation of the world from ἀμόρφος ὕλη. Highly speculative are any suggestions positing a link between this passage and Genesis 1:1-2 in order to demonstrate how some early Jews interpreted Genesis 1:1.

2 Maccabees 7:28. The second and older Apocryphal passage is from 2 Maccabees 7:28 (78-63 BC).[17] It states the following:

> ἀξιῶ σε τέκνον ἀναβλέψαντα εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα ἰδόντα γνῶναι ὅτι οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτὰ ὁ θεός καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος οὕτω γίνεται
>
> I beseech thee, my son, look upon heaven and earth, and all that is therein, and consider that God made them of things that were not; and so was mankind made likewise.[18]

Unlike the Wisdom passage, there are parallels between the vocabulary of Genesis 1:1 and 2 Maccabees 7:28. First, the phrase τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν is used just as it is in Genesis 1:1 of the LXX. Second, the Greek word for "made" in the passage is ἐποίησεν, just as it is in Genesis 1:1 of the LXX. These parallels do not prove that there is a direct

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[16]Even though the early Greeks believed that the ἀμόρφος ὕλη was eternal, it is not proof that the Jewish speaker in Wisdom believed the same. Wis 9:1 suggests that the author did not believe the ἀμόρφος ὕλη was eternal. Furthermore, various church fathers believed Gen 1:2 was a description of the Greek ἀμόρφος ὕλη. They even used Wis 11:17 to argue their case, but they also believed that it was created by God in Gen 1:1. See Theophilus *Ad Autoclytum libri tres* 2.10; Origen *De principiis* 4.1.33-34; Ambrose *Exameron libri sex* 1.2.5; Augustine *De genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 3.10. The Medieval Jewish scholar Ramban also argued that Gen 1:1 describes creation out of nothing while Gen 1:2 describes the initial creation, stating that what the Jews called *tôhû*, the Greeks called ὕλη. See Ramban, *The Commentary of Nahmanides on Genesis Chapters 1–6*, trans. Jacob Newman, Pretoria Oriental Series, vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 33.

[17]Jonathan A. Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, The Anchor Bible 41A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1983), 83. This would be the time in which Maccabees was completed.

[18]This translation is from the AV Apocrypha, provided by *BibleWorks 6.0*. [CD ROM] (2003).

link between 2 Maccabees 7:28 and Genesis 1:1, but the vocabulary shows the passage has a better link to Genesis 1:1 than Wisdom 11:17.

The most important feature of this passage is that the Vulgate translates the phrase οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων as *ex nihilo*.[19] Thus, the book of 2 Maccabees probably contains the first extra-biblical, Jewish reference to something resembling the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. The speaker, a mother, may not have had Genesis 1:1 in mind when speaking these words, but it is probable that Genesis 1:1 had an influence in shaping her theology of creation since no other cosmogonies of that time had such an inherent notion.

The New Testament

Like the Old Testament passages, there are a plethora of verses in the New Testament that reflect on creation. Again, however, since this section of the dissertation focuses upon the history of the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1, only the passages which give clues to the translation and interpretation of the verse are analyzed.

John 1:1-3

The most notable use and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the New Testament is from John 1:1-3, which states,

> [1]Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος. [2]οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν. [3]πάντα δι᾽ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἕν. ὃ γέγονεν
>
> [1]In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. [2]He was in the beginning with God. [3]All things came into being through him and without him nothing came into being which has come into being.

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[19]Of course there are scholars who disagree that the Greek phrase οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων implies creation *ex nihilo*. See Goldstein, *II Maccabees*, 307. The Greek phrase literally translated is not even rendered "out of nothing," but rather, "not from being." However, in his commentary on Genesis, Ibn Ezra, speaking of those who believe in creation out of nothing, writes the phrase in Hebrew as יש מאין, literally, "there is from there is not." If 2 Maccabees was originally written in Hebrew or written by a Hebrew speaker, the term מאין could be translated into Greek as οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων. Obviously this is not an argument that Ibn Ezra's term for *creatio ex nihilo* influenced the writer of Maccabees; it merely demonstrates how a Hebrew speaker could render such a phrase into Greek.

The creation language of the passage and the phrase Ἐν ἀρχῇ,[20] which also begins Genesis 1:1 in the LXX, demonstrate that John explains his theology of Christ, the λόγος, against the backdrop of the creation narrative of Genesis 1:1ff. His assertion in John 1:3 is that πάντα, "all things," came into being through Christ, the λόγος; this assertion is repeated in negative form in order to also show that nothing came into being without the λόγος. According to John's statement, Christ, the λόγος of creation, is preeminent over all because of His temporal precedence to and agency in creation.

Based upon the logic of his argument, John has most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1 as the first creative act. If John had interpreted Genesis 1:2 as a description of elements that temporally preceded God's first act of creation, then he would have contradicted himself. He could not have used the backdrop of Genesis 1:1 to argue for the preeminence of the λόγος in this manner if He, the λόγος, had neither temporally preceded all things nor created all things (i.e., the elements in Gen 1:2).[21] Thus, by analyzing John's theological argument, it is evident that he interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation temporally prior to Genesis 1:2. Otherwise his theological argument is meaningless.

Hebrew 11:3

Another passage which offers clues into the early Jewish/Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1 comes from Hebrews 11:3. The passage states the following:

> [3]Πίστει νοοῦμεν κατηρτίσθαι τοὺς αἰῶνας ῥήματι θεοῦ, εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων τὸ βλεπόμενον γεγονέναι.
>
> [3]By faith we know that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that what is seen has not come to be from things that are visible.

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[20]John's Gospel and the LXX treat the initial בְּרֵאשִׁית of Gen 1:1 as a grammatical absolute.

[21]Again, both Waltke and Barr argue that Gen 1:2 temporally precedes the phrase "In the beginning." See Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 60; Barr, "Was Everything That God Created," 58.

From the context of the passage, in which reference is next made to Abel, Enoch, Noah and the acts of the Patriarchs (the narrative sequence of the book of Genesis), the author most likely looks back to the creation account in the first chapter of Genesis.

If the author does look back to Genesis 1, then he has most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation. In Genesis 1:3ff, the universe is framed partly from the elements of Genesis 1:2 and partly from the spoken word of God.[22] If the author had interpreted Genesis 1:2 to be a description of the state of the universe that preexisted creation, then the author's argument in Hebrews would have been meaningless since Genesis 1:2 is a part of what is visible.[23] However, if the author has interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation by the invisible spoken word of God, the author's argument then becomes meaningful since everything, including the elements of Genesis 1:2, would then have come from the invisible spoken word of God.[24]

2 Peter 3:5

2 Peter 3:5 is also an important, yet difficult, passage for understanding the early Jewish/Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2. It states,

> [5]Λανθάνει γὰρ αὐτοὺς τοῦτο θέλοντας ὅτι οὐρανοὶ ἦσαν ἔκπαλαι καὶ γῆ ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι ὕδατος συνεστῶσα τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ,

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[22]For instance, light was created by God's spoken word, but the firmament was created out of the elements of Gen 1:2. A proponent of the traditional translation and interpretation would add that the elements of Gen 1:2 were also created by God's spoken word in 1:1.

[23]Some may object that in Gen 1:2 of the LXX, the earth is described as invisible, ἀόρατος. However, in the Hebrews passage the author does not use ἀόρατος nor its verbal opposite ὁράω. Rather, the author uses the word φαίνω to describe what is "visible." Furthermore, the LXX's rendering is only a description of the earth in Gen 1:2 and not a description of the waters or the deep. Most ancient commentators believed that the earth was described as ἀόρατος because it was covered by water and was in darkness, not because it had the property of invisibleness.

[24]Some may also object that Gen 1:1 does not contain the phrase וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים, "And God said." However, the only other uses of בָּרָא, "create," in Gen 1 parallel and complete the meaning of וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים (Gen 1:20 with 1:21 and Gen 1:26 with 1:27), and other ancient commentators believed that the act of creation in Gen 1:1 was one of God's spoken creations. (See *b. Rosh Hashanah* 32a and 2 Esd 6:38, or 4 Esd 6:38 in the Vg. These references are analyzed later in this chapter).

> [5]For this escapes them willingly that by the word of God the heavens came to be long ago and the earth, which had consisted of and was held together by water.[25]

This translation, which others have similarly suggested,[26] shows that Peter draws upon the language of Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 in order to describe both the initial creation of the heavens and the earth and the earth's ensuing watery state. The earth is depicted in this watery state by means of the participial phrase ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι ὕδατος συνεστῶσα. If this translation is correct, then it shows that Peter has interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation temporally prior to Genesis 1:2. The problem, however, is that this passage has difficult syntax,[27] and because of differences in translation, it has even been used to support the summary-statement interpretation.[28]

Revelation 3:14

The final passage that offers clues about the early Jewish/Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is Revelation 3:14. This verse from the last book of the Bible states,

> [14]Καὶ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ τῆς ἐν Λαοδικείᾳ ἐκκλησίας γράψον· Τάδε λέγει ὁ ἀμήν, ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστὸς καὶ ἀληθινός, ἡ ἀρχὴ τῆς κτίσεως τοῦ θεοῦ·
>
> [14]And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These things speaks the Dependable, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God

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[25]This translation is different from other Bible translations such as the ESV, NASB, NIV, etc. Many of these versions translate the verb συνίστημι as an indicative, meaning "formed." However, the verb is a perfect active participle modifying the word γῆ. Furthermore, the translation of "formed" for συνίστημι does not fit with the word's use anywhere else in the New Testament. See BDAG, s.v. "συνίστημι." In Col 1:17, another creation text, the ESV, NASB, and NIV translate the word as "hold together." The translation of συνίστημι offered in this chapter follows the suggestion of BDAG.

[26]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, vol. 22 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. and ed. John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, n.d. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 417 n. 1.

[27]Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 374; Peter H. Davids, *The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 267–68.

[28]See Davids, *2 Peter*, 269.

Other translations render the word ἀρχὴ in this passage as "ruler."[29] However, nowhere in the New Testament is this word used to describe Christ as a ruler. Furthermore, John consistently uses ἀρχὴ to describe Christ as being *from* the "beginning,"[30] and Revelation 21:6, an echo of Isaiah 44:6, also uses the word to identify Jesus as *the* "beginning."

In Revelation 3:14 and 21:6, John identifies Christ as the beginning of creation, the ἀρχὴ of Genesis 1:1.[31] In order for John to identify the Christ as the ἀρχὴ or רֵאשִׁית of Genesis 1:1, both in these passages from Revelation and in those of John 1:1; 1:2; 1 John 1:1; 2:13, 14, he must have interpreted the רֵאשִׁית of Genesis 1:1 as a specific point in time.[32] If the ἀρχὴ or רֵאשִׁית of Genesis 1:1 encompasses all of Genesis 1:3-2:3 as a *time within which*, then it makes Christ only a part of the beginning along with the rest of creation.[33] He is no longer the start of creation. Thus, these passages from Revelation demonstrate that John most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1 in a manner similar to that of the traditional interpretation where רֵאשִׁית refers to a specific point of time immediately preceding the first act of creation.

The Vulgate

The Latin translations of the Old Testament and the later Vulgate offer some of the first Christian renderings of Genesis 1:1 and provide important insights into the Christian and Jewish interpretation of the verse.

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[29]See the NIV and NAT.

[30]Paul also uses ἀρχὴ in the same sense in Col 1:18.

[31]Again, the LXX renders the word רֵאשִׁית in Gen 1:1 with the word ἀρχὴ.

[32]Beale interprets John's use of ἀρχὴ as the beginning of the new creation. See G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 297–301. In either case, Gen 1:1 is clearly the context of both interpretations.

[33]Again, summary-statement proponents argue that this is how the word בְּרֵאשִׁית should be understood in Gen 1:1, as a *time within which*. See Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180 and Barr, "Was Everything That God Created," 58.

The Latin Translation of Genesis 1:1

Like the LXX, the Vulgate also contributes to a tradition of rendering Genesis 1:1 with an independent main clause. Consider the following translation:

[1]In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram

[1]In the beginning God created heaven and earth.

Like the translators of the LXX, the Latin translators do not render Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause, but as an independent main clause. Furthermore, the translators also do not render the phrase *caelum et terram* with *orbem terrarum* or *universum*.[34]

The Latin Apocrypha

The inclusion of 4 Esdras into the Vulgate (2 Esdras in modern versions) also has special significance. This later Apocryphal book has a Jewish origin and was originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic.[35] It is dated to the last decade of the first century.[36] In 4 Esdr 6:38-40 it states,

> [38]et dixi: o Domine, loquens locutus es ab initio creaturae in primo die dicens: fiat caelum et terra, et tuum verbum opus perfecit. [39]et erat tunc spiritus volans, et tenebrae circumferebantur et silentium, sonus vocis hominis nondum erat abs te. [40]tunc dixisti de thesauris tuis proferri lumen quod luminis, ut apparerent tunc opera tua.
>
> [38]I said, O Lord, you have indeed spoken from the beginning of creation; on the first day you said: "Let heaven and earth be made" and your word accomplished the work. [39]At that time a wind was blowing fiercely, darkness and silence were everywhere, and the sound of man's voice was not yet before you. [40]Then you directed a ray of light to go forth from your treasury so that your works could be seen.[37]

This is the first extra-biblical, Jewish interpretation that explicitly states that Genesis 1:1 was the first act of creation on the first day.

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[34]Cf. footnote 11.

[35]Jacob M. Myers, *I and II Esdras*, The Anchor Bible 42 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 115.

[36]Ibid., 129.

Early Christian Works and Commentators

The Ante-Nicene Fathers

Although the New Testament contains no explicit statements about the creation of the world out of nothing, church fathers of the Ante-Nicene period began to argue in favor of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* quite directly.

Justin Martyr. Justin Martyr (*ca.* 100-165)[38] is a peculiar example for this study. Some scholars argue that this early church father believed that the world was created from eternal formless matter.[39] His belief that the world was created *with* formless matter is not in dispute, but whether he believed this matter to be eternal is debatable. If Justin Martyr did believe in the eternality of formless matter, then his interpretation of Genesis 1:1 was probably not traditional. However, in at least three places in his works, Justin Martyr quotes directly from Genesis 1:1,[40] but his interpretation of 1:1 is not given in any of these places. They only contain his statements about the formless matter of Genesis 1:2, but none of them suggest that he believed it to

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[37]Ibid., 204.

[38]Jules Lebreton, "St. Justin Martyr," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) [on-line]; accessed 9 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/108580c.htm; Internet.

[39]Copan argues that one of Justin Martyr's theological statements concerning eternal preexistent matter comes from *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 29, 30. See Paul Copan, "Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May's Proposal," *Trinity Journal* 17 (1996): 82–83. However, this portion of the church father's work is a description of how Plato borrowed from Moses without the subtle insight needed to understand the prophet. Thus, the church father argues that Plato was deceived in his understanding. This portion does not prove Justin Martyr believed in the eternality of matter. Van Winden argues that the church father seemed to understand the words of Gen 1:1 to be a creation out of eternal formless matter in *Apologia Prima* 59. See J. C. M. van Winden, "The Early Christian Exegesis of 'Heaven and Earth' in Genesis 1,1," in *Romanitas et Christianitas*, W. den Boer *et al.* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1973), 372. Although Justin Martyr quotes Gen 1:1-3 in this section, he ultimately argues that God created the world out of the material in Gen 1:2, a material which he says is known as Erebus to the poets. There is no interpretation of Gen 1:1 in this section, and there is no statement as to whether the early church father believed in the eternality of matter.

[40]See Justin Martyr *Cohortatio ad Graecos* 28; 30; *Apologia Prima* 59.

be eternal. Thus, his belief that the material in Genesis 1:2 was formless matter is not proof that he believed it to be eternal. Clearly other early church fathers had similar beliefs about Genesis 1:2, but they also argued that the formless matter of Genesis 1:2 was created in Genesis 1:1.[41] Thus, they did not see it as eternal, so it is likely that Justin Martyr may not have as well.

Irenaeus. Irenaeus (d. *ca.* 200)[42] is one of the first early Christians to provide explicit comments about the interpretation of Genesis 1:1. In one work he states, "He at first narrated the formation of the world in these words: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,' and all other things in succession; but neither gods nor angels [had any share in the work]."[43] When Irenaeus says, "all other things in succession," namely the things that are separate and distinct from heaven and earth, he understands Genesis 1:1 to be temporally prior to Genesis 1:2. In another section he writes,

> Moses, then, they declare, by his mode of beginning the account of the creation, has at the commencement pointed out the mother of all things when he says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" for, as they maintain, by naming these four,—God, beginning, heaven, and earth,—he set forth their Tetrad. Indicating also its invisible and hidden nature he said, "Now the earth was invisible and unformed." They will have it, moreover, that he spoke of the second Tetrad, the offspring of the first, in this way—by naming an abyss and darkness, in which were also water and the Spirit moving upon the water.[44]

Although Irenaeus cites the interpretation of the heterodoxic Marcosians, it is worth noting that even this group interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be temporally prior to Genesis 1:2.

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[41]Cf. footnote 16. May also points out that Tatian, one of Justin Martyr's pupils, also argued that God created the formless matter *ex nihilo*. See Gerhard May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creatio Out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 148–9.

[42]Albert Poncelet, "St. Irenaeus," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08130b.htm; Internet.

[43]Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 2.2.5, trans. A. Roberts and W. H. Rambaut, ANF 1:91.

[44]Ibid., 1.18.1 (ANF 1:91).

Furthermore, this heterodoxic group also saw a semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, with Genesis 1:2 being a description of the hidden and invisible nature of the earth in Genesis 1:1.

Theophilus of Antioch. Theophilus of Antioch (115-181)[45] is one of the first Christian scholars to link Genesis 1:1 to the concept of *creatio ex nihilo*. In his work *Theophilus to Autoclytus*, he states,

> And first, they taught us with one consent that God made all things out of nothing; for nothing was coeval with God: but He being His own place, and wanting nothing, and existing before the ages, willed to make man by whom He might be known; for him, therefore, He prepared the world . . . . And Moses, who lived many years before Solomon, or, rather, the Word of God by him as by an instrument, says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." First he named the "beginning," and "creation," then he thus introduced God; for not lightly and on slight occasion is it right to name God. For the divine wisdom foreknew that some would trifle and name a multitude of gods that do not exist. In order, therefore, that the living God might be known by His works, and that [it might be known that] by His Word God created the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, he said, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Then having spoken of their creation, he explains to us: "And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved upon the water." This, sacred Scripture teaches at the outset, to show that matter, from which God made and fashioned the world, was in some manner created, being produced by God.[46]

According to his explanation in this excerpt, Theophilus clearly understands Genesis 1:1 to be temporally prior to Genesis 1:2. In an earlier portion of the same chapter, Theophilus again makes the theological claim that God created the world *ex nihilo*, a claim that is influenced by his understanding of Genesis 1:1.[47]

Clement of Alexandria. Clement of Alexandria (d. 215),[48] like Justin Martyr,

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[45]Marcus Dods, introductory note to *Theophilus of Antioch*, ANF 2:87.

[46]Theophilus *Theophilus to Autoclytus* 2.10, trans. Marcus Dods, ANF 2:98.

[47]May states that Theophilus and Tatian, almost at the same time, are the first church fathers to argue that the matter of the universe was created by God *ex nihilo*. See May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 148. However, in the preceding excerpt, Theophilus states that it was taught to him by general consensus, which demonstrates that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* preceded Theophilus and Tatian.

[48]Francis Havey, "Clement of Alexandria," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908) [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2008; available from

has been charged with believing in the eternality of matter.[49] However, his interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is similar to that of Theophilus, who believed that God, in Genesis 1:1, created the matter described in Genesis 1:2. Clement states,

> Again the [Hebrew] philosophy knows the world of thought and the world of sense—the former archetypal, and the latter the image of that which is called the model; and assigns the former to the Monad, as being perceived by the mind, and the world of sense to the number six. For six is called by the Pythagoreans marriage, as being the genital number; and he places in the Monad the invisible heaven and the holy earth, and intellectual light. For "in the beginning," it is said, "God made the heaven and the earth; and the earth was invisible." And it is added, "And God said, Let there be light; and there was light." And in the material cosmogony He creates a solid heaven (and what is solid is capable of being perceived by sense), and a visible earth, and a light that is seen.[50]

In this excerpt Clement describes the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:1 as being distinct from the creation of heaven and earth in the later portion of Genesis 1, the former creation being a part of the invisible archetype and the latter being part of the visible type. He also understands Genesis 1:2 to be a description of the "invisible" earth created in Genesis 1:1. Thus, he describes Genesis 1:1 as the first act of creation temporally prior to Genesis 1:2.

Tertullian. Tertullian (145-220)[51] is one of the most important scholars of the early church. His work *Against Hermogenes* presents not only an interpretation of Genesis 1:1, but also a literary and grammatical analysis of the verse and its context. He states,

> We, however, have but one God, and but one earth too, which in the beginning God made. The Scripture, which at its very outset proposes to run through the order thereof tells us as its first information that it was created; it next proceeds to set forth what sort of earth it was. In like manner with respect to the heaven, it informs us first of its creation—"In the beginning God made the heaven:" it then goes on to introduce its arrangement; how that God both separated "the water which was below

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http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04045a.htm; Internet.

[49]Copan, "Is *Creatio Ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention?" 82, 92.

[50]Clement *The Miscellanies* 5.14, ANF 2:466.

[51]A. Cleveland Coxe, introductory note to *Tertullian: Part First*, ANF 3:3.

> the firmament from that which was above the firmament," and called the firmament heaven,—the very thing He had created in the beginning. Similarly it (afterwards) treats of man: "And God created man, in the image of God made He him." It next reveals how He made him: "And (the Lord) God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Now this is undoubtedly the correct and fitting mode for the narrative. First comes a prefatory statement, then follow the details in full; first the subject is named, then it is described. How absurd is the other view of the account, when even before he had premised any mention of his subject, *i.e.* Matter, without even giving us its name, he all on a sudden promulged its form and condition, describing to us its quality before mentioning its existence [(Gen 1:2)],—pointing out the figure of the thing formed, *but* concealing its name! But how much more credible is our opinion, which holds that Scripture has only subjoined the arrangement of the subject after it has first duly described its formation and mentioned its name! Indeed, how full and complete is the meaning of these words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; but the earth was without form, and void,"—the very same earth, no doubt, which God made, and of which the Scripture had been speaking at that very moment. For that very "*but*[," *autem*,] inserted into the narrative like a clasp, (in its function) of a conjunctive particle, to connect the two sentences indissolubly together: "But the earth." This word carries back the mind to that earth of which mention had just been made, and binds the sense thereunto. Take away this "but," and the tie is loosened; so much so that the passage, "But the earth was without form, and void," may then seem to have been meant for any other earth.[52]

In an earlier portion of his work he also draws theological meaning from Genesis 1:1. He states,

> Therefore, just as He shows us the original out of which He drew such things as were derived from a given source, so also with regard to those things of which He does not point out whence He produced them, He confirms (by that silence our assertion) that they were produced out of nothing. "In the beginning," then, "God made the heaven and the earth."[53]

Tertullian's interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is unmistakable. The verse temporally precedes Genesis 1:2; the earth that is created in Genesis 1:1 is the same earth that is described in Genesis 1:2. Thus for Tertullian, the grammatical link between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is of vital importance. Tertullian's theology is also unmistakable. Since the first chapter of Genesis describes the sources from which things come, Genesis 1:1, by its silence concerning the sources of the heavens and the earth, describes a

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[52]Tertullian *Against Hermogenes* 26, trans. D. Holmes, ANF 3:491-2.

[53]Ibid., 22 (ANF 3:490).

creation out of nothing.

Origen. Origen (185-253/4)[54] has been charged by a later church father with believing in the eternality of the universe.[55] However, in his work *De principiis* he writes,

> And if this word "matter" should happen to occur in any other passage, it will never be found, in my opinion, to have the signification of which we are now in quest, unless perhaps in the book which is called the Wisdom of Solomon, a work which is certainly not esteemed authoritative by all. In that book, however, we find written as follows: "For thy almighty hand, that made the world out of shapeless matter, wanted not means to send among them a multitude of bears and fierce lions" [(11:17)]. Very many, indeed, are of opinion that the matter of which things are made is itself signified in the language used by Moses in the beginning of Genesis: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth; and the earth was invisible, and not arranged:", for by the words "invisible and not arranged" Moses would seem to mean nothing else than shapeless matter. But if this be truly matter, it is clear then that the original elements of bodies are not incapable of change.[56]

In this same section, Origen goes on to agree with the "very many" if they can assert that matter cannot exist without properties and cannot be "uncreated." Thus, he most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be the creation property-filled matter.

Constitutions of the Holy Apostles. *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (4th cent.) was used as a guidance book for clergy and some laity.[57] It sheds light upon the early church's communal interpretation of Genesis 1:1, stating,

> As, therefore, we believe Moses when he says, "In the beginning God made the heaven and the earth;" and we know that He did not want matter, but by His will alone brought those things into being which Christ was commanded to make; we

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[54]Ferdinand Prat, "Origen and Origenism," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm; Internet.

[55]Coxe states that Methodius, argued against Origen's belief in the eternality of the universe. See A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *Fragments*, ANF 6:381. Methodius, however, may have misinterpreted him because Origen, in *De principiis* 4.1.33-34, seems to argue that the matter of the universe was created.

[56]Origen *De principiis* 4.1.33, trans. Frederick Crombie, ANF 4:379.

[57]John Bertram Peterson, "Apostolic Constitutions," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) [on-line]; accessed 10 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01636a.htm; Internet.

> mean the heaven, the earth, the sea, the light, the night, the day, the luminaries, the stars, the fowls, the fishes, and four-footed beasts, the creeping things, the plants, and the herbs; so also will He raise all men up by His will, as not wanting any assistance.[58]

This section suggests that Genesis 1:1 is a part, not the whole, of what God created. Furthermore, the order describing the creation begins with the heaven, the earth, the sea, the light, the night, and the day. This is the same order described in Genesis 1:1-3 if one takes the sea to mean the watery תְּהוֹם of Genesis 1:2. This order suggests that this early manual exhorted clergy to teach Genesis 1:1 as the first act of creation.

Pseudo-Clementine literature. The last source of the Ante-Nicene period is *The Recognitions of Clement* in the Pseudo-Clementine writings (4th cent.).[59] It states the following:

> In the beginning, when God had made the heaven and the earth, as one house, the shadow which was cast by the mundane bodies involved in darkness those things which were enclosed in it. But when the will of God had introduced light, that darkness which had been caused by the shadows of bodies was straightway dispelled: then at length light is appointed for the day, darkness for the night. And now the water which was within the world, in the middle space of that first heaven and earth, congealed as if with frost, and solid as crystal, is distended, and the middle spaces of the heaven and earth are separated as by a firmament of this sort; and that firmament the Creator called heaven, so called by the name of that previously made: and so He divided into two portions that fabric of the universe, although it was but one house.[60]

By referencing a previous heaven and earth, this passage clearly shows Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation that temporally precedes Genesis 1:2.

Conclusion. During the time of these early church fathers there is an explicit view that Genesis 1:1 is a narration of the first act of creation, the heavens and the earth,

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[58]*Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 5.1.7, trans. D. Donaldson, ANF 7:441.

[59]John Chapman, "Clementines," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1908) [on-line]; accessed 5 March 2009; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04039b.htm; Internet.

[60]*The Recognitions of Clement* 1.27, trans. Thomas Smith, ANF 8:84-85.

and Genesis 1:2 is a description of the earth's ensuing watery state. Although the earlier scholars of this view do not all state that God created the world from nothing, most of their interpretations show that everything in the first chapter of Genesis is described as being created. These interpretations led later scholars to the theological conclusion that since God created everything, even the material in Genesis 1:2, He created the world *ex nihilo.*

The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

During the periods before and after the Nicene creed, there were many heresies with which the church had to contend. The teachings of Arius caused the early church to convene the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and produce the Nicene creed, which defined the nature of Christ.[61] Other deviant teachings denied the finite nature of the universe and affirmed the eternality of matter. In order to uphold the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* many early scholars turned to Genesis 1:1.

Athanasius. Athanasius (296-373),[62] in his work *On the Incarnation of the Word*, states the following:

> Thus do they vainly speculate. But the godly teaching and the faith according to Christ brands their foolish language as godlessness. For it knows that it was not spontaneously, because forethought is not absent; nor of existing matter, because God is not weak; but that out of nothing, and without its having any previous existence, God made the universe to exist through His word, as He says firstly through Moses: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth;" secondly, in the most edifying book of the Shepherd [of Hermas (*Mandate* 1.1.1)], "First of all believe that God is one, which created and framed all things, and made them to exist out of nothing."[63]

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[61]H. Leclercq, "The First Council of Nicaea," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1911) [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11044a.htm; Internet.

[62]C. Clifford, "St. Athanasius," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02035a.htm; Internet.

[63]Athanasius *On the Incarnation of the Word* 3, trans. Archibald Robertson, NPNF^2 4:37.

Although he does not offer any explicit interpretation of Genesis 1:1, Athanasius does use the verse to argue for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Thus, Athanasius most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation that temporally preceded Genesis 1:2.

Gregory of Nyssa. In his work *On the Making of Man*, Gregory of Nyssa (d. 385/6)[64] writes the following:

> [Heaven and earth], moreover, were first framed before other things, according to the Divine Wisdom, to be as it were a beginning of the whole machine, the great Moses indicating, I suppose, where he says that the heaven and the earth were made by God "in the beginning" that all things that are seen in the creation are the offspring of rest and motion, brought into being by the Divine will.[65]

According to Gregory's interpretation, Genesis 1:1 narrates the first act of creation.

Basil the Great. Basil the Great (329-379),[66] in his work entitled *The Hexaemeron*, makes the following pronouncement in his first homily:

> Perhaps these words "In the Beginning God created" signify the rapid and imperceptible moment of creation. The beginning, in effect, is indivisible and instantaneous. The beginning of the road is not yet the road, and that of the house is not yet the house; so the beginning of time is not yet time and not even the least particle of it. If some objector tell us that the beginning is a time, he ought then, as he knows well, to submit it to the division of time—a beginning, a middle and an end. Now it is ridiculous to imagine a beginning of a beginning. Further, if we divide the beginning into two, we make two instead of one, or rather make several, we really make infinity, for all that which is divided is divisible to the infinite. Thus then, if it is said, "In the beginning God created," it is to teach us that at the will of God the world arose in less than an instant, and it is to convey this meaning more clearly that other interpreters have said: "God made summarily" that is to say all at

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[64]Henri Leclercq, "St. Gregory of Nyssa," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) [on-line]; accessed 16 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07016a.htm; Internet.

[65]Gregory of Nyssa *On the Making of Man* 1.2, trans. William Moore and Henry Wilson, NPNF^2 5:48.

[66]Joseph McSorley, "St. Basil the Great," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) [on-line]; accessed 16 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02330b.htm; Internet.

> once and in a moment.[67]

In this excerpt, Basil clearly interprets the phrase "In the beginning" to be a reference to a starting point in time and strongly argues against interpreting it as a time within which creation happened. In the second homily of *The Hexaemeron*, Basil states,

> "The earth," says Holy Scripture, "was invisible and unfinished." The heavens and the earth were created without distinction. How then is it that the heavens are perfect whilst the earth is still unformed and incomplete? In one word, what was the unfinished condition of the earth? And for what reason was it invisible? The fertility of the earth is its perfect finishing; growth of all kinds of plants, the upspringing of tall trees, both productive and sterile, flowers' sweet scents and fair colours, and all that which a little later, at the voice of God came forth from the earth to beautify her, their universal Mother. As nothing of all this yet existed, Scripture is right in calling the earth "without form." We could also say of the heavens that they were still imperfect and had not received their natural adornment, since at that time they did not shine with the glory of the sun and of the moon and were not crowned by the choirs of the stars. These bodies were not yet created. Thus you will not diverge from the truth in saying that the heavens also were "without form."[68]

Since Basil interprets the phrase "In the beginning" as the starting point of creation in his first homily, it is only logical that in his second homily, he interprets Genesis 1:2 to be a description of the incomplete heavens and the earth after their creation in Genesis 1:1.

Ambrose of Milan. In his work *Hexameron*, Ambrose of Milan (340-397)[69] uses Genesis 1:1 to argue against the eternality of matter:

> Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Moses, a holy man, foresaw that these errors [theories of Greek philosophy] would appear among men and perhaps had already appeared. At the opening of his work he speaks thus: 'In the beginning God created heaven and earth.' He linked together the beginnings of things, the Creator of the world, and the creation of matter in order that you might understand that God existed before the beginning of all things.[70]

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[67]Basil the Great *The Hexaemeron* 1.6, trans. Blomfield Jackson, NPNF^2 8:55.

[68]Ibid., 2.1 (NPNF^2 8:59).

[69]J. Loughlin, "St. Ambrose," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01383c.htm; Internet.

[70]Ambrose *Hexameron* 1.2.5, trans. John J. Savage, in *Saint Ambrose*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 42 (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1961), 5.

Ambrose clearly links Genesis 1:1 to the creation of matter described in Genesis 1:2.

John Chrysostom. Chrysostom (347-407),[71] in his *Homilies on Genesis*, uses Genesis 1:1 as a means to protect believers from the heterodoxy of eternally preexistent matter. He states,

> At the same time he uprooted all the heresies springing up like weeds in the Church by his words, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." Even if Mani accosts you saying matter preexisted, or Marcion, or Valentinus, or pagans, tell them directly: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." But what if the person does not believe the Scriptures? Leave him to his own devices, like an utter madman; for what allowance can you make for a person who does not believe the creator of all things, who treats the truth as falsehood.[72]

Although no explicit interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is in this excerpt, Chrysostom clearly sees theological importance in the verse. For him, it is a means for battling those heretics who argue that matter is eternally preexistent. It is doubtful then that Chrysostom would have interpreted Genesis 1:1 any other way than in the traditional manner since such an interpretation is not silent on the origin of the elements in Genesis 1:2.

Augustine. Augustine (354-430)[73] is one of the most influential thinkers of the early church period, being an ardent defender of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, he is also one of the most difficult interpreters of Genesis 1:1. He attempted an interpretation on the early sections of the book of Genesis in five different works.[74] Thus, it is difficult to know his final interpretation of Genesis 1:1. His works, however, shed

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[71]C. Baur, "St. John Chrysostom," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) [on-line]; accessed 16 July 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08452b.htm; Internet.

[72]John Chrysostom *Homilies on Genesis* 2.10, trans. Robert C. Hill, in *St. John Chrysostom*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 74 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1985), 34.

[73]John K. Ryan, introduction to *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1960), 18, 27.

[74]Roland J. Teske, introduction to *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, The Church Fathers: A New Translation, vol. 84 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 3.

light on what other interpretations he thought were possible. In his earlier work, *Against the Manichees*, Augustine makes the following interpretations:

> Hence, that unformed matter which God made from nothing was first called heaven and earth, and Scripture said, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," not because it already was, but because it could be. For it said that heaven was made later. If we consider the seed of a tree, we say that the roots, trunk, branches, fruit and leaves are present there, not because they are already in the seed, but because they will come to be from it. In the same way Scripture said, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," the seed, so to speak, of heaven and earth, since the matter of heaven and earth was still in a confused state. But because it was certain that heaven and earth would come to be from it, the matter itself was already called heaven and earth.[75]

> For when it said, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," it did not say that he made all the green of the field and food. For we clearly read that he made all the green and food of the field on the third day. The words "In the beginning God made heaven and earth" do not belong to any of those seven days. For up to that point it is called by the name of heaven and earth the matter from which all things were made, or at least it first set forth by the name of heaven and earth the whole of creation, when it said, "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth."[76]

In these early writings it is clear that Augustine interprets Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation temporally prior to 1:2. Furthermore, as these writings reveal, Augustine's interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 leads him to the conclusion that God created the world *ex nihilo*.[77] However, in the last line of the second excerpt it does appear that Augustine sees another possible interpretation that treats Genesis 1:1 as some kind of summary statement similar to the summary-statement interpretation.

In his incomplete work *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, Augustine writes,

> We can ask whether Scripture called heaven and earth all the things which were already distinct and formed, or whether it first called by the name heaven and earth that formless matter of the universe which was changed into these formed and beautiful natures by God's ineffable command. Although we read in Scripture,

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[75]Augustine *Against the Manichees* 1.7, trans. Roland J. Teske, in *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, The Church Fathers: A New Translation, vol. 84 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 58-59.

[76]Ibid., 2.3.4 (trans. Teske, 97).

[77]Augustine states, "And, therefore, we correctly believe that God made all things from nothing." Ibid., 1.6.10 (trans. Teske, 57).

> "You who made the world from formless matter," [(Wis 11:17)] still we cannot say that whatever sort of matter this was it was not made by him, from whom we confess and believe that all things are. Thus, the transformation and ordering of all the individual formed and distinct things is called the world, but its matter is called heaven and earth, like the seed of heaven and earth. This heaven and earth which were confused and mixed up were suited to receive forms from God their maker. What we have done up to this point concerning the words, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," should be looked upon as a matter for ongoing inquiry, for none of these views could be affirmed without hesitation.[78]

He further adds,

> "But the earth was invisible and without form, and darkness was over the abyss, and the Spirit of God was borne over the water." The heretics who are opposed to the Old Testament usually stir up charges against this passage, saying, "How did God make heaven and earth in the beginning, if the earth already was?" They do not understand that this addition was made to explain the condition of the earth, of which Scripture says, "God made heaven and earth." Hence, we should take it this way: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth," but this earth which God made was invisible and without form until, by introducing distinctions, he brought it from confusion and established it in a certain order of reality.[79]

In the first excerpt Augustine does acknowledge that Genesis 1:1 could be interpreted as a summary or title of the passage; however, the passage from Wisdom 11:17 causes him to conclude that it should not be so interpreted. Although he does acknowledge that Genesis 1:1 is a difficult passage, Augustine, in the second excerpt, explicitly interprets Genesis 1:2 to be a description of the material created in Genesis 1:1.

After offering his interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book*, Augustine takes up the issue again in *The Confessions*. He writes,

> Because of these two, [heaven and earth,] the one formed from the very beginning and the other completely unformed, the first heaven, but the heaven of heaven, the second earth, but the earth invisible and without form, because of these two I meanwhile understand what your Scripture says, without mention of days, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." For immediately it subjoins which earth it spoke of. Also, since it is recorded that on the second day the firmament was made and was called heaven, it indicates which heaven was previously spoken of as being

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[78]Augustine *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis: An Unfinished Book* 3.10, trans. Roland J. Teske, in *Saint Augustine on Genesis*, The Fathers of the Church, vol. 84 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 150-1.

[79]Ibid., 4.11 (trans. Teske, 151).

without days.[80]

In this section Augustine again presents his own interpretation of Genesis 1:1: the traditional interpretation.[81] However, in this same work he describes and defends the validity of other interpretations that he does not necessarily espouse. He states,

> They say: "Although these words are true, yet Moses was not considering the two things you name when by the revelation of the Spirit he said, 'In the beginning God made heaven and earth.' By the term 'heaven,' he did not mean that spiritual or intellectual creature which forever contemplates God's face, nor by the term 'earth' did he mean formless matter." What then? They say: "That man meant what we say. He stated this in those words." What is that? They answer: "By the terms 'heaven' and 'earth,' he first wanted to signify in an all-inclusive and brief manner, the whole visible world, so that afterwards by enumeration of days he could point out, in detail as it were, all the things which the Holy Spirit was pleased to announce in this manner. That rude and carnal people to which he spoke was made up of such men that he judged only the visible works of God should be set down for them." However, they agree that the invisible and unformed earth and the darksome deep, out of which, as is later shown, all these visible things were made and set in order during those various days, things which are known to all men, are not unfittingly interpreted as being that formless matter.[82]

There cannot be a better articulation of the summary-statement interpretation from the early church fathers. Even though he does not espouse the summary-statement interpretation nor agree with it, Augustine is nevertheless inclined to present it as an alternative and defend its legitimacy. He continues,

> The proponents of these two opinions[—both opinions being similar to the summary-statement interpretation—]which we placed last whether of one or of the other, will respond, when they hear these things, and they will say: "We do not deny that this formless matter was made by God, from whom are all things exceedingly good, because, just as we have asserted that that is a greater good which is created and formed, so we admit that that is a lesser good which is made creable and formable, but yet a good. However, we say that Scripture has not recorded that God made this formlessness, just as it has not recorded many other things, like the

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[80]Augustine *The Confessions of St. Augustine* 12.13.16, trans. John K. Ryan, (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1960), 313-14.

[81]By the time of this writing Augustine had changed his interpretation of what the term "heaven and earth" represents. In earlier writings, the term "heaven and earth" refers to the unformed matter of the universe. In later writings, "heaven" refers to the highest, formed heavens, and only the "earth" refers to the unformed matter of the universe. This new interpretation of "heaven and earth" is repeated again in *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, which is quoted next in this discussion.

[82]Augustine *The Confessions* 12.17.24 (trans. Ryan, 318).

> Cherubim and the Seraphim, and those which the Apostle distinctly names, Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers.[83]

Finally, in his work *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Augustine offers his last full explanation of Genesis 1:1.[84] He states,

> Thus, we must suppose that before the beginning of days, He wrought the work referred to in the words, *In the beginning God created heaven and earth.* And then by the expression "heaven" we must understand a spiritual created work already formed and perfected, which is, as it were, the heaven of this heaven which is the loftiest in the material world. On the second day God made the firmament, which He called heaven again. But by the expression, *earth without shape or form*, and by the dark abyss, is meant the imperfect material substance from which temporal things would be made, of which the first would be light.[85]

Although Augustine does change his interpretation of the term "heaven and earth" in this work, he does not change his view that Genesis 1:1 narrates a particular act of creation that temporally precedes Genesis 1:2, nor does he change his view that Genesis 1:2 is a description of the material created in Genesis 1:1.[86] However, he again reveals that there are some who hold to a summary-statement interpretation of the verse similar to that of modern scholars.

John of Damascus. Lastly, John of Damascus (676-749),[87] in his work *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, writes,

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[83]Ibid., 12.22.31 (trans. Ryan, 323).

[84]Teske states that Augustine last deals with the interpretation of the early chapters of Genesis in book eleven of the *The City of God.* However, no information contributing to his interpretation of Gen 1:1 is in this source. See Teske, introduction to *Augustine on Genesis*, 3.

[85]Augustine *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1.9.15, trans. John Hammond Taylor, Ancient Christian Writers no. 41 (New York: The Newman Press, 1982), 27. Of course in this passage, Augustine says that light was the first visible creation, but it was not the first act of creation. The designation of the first act of creation is still reserved for the heaven and the earth in Genesis 1:1.

[86]This view of course is debated amongst scholars. See van Winden, "Early Christian Exegesis," 377–80. Van Winden does seem to agree that Augustine's interpretation of "heaven" is the same in *The Confessions* and *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*. See also ibid., 380.

[87]John Bonaventure O'Connor, "St. John Damascene," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910) [on-line]; accessed 16 December 2008; available from http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08459b.htm; Internet.

> The earth is one of the four elements, dry, cold, heavy, motionless, brought into being by God, out of nothing on the first day. *For in the beginning*, he said, *God created the heaven and the earth*: but the seat and foundation of the earth no man has been able to declare.[88]

In this excerpt John not only interprets Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation on the first day, he also uses the verse to make the theological pronouncement that God created heaven and earth *ex nihilo*.

Conclusion. These scholars, like those of the Ante-Nicene period, clearly interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be God's first act of creation. Based upon this interpretation, they also clearly perceived the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* to be a logical inference of the Genesis text. However, as Augustine has revealed, some scholars of the early church seemed to have also interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a summary statement of the entire creation event. Nevertheless, the traditional interpretation was still almost universally held by the fathers of the early church.

Early Jewish Works and Commentators

The Targumim

The targumim, translational paraphrases of the Hebrew Old Testament, play an important role in understanding the Jewish translational and interpretive history of Genesis 1:1. The two most important are the *Tgs. Neofiti* (*ca.* 4th cent.)[89] and *Onqelos* (2nd cent.).[90] The following are their translations of Genesis 1:1-2:

Tg. Neof.

מלקדמין בחכמה ברא דה שכלל ית שמיא ויח ארעא׃

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[88]John of Damascus *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.10, trans. S. D. F. Salmond, NPNF^2 9:28.

[89]Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1A (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 45.

[90]Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 6 (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1988), 33.

וארעא הוות תהיא ובהיא וצדי מן בר נש ומן בעיר וריקנא מן כל פלחן
צמחין ומן אילנין וחשוכא פריס על אפי תהומא ורוח דרחמין מן קדם ה הוה
מנשבא על אפי מיא:[91]

From the beginning with wisdom the Memra of the Lord created and perfected the heavens and the earth.
And the earth was waste and unformed, desolate of man and beast, empty of plant cultivation and of trees, and darkness was spread over the surface of the waters.
And the spirit of mercy from before God was blowing over the face of the waters.[92]

Tg. Onq.

בקדמין ברא יי ית שמיא וית ארעא:
וארעא הות צדיא וריקניא וחשוכא פריש על אפי תהומא ורוחא מן קדם יי
מנשבא על אפי מיא:[93]

In ancient times the Lord created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep; and a wind from before the Lord was blowing on the face of the water.[94]

These translational paraphrases offer some simple observations. First, both targumim translate Genesis 1:1 as an independent main clause.[95] Second, neither targum treats

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[91]Bernard Grossfeld, "A Commentary on the Text of a New Palestinian Targum (Codex Neofiti I) on Genesis I-XXV." (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1969), 10, 14.

[92]McNamara, *Targum Neofiti*, 55.

[93]Moses Aberback and Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Center for Judaic Studies University of Denver, 1982), 20.

[94]Ibid.

[95]In order to explain why the translators of the targumim did not render Gen 1:1 with a dependent temporal clause, Anderson argues, "A more banal grammatical explanation must be proposed. In postbiblical Hebrew, the asyndetic relative clause was no longer used. The presence of such clauses in biblical texts must have appeared as strikingly unusual. Other such asyndetic relative clauses were subject to significant midrashic elaboration." Gary Anderson, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:1 in the Targums," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 52 (1990): 22. The problem with Anderson's argument is that the evidences he uses do not support his claim. First, he cites Kugel's analysis of the midrashic elaboration of the asyndetic relative clause in Ps. 81:6 as proof that the clause type was misunderstood. But Kugel's analysis is unrelated to the asyndetic relative clause. In fact, the clause in Ps 81:6 is grammatically correct in the midrash. The midrashic elaboration that Kugel analyzes is focused upon explaining the extra letter included in Joseph's name. See James Kugel, "Two Introductions to Midrash," *Prooftexts* 3 (1983): 147–51. Second, Anderson cites how *B. Bathra* 14b-15a mishandles the asyndetic relative clause in Hosea 1:2; however, Hos 1:2 may not contain an asyndetic relative clause. See Chapter 3 of this dissertation and John

Genesis 1:2 as a description of chaos. Both targumim describe the earth in a state of emptiness more so than in a state of chaos. Third, the insertion of the word שכלל in *Tg. Neofiti* suggests that the translator may have understood Genesis 1:1 to be a kind of summary statement.[96] This translational paraphrase, then, is most likely the first explicit rendering of Genesis 1:1 that is favorable to the summary-statement interpretation. However, the inclusion of שכלל also suggests that the readers of both the *Tg. Neofiti* and the original Hebrew text may not have understood the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ to be a reference to the complete and ordered universe; otherwise, the use of שכלל would not have been necessary.[97]

Tg. Onqelos most likely favors the traditional interpretation.[98] If the early reader of this text did not perceive the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 to be a reference to the complete and ordered universe, and no description of chaos is pictured in Genesis 1:2, then an early reader would have had no reason for semantically separating Genesis 1:1 from 1:2 in *Tg. Onqelos*. Thus, the two targumim probably represent two different interpretations of Genesis 1:1.

The implications from the targumim present two important evidences in the history of the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1. First, the traditional

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C. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 51 n. 49.

[96]Anderson, "Interpretation of Genesis 1:1," 25.

[97]One could argue that the phrase in Hebrew refers to the complete and ordered universe, but the phrase in Aramaic does not. Thus, the the translator used the word שכלל to carry this meaning over into the Aramaic translation. However, considering the cognate nature of the two languages, it does not seem likely that the commonly used phrase would have one meaning in Hebrew and a different meaning in Aramaic.

[98]Grossfeld argues that the rendering of בקדמין for בְּרֵאשִׁית implies that the translator meant to deny any order to creation since בקדמין refers to a larger creation context, not a single point in time. See Bernard Grossfeld, *The Targum Onqelos*, 43 n. 1. This rendering would change the beginning of Gen 1:1 to a *time within which* rather than a *time when,* but the rendering does not deny a chronological sequence from Gen 1:1 to 1:2. As long as a *time within which* refers to time prior to Gen 1:2ff, then its interpretation may still be like that of the traditional interpretation.

translation was still the only means for translating Genesis 1:1. Second, the summary-statement interpretation seems to have been another possible means of interpreting Genesis 1:1 among the Jews of this period.

The Mishnah of the Babylonian Talmud

The Mishnah, which took shape in the period of the first and second century, reached its final form in the late second century.[99] Its tractate *Kelim* contains an interesting and implicit interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It states,

> The laws of uncleanness can apply to what was created on the first day. There can be no uncleanness in what was created on the second day. To what was created on the third day the laws of uncleanness can apply. No uncleanness applies to what was created on the fourth day . . .[100]

This passage applies the laws of uncleanness to the context of the days of creation in the first chapter of Genesis. It goes on to say how the law of uncleanness applies to what was created on the rest of the days of creation. The firmament and the heavens, created on the second day, cannot become unclean. The earth and vegetation, created on the third day, can become unclean. The sun, moon, and stars, created on the fourth day, cannot become unclean and neither can the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, created on the fifth day. The beast of the field and mankind, created on the sixth day, can become unclean. However, what was created on the first day can become unclean. It is doubtful that the author of this early Mishnaic tractate interpreted Genesis 1:3 to be the first and only act of creation on the first day since light, the first and only thing created in Genesis 1:3, cannot become unclean.[101] The author most likely interpreted Genesis 1:1-2 to be a part of the

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[99]Jacob Neusner, introduction to *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (London: Yale University Press, 1988), xv.

[100]*Kelim* 17:14, trans. Israel W. Slotki, in *Seder Ṭohoroth*, Sonc. Talm. 87.

[101]Slotki explains that earthen vessels can become unclean, thus the creation of the earth in Gen 1:1 and its description in 1:2 would explain why the law of uncleanness applies to the first day of creation. See Israel W. Slotki, trans., *Kelim*, in *Seder Ṭohoroth*, Sonc. Talm. 87 n. 11.

first day of creation in order to say that what was created on the first day can become unclean.

The Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud

Rosh Hashanah. The Gemara of the Babylonian Talmud, completed around AD 600,[102] provides many other examples of how the early Jews interpreted Genesis 1:1. From the tractate *Rosh Hashanah* comes the following example:

> To what do these ten kingship verses correspond? . . . R. Johanan said: To the ten Utterances by means of which the world was created. Which are they? The phrase 'and he said' occurs in the account of the creation only nine times?-The words 'in the beginning' are also an utterance, as it is written, By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.[103]

By including בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 among the ten utterances that God used to create the world, R. Johanan clearly understands Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation.

Ḥagigah. The tractate *Ḥagigah* also offers glimpses into the early Jewish interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It states,

> Rab Judah further said that Rab said: Ten things were created the first day, and they are as follows: heaven and earth, *Tohu* [chaos], *Bohu* [desolation], light and darkness, wind and water, the measure of day and the measure of night. Heaven and earth for it is written: *In the beginning God created heaven and earth. Tohu* and *Bohu*, for it is written: *And the earth was* Tohu *and* Bohu. Light and darkness: darkness, for it is written: *And darkness was upon the face of the deep*; light for it is written: *And God said, Let there be light.* Wind and water, for it is written: *And the wind of God hovered over the face of the waters.* The measure of day and the measure of night, for it is written: *And there was evening and there was morning, one day.*[104]

In this passage Rab Judah, or at the least Rab, also understands the heavens and earth, along with the elements of Genesis 1:2, to be particular acts of creation in Genesis 1:1. Furthermore, in this passage, Genesis 1:1-3 is semantically, syntactically, and

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[102]Jacob Neusner, introduction to *Genesis Rabbah: The Judaic Commentary to the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, Brown Judaic Studies, no. 104 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), ix.

[103]*Rosh Hashanah* 32a, trans. Maurice Simon, in *Seder Mo'ed*, Sonc. Talm. 156.

[104]*Ḥagigah* 12a, trans. I. Abrahams, in *Seder Mo'ed*, Sonc. Talm. 63.

contextually linked together as a description of the first day of creation.

Later in this same tractate, another rabbi poses a question regarding the creation account. He states,

> '*And the earth was unformed and void*'. Consider: [Scripture] began at first with heaven, why then does it proceed to relate [first] the work of the earth? - The school of R. Ishmael taught: It is like a human king who said to his servants: Come early to my door. He rose early and found women and men. Whom does he praise? The ones who are not accustomed to rise early but yet did rise early.[105]

In this passage the question is over why the description of the earth comes next in Genesis 1:2 when Genesis 1:1 states that the heavens were created before the earth. Although an interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is not explicitly stated in this passage, the rabbi's understanding of it as the first act of creation is clearly the background of the question and answer.

Tamid. Finally, the tractate *Tamid* offers one final interpretation of Genesis 1:1 that is similar to those of the previous rabbis. It states,

> He said to them: Were heavens created first or the earth? They replied: The heavens were created first, as it says. In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. He said to them: Was light created first, or darkness? They replied: This question cannot be solved. Why did they not reply that darkness was created first, since it is written, Now the earth was unformed and void and darkness, and after that, and God said, Let there be light, and there was light?[106]

The questioner of this passage and the respondents both seem to treat Genesis 1:1-3 as a temporally sequenced account. The respondents do not appeal to Genesis 1:6-9 to support their conclusion that the heavens were created first. They rather appeal to Genesis 1:1 because the "heavens" are mentioned first in the verse. When the questioner asks whether light was created first or darkness, he demonstrates his agreement with their understanding of Genesis 1:1-3. The questioner could not have interpreted darkness as a part of the creation if he had not first assumed that the elements in Genesis 1:2 were

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[105]Ibid., 12b (Sonc. Talm. 68).

[106]*Tamid* 32a, trans. Maurice Simon, in *Seder Ḳodashim*, Sonc. Talm. 27.

created as well. According to the questioner, the most logical order for the creation of light and darkness is to be found in the sequence of the narrative of Genesis 1:2-3. Darkness, which is in existence in Genesis 1:2, textually precedes the creation of light in Genesis 1:3. Thus, the questioner understands the text to be a temporally sequenced account that starts in Genesis 1:1. Furthermore, he views the elements in Genesis 1:2 to be created, not preexistent.

These passages from the Babylonian Talmud clearly demonstrate that the traditional interpretation was the most popular interpretation of Genesis 1:1 among many of the rabbis.[107] No clear reference from the Babylonian Talmud assumes the rabbis interpreted the passage any other way.

The Midrashim

Genesis Rabbah. Like the Babylonian Talmud, the midrashim also offer insight into early Jewish interpretations of Genesis 1:1. *Genesis Rabbah*, one of the earlier midrashim, completed around the later fourth or early fifth century,[108] contains many relevant passages that offer important, yet conflicting interpretations of Genesis 1:1. The first passage states,

> Said Rab: Let him have nought of Thine abundant goodness. In human practice, when an earthly monarch builds a palace on a site of sewers, dunghills, and garbage, if one says, 'This palace is built on a site of sewers, dunghills, and garbage,' does he not discredit it? Thus, whoever comes to say that this world was created out of *tohu* and *bohu* and darkness, does he not indeed impair [God's glory]! R. Huna said in Bar Kappara's name: If the matter were not written, it would be impossible to say it, viz., GOD CREATED HEAVEN AND EARTH; out of what? Out of NOW THE EARTH WAS TOHU AND BOHU (I,2).[109]

The modern translators of this passage seem to think that it was a refutation of those who

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[107]Rosenburg also makes this assessment. See A. J. Rosenburg, trans., *The Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Mikraoth Gedoloth*, Books of the Bible (New York: The Judaica Press, 1993), 5.

[108]Neusner, introduction to *Genesis Rabbah*, ix.

[109]*Genesis Rabbah* 1.5, trans. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, in *Midrash Rabbah* (London: The Soncino Press, 1939), 1:2.

did not hold to *creatio ex nihilo*.[110] The first rabbi in this excerpt may be trying to make this refutation, but the second, R. Huna, seems to interpret Genesis 1:2 as temporally prior to Genesis 1:1, which suggests that some of the rabbis of the *Genesis Rabbah* may have understood Genesis 1:1 differently from those of the Babylonian Talmud.[111] Thus, this passage probably reflects a Jewish interpretation of Genesis 1:1 resembling the summary-statement interpretation.

The next passage presents Rabban Gamaliel's response to a philosopher's interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2. It states,

> A philosopher asked Rabban Gamaliel, saying to him, "Your God was indeed a great artist, but he had good materials to help him." He said to him, "what are they?" He said to him, "Unformed [space], void, darkness, water, wind, and the deep." He said to him, "May the spirit of that man [you] burst! All of them are explicitly described as having been created by him [and not as pre-existent]. "Unformed space and void: 'I make peace and create evil' (Is. 45:7). "Darkness: 'I form light and create darkness (Is. 45:7). "Water: 'Praise him, you heavens of heavens, and you waters that are above the heavens (Ps 148:4). Why? For he commanded and they were created (Ps. 148:5). Wind: for lo, he who forms the mountains creates the wind" (Amos 4:13). The depths: When there were no depths, I was brought forth (Prov. 8:24)[112]

Gamaliel does not use Genesis 1:1 to prove that the elements in Genesis 1:2 were created.[113] However, even though he does not use the term *creatio ex nihilo*, Gamaliel is

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[110]Freedman and Simon state, "Here, however, [*tohu* and *bohu*] are regarded, together with darkness, as forms of matter which according to some who deny *creatio ex nihilo* was God's raw material in the creation of the world. The object of the Midrash here is to refute that view." See Freedman and Simon, *Midrash Rabbah*, 1:2 n. 5.

[111]This statement is not intended to suggest that the rabbis of the *Bab. Talm.* were a different group from those of the *Gen. Rab.* and other midrashim. The *Bab. Talm.* and the early midrashim drew from the same pools of rabbinic scholars, so overlap between these sources happened frequently. Nevertheless, no rabbi from the *Bab. Talm.* interpreted Gen 1:1 to be a summary statement or title of the creation narrative.

[112]*Genesis Rabbah* 1.9 (trans. Freedman and Simon, 1:8).

[113]There are a number of reasons why Gamaliel may have excluded Gen 1:1 from his argument. The opinion of this author is that since the philosopher did not include the earth in his list of materials, for that is an element in Gen 1:2, Gamaliel did not need to use Gen 1:1 because he was using texts that individually described the creation of the other elements in Gen 1:2. Had the philosopher mentioned the earth as one of the preexistent materials, Gen 1:1 would have been the perfect verse for Gamaliel to include in his argument. Gamaliel's response and the philosopher's exclusion of the earth from

obviously offended by the philosopher's assumption that raw materials existed with God prior to creation.

A third passage also reveals that rabbis of the Genesis Rabbah may have interpreted Genesis 1:1 differently from those of the Babylonian Talmud. The passage states,

> Said he to him: 'If it stated, "In the beginning God created heaven and earth," we might have maintained that heaven and earth too are divine powers.' Thereupon he cited to him, for it is no empty thing from you (Deut. XXXII, 47), and if it is empty, it is so on your account, because you are unable to interpret it [rightly]. No: ETH THE HEAVENS is to include the sun and moon, the stars and planets; WE-ETH THE EARTH is to include trees, herbage, and the Garden of Eden.[114]

In this passage the rabbi, Ishmael, seems to interpret Genesis 1:1 as a title or summary of the creation narrative. This is peculiar considering that the school of Rabbi Ishmael seems to have interpreted Genesis 1:1 according to the traditional interpretation.[115] However, R. Ishmael bases his summary interpretation on the use of the Hebrew direct object marker אֵת. He does not argue that the phrase "heavens and earth" describes the complete and ordered universe.

Yet a fourth passage from the *Genesis Rabbah* again shows support for the traditional understanding of Genesis 1:1. It states,

> NOW THE EARTH WAS TOHU E.V. 'UNFORMED', . . . R. Judah b. R. Simon said: Compare this case to a king who bought two bondmaids, both on the same bill of sale and at the same price. One he commanded not to stir out from the palace, while for the other he decreed banishment. The latter sat bewildered and astonished. 'Both of us were bought on the same bill of sale, and at the same price,' she exclaimed, 'yet she does not stir from the palace while against me he has decreed banishment. How amazing!' Thus the earth sat bewildered and astonished, saying, 'The celestial and the terrestrial beings were created at the same time: why do the former live [eternally], whereas the latter are mortal?' Therefore, AND THE EARTH WAS TOHU AND BOHU (BEWILDERED AND ASTONISHED).[116]

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his list of preexistent materials suggests that the philosopher had misinterpreted Gen 1:1-2.

[114]*Genesis Rabbah* 1.14 (trans. Freedman and Simon, 1:13).

[115]See the previous discussion on the passage from the tractate *Ḥagigah*.

[116]*Genesis Rabbah* 2.2 (trans. Freedman and Simon, 1:15-16).

R. Judah seems to have interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation in which the heavens and the earth were created at the same time.[117] In the excerpt, this interpretation is the basis of his explanation for why Genesis 1:2 states that the earth was "TOHU" and "BOHU," or "bewildered" and "astonished."

A final passage from the Genesis Rabbah reveals the difference of opinion some rabbis had over the interpretation Genesis 1:1. It states,

> R. Judah says, "The light was created first. The matter may be compared to the case of a king who wanted to build a palace. But the site was shaded. What did he do? He kindled lights and lanterns to know how to lay the foundations. Along these same lines, light was created first." R. Nehemiah says, "The world was created first [then the light]. The matter may be compared to the case of a king who built a palace and crowned it with light.[118]

In this excerpt, it seems as if R. Judah's interpretation of Genesis 1:1-3 implies that the earth in Genesis 1:1 was not created first. Thus, he probably did not see Genesis 1:1 as a particular act of creation, which means that he probably interpreted Genesis 1:2 as a description of preexistent materials. However, the excerpt also shows that R. Nehemiah probably did interpret Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation. Thus, the discussions of these and the other rabbis of the *Genesis Rabbah* demonstrate that there was considerable debate over the interpretation of Genesis 1:1.

Tanḥuma. Another later midrash, *Tanḥuma* (8th/9th cent.),[119] also offers evidence of the early Jewish interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It states the following:

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[117]There was a debate between the House of Shammai and the House of Hillel about whether the heavens or the earth were created first. This debate is recorded in the *Genesis Rabbah* (*Gen. Rab.* 1.15), the *Pal. Talm.* (*y. Ḥag* 17a), and the *Bab. Talm.* (*b. Ḥag* 12a). In this debate a third position is offered in which a rabbi (or one of the the sages) argues that the heavens and the earth were created at the same time. R. Judah seems to have taken this third position. Interestingly, the House of Shammai uses Gen 1:1 to argue that the heavens were created first. However, the House of Hillel uses Gen 1:2, where the verb is translated as a pluperfect, to refute the argument. (The refutation is not included in the account from the *Bab. Talm.*)

[118]*Genesis Rabbah* 3.1 (trans. Freedman and Simon, 1:27).

[119]Samuel Berman, introduction to *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1996), xii.

> R. Isaac declared: A man first constructs the foundation of a palace and then erects the upper story upon it, but the Holy One, blessed be He, fashioned the upper spheres first and then created the earthly spheres, as it is said: *In the beginning God created the heaven*, and after: *and the earth*.[120]

In this passage R. Isaac clearly describes Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation. Furthermore, he does not treat the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 as a merism for the complete and ordered universe.

Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer. Lastly, the midrash *Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* (8th/9th cent.)[121] depicts more early Jewish interpretations of Genesis 1:1. It states,

> Eight things were created on the first day, and they are as follows: heaven and earth, light and darkness, *tohu* and *bohu* [see verse 2], and wind and water, as it is stated: "and a wind of God was hovering over the water." And some say: also day and night as it is stated: "and it was evening and it was morning, one day.[122]

The heavens and the earth of Genesis 1:1 are described as particular acts of creation, and the elements of Genesis 1:2 are not described as preexistent or eternal, but rather as elements created on the first day. Furthermore, the passage makes the verses of Genesis 1:1-3 to be grammatically and contextually linked together as the first day of creation.

There are no explicit statements from the Jewish scholars of the midrashim that the world was created *ex nihilo* or rather מֵאַיִן. However, if many of these early Jews interpreted Genesis 1:1 as a particular act of creation by God and believed that the elements of Genesis 1:2 were created as well, then there would be nothing else in the text that God did not already create. Their interpretations, being mostly traditional, explain why later Medieval Jewish scholars did embrace the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

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[120]*Tanḥuma* 1.4, trans. Samuel Berman, in *Midrash Tanhuma-Yelammedenu* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1996), 15.

[121]Dagmar Börner-Klein, introduction to *Pirke De-Rabbi Elieser*, Studia Judaica: Forschungen Zur Wissenschaft Des Judentums (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2004), XXXIX.

[122]*Pirqe Rabbi Eliezer* 3.9, trans. A. J. Rosenburg, *The Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Mikraoth Gedoloth*, Books of the Bible (New York: Judaica Press, 1993), 5.

Conclusion. There are no explicit statements from the Jewish scholars of these midrashim that the world was created *ex nihilo*, or rather מֵאַיִן. However, if many of these early Jews interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be a particular act of creation by God and believed that the elements of Genesis 1:2 were created as well, then according to their interpretations, everything in the text of Genesis 1 was created and nothing was preexistent. These interpretations, being mostly traditional, explain why later, Medieval Jewish scholars embraced the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. However, they also demonstrate that the summary-statement interpretation seemed to be another interpretive option.

The Medieval Jewish Scholars

By the Medieval period, many Jewish scholars were crafting commentaries of their own on the Pentateuch. Most of these commentaries followed a method of interpretation known as *peshaṭ*: an interpretation of the plain meaning of the text.[123] Some of these Jewish scholars had different notions about the grammar and syntax of Genesis 1:1-3 while others used the passage to explicitly argue for the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Solomon ben Isaac. One of the earliest, Medieval Jewish scholars to offer his interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is Solomon ben Isaac (1040-1105),[124] or Rashi. In his commentary on the Pentateuch he states,

> If, however, you wish to explain [Genesis 1:1] in its plain sense, explain it thus: At the beginning of the Creation of heaven and earth when the earth was without form and void and there was darkness, God said, "Let there be light." The text does not intend to point out the order of the *acts* of Creation—to state that these (heaven and earth) were created first; for if it intended to point this out, it should have written

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[123]Lockshin argues that *peshaṭ* was not a widely used method of exegesis prior to the Medieval period. See Martin I. Lockshin, trans., *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's Commentary on Genesis: An Annotated Translation*, Jewish Studies, vol. 5 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 242 n. 1.

[124]Chaim Pearl, introduction to *Rashi: Commentaries on the Pentateuch*, The B'Nai B'Rith Jewish Heritage Classics (New York: W W Norton & Company Inc., 1970), 13.

> וגו בראשונה ברא את השמים "At first God created etc." *And for this reason*: Because, wherever the word ראשית occurs in Scripture, it is in the construct state . . . . Similarly here you must translate בראשית ברא אלהים as though it read בראשית ברוא, at the beginning of God's creating.[125]

Rashi goes on to argue that the Hebrew of Hosea 1:2a demonstrates that a noun can be in construct with a verb.[126]

Next in his commentary, Rashi argues against those who hold to the traditional understanding of Genesis 1:1 by stating,

> Should you, however, insist that it does actually intend to point out that these (heaven and earth) were created first, and that the meaning is, "At the beginning of everything He created these, *admitting therefore that the word* בראשית *is in the construct state and explaining the omission of a word signifying "everything" by saying* that you have texts which are elliptical, omitting a word, as for example . . . (Isa. XLVI. 10) "Declaring from the beginning the end," and it does not explicitly state, "Declaring from the beginning of a thing the end of a thing"—if it is so (that you assert that this verse intends to point out that heaven and earth were created first), you should be astonished at yourself, because *as a matter of fact* the waters were created before *heaven and earth*, for, lo, it is written, (v.2) "The Spirit of God was hovering on the face of the waters," and Scripture had not yet disclosed when the creation of the waters took place—consequently you must learn from this that the creation of the waters preceded that of the earth . . . . Therefore you must needs admit that the text teaches nothing about the earlier or later sequence *of the acts of Creation*.[127]

Although Rashi argues for a different grammatical understanding of the passage, his reason for explaining the passage as such is neither grammatical nor syntactical but rather contextual. However, his explanation of the passage is the first known example of Genesis 1:1 being treated as a dependent temporal clause.[128]

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[125]Rashi, *Genesis*, in vol. 1 of *Pentateuch: With Targum Onkelos, Haphtorah and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary*, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1946), 2.

[126]Ibid.

[127]Ibid., 2–3.

[128]Even though Rashi's translation of Gen 1:1 is different from earlier Jewish sources, he still seemed to regard the creation of heaven and earth to be an event that took place on the first day. His commentary states, "Thus it is explained in Gen. R. **(6)** יהי רקיע BE THERE AN EXPANSE—Let the expansion become fixed; for although the heavens were created on the first day, they were still in a fluid form, and they became solidified only on the second day at the dread command (lit., rebuke) of the Holy One, blessed be He, when he said 'Let the firmament be *stable*'. It is to this that allusion is made in what is

Abraham Ibn Ezra. Following the example of Rashi's grammatical explanation of Genesis 1:1, Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164),[129] in his commentary, also argues that Genesis 1:1 should be understood as a temporal clause. He writes,

> I believe that *bereshit* is in the construct, as in *In the beginning of* (bereshit) *the reign of Jehoiakim* (Jeremiah 26:1). Don't ask, how can a word in the construct be connected to a verb in the perfect. This presents no problem, for we find that very case in the verse *When the Lord spoke at first with Hosea* (Hosea 1:2), and in the verse *the city where David encamped* (Isaiah 29:1).[130]

After explaining Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause, Ibn Ezra goes on to explain the verse's syntactical relationship to 1:2. He states,

> The meaning of our verse is this: When the creation of the firmament and the dry land took place, the earth was uninhabited because it was covered with water. God created the earth in such a way that by the laws of nature it would be below the waters. Do not reject this interpretation because of the *vav* that is placed before the words *the earth* (*ve-ha-aretz*), for its meaning is identical to that of the Arabic *fa*. The *vav* placed before the word *mist* (*ed*) in *but there went up a mist* (ve-ed) [*sic*] from the earth (Gen. 2:6) is analogous.[131]

Thus, although Ibn Ezra shares Rashi's grammatical understanding of Genesis 1:1 as a dependent temporal clause, he differs with Rashi's view concerning the verse's syntactical relationship. Rashi syntactically joins Genesis 1:1 to 1:3; whereas, Ibn Ezra joins Genesis 1:1 to 1:2. Interestingly, in the second excerpt, Ibn Ezra interprets the phrase "heavens and earth" as a reference to the firmament and dry land created in Genesis 1:6-10 rather than as a reference to the whole of creation.

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written *in* (Job XXVI. 11): 'The pillars of heaven were trembling' (i.e. they were unstable)—this was during the whole of the first day—and on the second (ibid.): 'they were astonished at His rebuke', like a man who stands immovable, amazed at the rebuke of the one who terrifies him." Ibid., 3-4.

[129]Rosenburg, *Genesis*, 269.

[130]Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Ibn Ezra's Commentary on the Pentateuch*, trans. H. Norman Strickman and Arthur M. Silver (New York: Menorah Publishing Company, Inc., 1998), 22. Unlike Rashi, Ibn Ezra does not deal with the crucial passage of Isa 46:10.

[131]Ibid., 30.

Samuel ben Meir. Samuel ben Meir (1085-1174),[132] or Rashbam, Rashi's grandson, also argues in his commentary that Genesis 1:1 is a dependent clause. However, he recognizes how this treatment of the verse creates a complex problem for semantically relating Genesis 1:1 to 1:2. He states,

> Some explain this verse as being similar to the phrase (Hos. 1.2), "The outset of God's speaking (*tehillat dibber*) to Hosea." In other words, they see the verse as meaning, "At the outset of God's creation of heaven and earth"-- i.e. *before* God had created heaven and earth-- then, "The earth was unformed and void with darkness over the surface of the waters." According to this interpretation, then, water was created first.
>
> This interpretation is also folly. The text should not have read, "The earth was unformed and void," for the earth was not yet created. How can the text mention the earth even before the creation of the water, which preceded the earth?[133]

In this excerpt, Rashbam argues against Rashi's understanding of Genesis 1:1 because he sees a tension in it: the earth is in existence before it is created.

In order to avoid this contradiction, Rashbam links 1:1 to 1:2 in the following manner:

> [In other words, Moses said,] "Do you think that this world has forever existed in the way that you now see it, filled with all good things? That is not the case. Rather *bereshit bara' 'elohim*-- i.e. at the beginning of the creation of the heaven and the earth, when the uppermost heavens and the earth *had already* been created for some undetermined length of time-- The, 'THE EARTH' which already existed, 'WAS UNFORMED AND VOID'-- i.e. there was nothing in it.[134]

Rashbam's interpretation of the passage demonstrates that the mention of the earth in Genesis 1:2 presents a contextual problem when Genesis 1:1 is rendered as a dependent temporal clause. Thus, he translates the passage with a dependent clause, but interprets Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation. His translation and interpretation seem incompatible.

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[132]Lockshin, *Samuel ben Meir*, 11.

[133]Rashbam, *Rabbi Samuel ben Meir's Commentary on Genesis: An Annotated Translation*, trans. Martin I. Lockshin, Jewish Studies, vol. 5 (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 29–30.

[134]Ibid., 32.

Moses ben Naḥman. Although Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Rashbam argued for a different grammatical treatment of Genesis 1:1, other Medieval scholars were opposed to their views. In his commentary on Genesis, Moses ben Naḥman (1194-1270),[135] or Ramban, argues a contrary understanding of Genesis 1:1:

> The difficulty which led [Rashi] to give this explanation is, as he says, that 'if the object is to teach the order of creation, that these were created first, there should have been written bârîshônâh (first) for there is no rê'shîth in scripture which is not in the construct state". But, there is the verse [Isaiah 46:10] "Declaring the end from the beginning" (mê-rê'shîth), and if he constructs (the word mê-rê'shîth) with 'dâbhâr' (thing) understood, here too it can be constructed (with a word understood) in the same way. There is also "and he provided the first part rê'shîth for himself." Rashi also raised other objections.
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> Now listen to the explanation of [Genesis 1:1] in its simple sense, correct and clear. The Holy One b.b.H. created all that has been created from absolute nothingness. We have in our holy language no other term for 'the bringing forth of something from nothing' but *bârâ'* (to create). All that exists under the sun or above it was not made 'ex nihilo', as a first beginning, but He brought forth from the complete and absolute nought a very subtle substance devoid of real existence but which is a potency to produce, fitted to assume a shape and emerge from potentiality into reality. This, the primary substance, the Greeks call [ὕλη]. After the [ὕλη], He did not create anything, but He formed and made from it, because from it He brought everything into existence and clothed things with forms and put them into shape.
>
> Know that the heavens and all that is in them are one substance, and the earth and all that is in her is one substance, and the Holy One b.b.H. created these two from nought; and only these were created. And everything else was made from them. This substance which is called [ὕλη] is called in the holy tongue *tôhû*.[136]

Ramban explicitly interprets Genesis 1:1 as the first and only act of creation that is done *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, he interprets verse 1:2 as a description of that first act in its "potentially" unformed state existing only as ὕλη. Everything else that God created was formed from that initial ὕλη.

Baḥya ben Asher ben Halawa. Baḥya ben Asher (d. 1340)[137] interprets Genesis 1:1 like Ramban. In his commentary, which employs Kabbalistic exegesis,[138] he

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[135]Maurice Simon, introduction to *The Soncino Chumash: The Five Books of Moses with Haphtorah*, ed. A. Cohen (Hindhead, England: The Soncino Press, 1947), xii.

[136]Ramban, *Genesis*, 33.

[137]Kaufman Kohler and Philip Bloch, "Baḥya (Beḥai) ben Asher ben Halawa," in *The Jewish*

argues against Rashi stating,

> However, the true meaning is that "in the beginning" is a distinct word. It is not the subject of a construct clause and it is to be read as if the verse was stating "at first." The cantillation supports this. The meaning of the pericope is that heaven and earth and all of their generations were created on the first day from complete nothingness and non-existence, as is denoted by verb "created" [*bara*], which refers to the creation of being from nought.[139]

Again, the rabbi sees Genesis 1:1 as the first act of creation. Later in his work, he even argues that his interpretation is just like that of Rabbi Nehemiah of the midrashim, whom he quotes as saying that the seed of all creation was placed in the earth on the first day of creation.[140]

Conclusion. Although previous Jewish scholars argued over what the first act of creation was, it was not until the Medieval period that Jewish scholars began to explain Genesis 1:1 as a dependent clause. However, it was also during this period that Jewish scholars began to defend the traditional understanding of the verse in order to make an explicit argument for creation מֵאַיִן, or *ex nihilo*.

The Reformation and the Reformers

During the period of the Reformation (1517-1648), a number of commentaries on Genesis were produced. Chief among the commentators are Luther and Calvin, who both viewed Genesis 1:1 in the same way as many of the early church fathers before them. In his commentary on Genesis, Calvin writes the following:

Encyclopedia, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906) [on-line]; accessed 19 January 2009; available from http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=B&artid=133; Internet.

[138]Seth Brody, introduction to "R. Bahya Ben Asher of Saragossa Commentary on Genesis 1:1–2," in *Rabbi Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona: Commentary on the Song of Songs and Other Kabbalistic Commentaries*, trans. Seth Brody, Commentary Series (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, Medieval Institute Publications for TEAMS, 1999), 207.

[139]Baḥya ben Asher, "R. Bahya Ben Asher of Saragossa Commentary on Genesis 1:1–2," in Brody, 211.

[140]Ibid., 211-12.

> To expound the term "beginning," of Christ, is altogether frivolous. For Moses simply intends to assert that the world was not perfected at its very commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, but that it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth. . . . There is no doubt that Moses gives the name of heaven and earth to that confused mass which he, shortly afterwards, (verse 2,) denominates *waters*. The reason of which is, that this matter was to be the seed of the whole world. Besides, this is the generally recognized division of the world.[141]

Similarly, Luther writes,

> The plain and simple meaning of what Moses (*here*) says is that all things that exist were created by God and that at the beginning of the first day there was created a shapeless lump, or mass, of earth with fog, or water. Later, during the remaining time of the first day, God put into it the light, so that the light of day was shining and the shapeless heaven and earth could be seen. This was not unlike a shapeless crude seed from which things can be generated and produced.[142]

Like the church fathers before them, Luther and Calvin interpreted Genesis 1:1 to be the initial act of creation with Genesis 1:2 as a description of its formless state.

In addition to the commentaries, a number of Bible translations followed the past translations of Genesis 1:1. Tyndale's translation of Genesis 1:1 from the original Hebrew (1530)[143] translates the verse as, "In the begynnynge God created heaven and erth."[144] The Geneva Bible (1560)[145] translates Genesis 1:1 as, "In the beginning God created the heauen and the earth." Finally, the King James Bible (1611) also translates it as, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."[146] Like the ancient

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[141]John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 1 of *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, n.d. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), 69–70.

[142]Martin Luther, *Luther's Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 9–10.

[143]F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations from the Earliest English Versions to the New English Bible*, new and revised ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 41.

[144] William Tyndale, *William Tyndale's Five Books of Moses Called the Pentateuch*, Being a Verbatim Reprint of the Edition of M.CCCCC.XXX (New York: Anson D. F. Randoph & Co., n.d.; London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, Limited, n.d.), 15. Accessed 7 July 2008. Available from http://books.google.com/books?id=4orlV4oYuwoC&printsec=frontcover&dq=tyndale&as_brr=1&source=gbs_book_other_versions_r&cad=3_0#PPA15,M1; Internet.

[145]Bruce, *The English Bible*, 87.

[146]The quotes of the Geneva Bible and King James Bible were taken from *BibleWorks 6.0*.

translations of the LXX, Vulgate, and targumim, all of these translations rendered Genesis 1:1 with an independent main clause.

Conclusion

This brief introduction to the history of the translation, interpretation, and theology of Genesis 1:1 demonstrates that the traditional translation and interpretation were the majority-held views of both Christian and Jewish interpreters. However, differing opinions did exist, especially among the Jews of the Medieval period. In this modern era the discussion over the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 has only intensified. No longer is the traditional translation and interpretation the dominant position amongst the majority of modern scholars. Furthermore, the discussion is much more multifaceted. Many scholars argue their understanding of the verse using a variety of lexical, grammatical, syntactical, stylistic, structural, theological, literary, and historical evidences. This dissertation does not address all of these evidences, but the following chapters do introduce and address the linguistic arguments related to the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1.

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CHAPTER 3

THE TRANSLATION OF GENESIS 1:1

Introduction

In the modern debate over the proper translation of Genesis 1:1, the only real issue is whether or not the word בְּרֵאשִׁית is a grammatical absolute or construct. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is a grammatical construct, then it is in construct with the verb בָּרָא, and the sentence should be rendered with a dependent clause. Naturally, this is the argument of the dependent-clause translation. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is a grammatical absolute, then it is not in construct with בָּרָא, and the verse should be rendered with an independent main clause. This is the argument of the traditional translation.[1] However, the debate is more technical than it first seems.

There are many different ways in which various proponents of each translation argue their case. Some use lexical and grammatical evidences. Some use theological and historical evidences. Some use evidences from the parallel ancient Near Eastern literature. All of the different types of evidence are valid areas of investigation, but the most weighty are those centered upon the linguistics of the text, such as the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical evidences. These linguistic evidences have methodological priority since they can determine what the text can or cannot actually say. For instance, if it is linguistically improbable for Genesis 1:1 to be rendered with the traditional

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[1]Lane also states, "The question whether verse 1 is a complete sentence or only a dependent clause is centered in the syntactical interpretation of the first word, *bərē(ʾ)šît*. If the noun *rē(ʾ)šît* is in the absolute state, verse 1 contains a complete thought and is an independent clause or sentence. If, on the other hand, it is in the construct state, verse 1 is not a complete thought and forms a temporal clause which must be completed by either verse 2 or 3." W. R. Lane, "The Initiation of Creation," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 66.

translation, then even supporting theological evidences become less relevant. Thus, though the other areas of investigation are deserving of further study and analysis, this chapter will limit itself to the linguistic evidences involved in translating Genesis 1:1.

Even the linguistic evidences, however, have a proper methodological order. In this chapter the first analysis will start at the most basic level, the lexical level. The central issue at this level is whether the word רֵאשִׁית has a lexically relative or absolute meaning. The next analysis will proceed to the grammatical level. The central issue at this level concerns the pointing of the first two words of Genesis 1:1. The final analysis will end at the syntactical level. The central issue at this level is how the clauses of Genesis 1:1-3 can relate to one another. In the end, this chapter will argue that the traditional translation is more faithful to the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical evidences.

The Lexical Level

As previously noted, at the lexical level the central debate is whether בְּרֵאשִׁית has an absolute or relative meaning. Many proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that the word רֵאשִׁית always has a relative meaning, and since it is always relative, it must be in the construct state with the verb בָּרָא. However, many proponents of the traditional translation argue that in Genesis 1:1 the word רֵאשִׁית has an absolute meaning. Since it has an absolute meaning, it is in the absolute state and is not in construct with בָּרָא.[2] Whether or not these arguments are valid, the evidence will demonstrate that בְּרֵאשִׁית does not have an absolute meaning.

The Relative Meaning of בְּרֵאשִׁית

When proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that רֵאשִׁית has a

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[2]Waltke is one of the few proponents of the traditional translation who argues that the word has a relative meaning. See Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58 n. 12.

relative meaning, they are describing its tendency to be semantically related to another word or concept. Skinner states, "The [independent-clause] construction seems to me, however, opposed to the essentially relative idea of [רֵאשִׁית],—its express reference to *that of which* it is the beginning."[3] Simpson also states, "But the Hebrew *b^{e}rêshîth* seems to mean 'in the beginning of' rather than in the beginning, and this requires that vs. 1 should be taken with vs. 3—on vs. 2 see below—and rendered, 'In the beginning of God's creating the heavens and the earth, God said, etc.'"[4] Finally, Orlinsky adds, "The very first word, *b^{e}reshith*, as every student of biblical Hebrew knows, means 'In the beginning of,' with the word or phrase that follows indicating the object (as in 'In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah'—Jeremiah 26:1, King James Version)."[5] Thus, according to these scholars, if בְּרֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning then it should be rendered as "In the beginning of," which would make the word a grammatical construct.

In order to defend the absolute rendering of בְּרֵאשִׁית as "In the beginning," many proponents of the traditional translation argue that in Genesis 1:1 the word has an absolute meaning.[6] They often cite Isaiah 46:10a as evidence of this claim.[7] It states the

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[3]John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., The International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 13 n. 1.

[4]Cuthbert A. Simpson and Walter Russel Bowie, *The Book of Genesis*, in vol. 1 of *The Interpreter's Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick et al (New York: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1952), 466.

[5]Harry M. Orlinsky, "The Plain Meaning of Genesis 1:1–3," *Biblical Archaeologist* 46 (December 1983): 208.

[6]See N. H. Ridderbos, "Genesis i 1 und 2," in *Studies on the Book of Genesis*, ed. B. Gemser, Oudtestament Studiën 12 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958), 218; Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Chatham, England: W. & J. MacKay & Co Ltd, 1960; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1960), 40; Walther Eichrodt, "In the Beginning: A Contribution to the Interpretation of the First Word of the Bible," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of J. Muilenburg*, ed. B.W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), 4; Gerhard F. Hasel, "Recent Translations of Genesis 1:1: A Critical Look," *The Bible Translator* 22, no. 4 (October 1971): 158; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990), 98.

[7]König states, "Denn auch andere Adverbia stehen im absoluten Sinne, wie ich durch eine

following:

מַגִּיד מֵרֵאשִׁית אַחֲרִית וּמִקֶּדֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נַעֲשׂוּ

> declaring from the beginning, the end, and from before, that which has not been done,

In this verse the word מֵרֵאשִׁית is in the absolute state and seems to be both lexically and grammatically comparable to the use of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1. In addition, many modern bible translations render the word מֵרֵאשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a as "from the beginning," not "from the beginning of."[8] Thus, Isaiah 46:10a seems to demonstrate that the word can have an absolute meaning.[9]

However, scholars of the dependent-clause translation argue that even though the occurrences of רֵאשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a and Genesis 1:1 may appear to be grammatically parallel, מֵרֵאשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a has a lexically relative meaning. Therefore, it cannot function as a lexical parallel to the alleged absolute meaning of בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1. Humbert states,

> On constate donc qu'au sens proprement temporel le substantif *rēšīt* ne figure qu'une seule fois à l'état absolu: Es. 46:10. La posibilité théorique de construire absolument un *rēšīt* temporel existe donc, mais ce passage mérite d'être considéré de plus près. D'abord, guidés par un sûr instinct, les LXX y traduisent *mērēšīt* par ἀναγγέλλων πρότερον τὰ ἔσχατα, c'est à dire qu'ils entendaient *mērēšīt* adverbialement («d'avance») et, au fond, relativement (=d'avance par rapport à autre chose), et non point au sens vraiment absolu de «au commencement». Ensuite, dans le TM luimême, il y a un rapport de corrélation évidente entre *mērēšīt* et *aḥarīt* qui

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eingehendere Untersuchung festgestellt habe. Man vergleiche nur *mêrêschîth* (Jes. 46 $_{10}$) im absoluten Sinne = „von Uranfang an"." (For other adverbs, without the article, are in the absolute sense as I have found through a more thorough investigation. One need only compare *mêrêschîth* [Isa 46:10] in the absolute sense = "From the very beginning.") Eduard König, *Die Genesis* (Gütersloh, Germany: Druck und Verlag von C. Bertelsmann, 1919), 130. Wenham also states, "Nor can it be shown that ראשית may not have an absolute sense. It may well have an absolute sense in Isa 46:10, and the analogous expression מראש in Prov 8:23 certainly refers to the beginning of all creation. The context of בראשית standing at the start of the account of world history makes an absolute sense highly appropriate here." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 12. See also Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 137 n. 99, 138 n. 103.

[8]Cf. NASB, NIV, NJPS, NAV, NRSV.

[9]This is the only other passage in which the temporal use of רֵאשִׁית is grammatically absolute.

> undiquent terminus a quo et terminus ad quem d'un certain laps de temps (cp. aussi le couple *rēšīt* . . . *aḥarīt* dans Job 8,7; 42,12; Eccl. 7,8), temps conçu de façon passablement concréte d'ailleurs vu le parallélisme de *aḥarīt* avec *ašèr lō' na'asū*. Or qui dit corrélation dit relation, impicite à tout le moins : par conséquent le *sens* même de *rēšīt* dans Es. 46,10 est au fond relatif, même si la *construction* ne l'est pas et si *rēšīt* est à l'état absolu. Le passage Es. 46:10 ne peut donc pas être légitimement invoqué en faveur d'un sens temporel absolu de *berēšīt* dans Gen 1,1 qui reste donc, finalement, sans exemple.[10]

According to Humbert the word מֵרֵאשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a still refers to the beginning *of* something; which makes it relative in meaning.[11]

Thus, the strength of Humbert's argument is that because מֵרֵאשִׁית in Isaiah 46:10a has a relative meaning, there is no parallel evidence that בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 has an absolute meaning. Thus, based upon the weight of the evidence, the word has a relative meaning in Genesis 1:1 as well. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is lexically relative, then according to proponents of the dependent-clause translation, it should be rendered as "In the beginning of," and should be in construct with the verb בָּרָא. If the word is in construct with the verb בָּרָא, then Genesis 1:1 should be rendered as a dependent clause. If this line of reasoning is sound, then the evidence as a whole seems to support the dependent-clause translation.

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[10]Paul Humbert, "Trois Notes Sur Genese 1," *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift* 56 (1955): 86–87. The translation is, "We note therefore that in the strictly temporal sense, the substantive *rēšīt* only appears one time in the absolute state: Isaiah. 46:10. The theoretic possibility of constructing a temporal *rēšīt* in an absolute manner exists therefore, but this passage merits closer consideration. First of all, guided by instinct, the LXX translate *mērēšīt* by ἀναγγέλλων πρότερον τὰ ἔσχατα, that is to say that they understood *mērēšīt* adverbially ['from before'] and, at the end, relatively [= from before in relation to another thing], and not at all in the absolute sense of "in the beginning." Then, in the MT itself, there is a correlation connection evident between *mērēšīt* and *aḥarīt* that indicates a *terminus a quo* and a *terminus ad quem* of a certain lapse of time [cf. also the pair *rēšīt* . . . *aḥarīt* in Job 8:7; 42:12; Eccl. 7:8], time conceived in a fairly concrete fashion as seen elsewhere in parallelism to *aḥarīt* with *ašèr lô' na'asû*. Now what says correlation says relation, all the less implicit: consequently, the *sense* even of *rēšīt* in Isaiah 46:10 is relative in the end, even if the *construction* is not relative and even if *rēšīt* is in the absolute state. The passage Isaiah 46:10 cannot be therefore legitimately called upon in favor of the absolute temporal sense of *berēšīt* in Genesis 1:1, which remains, therefore, without example." Lane goes so far as to argue that the translation "declaring the end from the beginning" in Isa 46:10a is inaccurate. See Lane, "Initiation of Creation," 67.

[11]Even Ridderbos, a proponent of the traditional translation, grants Humbert this claim; however, he still argues that רֵאשִׁית has an absolute meaning in Gen 1:1. See Ridderbos, "Genesis i 1 und 2," 218.

However, there seems to be some faulty reasoning from proponents of both translational positions. Proponents of the traditional translation who argue that רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 has an absolute meaning, hoping to sustain their argument that the word is grammatically absolute, have done themselves a disservice. How can a word like רֵאשִׁית, if it is rendered as "beginning," have an absolute meaning? How can it refer to a beginning that is unrelated to anything? The very nature of the word requires that it refer to the beginning of something. If it refers to the beginning of something then its meaning is relative to that something. A beginning that is unrelated to anything is the beginning of nothing, and it is thus not a beginning. On the other hand, proponents of the dependent-clause translation, who argue that the relative meaning of רֵאשִׁית requires the word to be in grammatical construct, have also done themselves a disservice because the evidence only demonstrates that רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning. It does not demonstrate that a relative meaning requires the word to be rendered as "the beginning of." In fact, the Isaiah 46:10a passage is still a strong parallel to Genesis 1:1 since the verse demonstrates that the word רֵאשִׁית can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute. In actuality, the word רֵאשִׁית is one of several types of Hebrew relator nouns, and when its usage is compared to that of other relator nouns, the evidence will demonstrate that it is common for a word like רֵאשִׁית to be lexically relative and grammatically absolute.

Defining and Identifying Relator Nouns

Before demonstrating that relator nouns can be lexically relative and grammatically absolute, one must first define what a relator noun is and identify examples of them. In an article dealing with adpositions, DeLancey describes relator nouns in the following manner:

> Relator noun categories are frequently the topic of discussion, and sometimes extended controversy, as to whether they are nouns or adpositions. For all the confusions that they seem to engender, relator nouns are not an unfamiliar phenomenon to anyone, being easily recognized in such unexotic languages as French and English. Since each of these languages has a robust and thriving adposition category, relator nouns constitute a relatively marginal category, but a

> number of them are quite frequent in occurrence and encode fairly basic concepts: *à **côté** de*, *on **top** of*, *in **front/back** of*, etc. Such constructions can be a source of new prepositions, e.g. English *atop* < *on top of, beside* < *by side of*. In languages which invest less in a lexical category of adpositions, relator nouns may constitute a substantial and important category.[12]

In general, relator nouns are nouns that are semantically dependent upon other words to complete their meanings. They can also be grammatically dependent upon those words—usually by means of the preposition "of" in English or the construct state in Hebrew. This dependency explains why relator nouns, by nature, have a relative meaning.

Once relator nouns are defined, they are easy to identify. English words, such as front, back, middle, side, end, and beginning are all relator nouns because their meanings are relative to other words or concepts in a sentence. For instance, if the word "book" is lexically and grammatically related to these English relator nouns, then their meanings become relative to and dependent upon that word: the front of the book, the back of the book, the middle of the book, the side of the book, the end of the book, the beginning of the book. Without the word "book" these relator nouns would be empty of meaning: The front of what? The back of what? The middle of what? The side of what? The end of what? The beginning of what?

Relator nouns are easily identifiable in Hebrew as well. They include such words as פָּנֶה, אָחוֹר, חוּץ, בַּיִת, שְׂמֹאל, יָמִין, רֹאשׁ, אַחֲרִית, and רֵאשִׁית. They exhibit the common traits of relator nouns in that they are also lexically relative to other words or concepts to complete their meanings.[13] Again, because of their relative nature, these nouns are most commonly found in grammatical construct with other words.[14] The

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[12]Scott DeLancey, "Adpositions as a Non-Universal Category," in *Linguistic Diversity and Language Theories*, ed. Zymunt Frajzyngier, Adam Hodges, and David S. Rood, Studies in Language Companion Series 72 (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2005), 190.

[13]This trait explains why proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning and should be translated with the preposition "of," making it relative to the word בָּרָא.

[14]Although Hebrew relator nouns are usually in construct with the words to which they are semantically related, some are grammatically linked to their related words by the preposition לְ. Cf. 2 Kgs

following analysis demonstrates these traits in the Hebrew relator nouns.[15]

The relator nouns פָּנֶה and אָחוֹר. The relator nouns פָּנֶה and אָחוֹר describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the front, פָּנֶה, or the back, אָחוֹר, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such words as מִשְׁכָּן, אֹהֶל, פָּרֹכֶת, קֹדֶשׁ, and בַּיִת.

Exodus 26:12

וְסֶרַח֙ הָעֹדֵ֔ף בִּירִיעֹ֖ת הָאֹ֑הֶל חֲצִ֤י הַיְרִיעָה֙ הָעֹדֶ֔פֶת תִּסְרַ֕ח עַ֖ל **אֲחֹרֵ֥י** הַמִּשְׁכָּֽן׃

And the leftover excess in the curtain of the tent, the half of the curtain that is left over, will run over the **back of** the tabernacle.

Exodus 26:9b

וְכָפַלְתָּ֙ אֶת־הַיְרִיעָ֣ה הַשִּׁשִּׁ֔ית אֶל־מ֖וּל **פְּנֵ֥י** הָאֹֽהֶל׃

And you shall double over the sixth curtain to the opposite of the **front of** the tent.

Leviticus 4:6

וְטָבַ֤ל הַכֹּהֵ֥ן אֶת־אֶצְבָּע֖וֹ בַּדָּ֑ם וְהִזָּ֨ה מִן־הַדָּ֜ם שֶׁ֤בַע פְּעָמִים֙ לִפְנֵ֣י יְהוָ֔ה אֶת־**פְּנֵ֖י** פָּרֹ֥כֶת הַקֹּֽדֶשׁ׃

And the priest shall dip his finger into the blood, and seven times he shall sprinkle the **front of** the veil of the sanctuary before the LORD.

Ezekiel 41:21

הַֽהֵיכָ֖ל מְזוּזַ֣ת רְבֻעָ֑ה **וּפְנֵ֣י** הַקֹּ֔דֶשׁ הַמַּרְאֶ֖ה כַּמַּרְאֶֽה׃

The door frames of the temple and the **front of** the sanctuary were square, the appearance *of one being* like the appearance *of the other*.

Ezra 47:1a

וַיְשִׁבֵנִי֙ אֶל־פֶּ֣תַח הַבַּיִת֔ וְהִנֵּה־מַ֣יִם יֹצְאִ֗ים מִתַּחַת מִפְתַּ֤ן הַבַּיִת֙ קָדִ֔ימָה כִּֽי־**פְנֵ֥י** הַבַּ֖יִת קָדִ֑ים

23:13; Ezek 10:3; Josh 15:21; Nah 2:10; 3:3.

[15]The following examples of relator nouns have been translated as literally as possible to bring out their relative meaings.

> And he returned me to the opening of the temple, and behold, waters were coming out from under the threshold of the temple toward the east because the **front of** the temple was *facing* eastward.

In his description of relator nouns, DeLancey states that there is sometimes controversy over whether relator nouns should be categorized as prepositions. With respect to אָחוֹר and פָּנֶה, one may ask whether these words should also be categorized as prepositions. The question, however, would fail for two reasons. First, there are already lexically similar prepositions, אַחֲרֵי and לִפְנֵי, that probably developed from these relator nouns. Second, although the relator nouns אָחוֹר and פָּנֶה and the prepositions אַחֲרֵי and לִפְנֵי have very similar, almost interchangeable, meanings, the relator nouns can also be used in instances in which they do not need to be *grammatically* related to another word.[16] The prepositions do not function in this manner.

The relator nouns חוּץ and בַּיִת. The relator nouns חוּץ and בַּיִת also describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the outside, חוּץ, or the inside, בַּיִת, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things as מַחֲנֶה, עִיר, פָּרֹכֶת, and כֹּתֶרֶת.

Exodus 33:7b[17]

וְהָיָה֙ כָּל־מְבַקֵּ֣שׁ יְהוָ֔ה יֵצֵ֖א אֶל־אֹ֣הֶל מוֹעֵ֑ד אֲשֶׁ֖ר **מִח֥וּץ** לַֽמַּחֲנֶֽה׃

> And it will be that everyone who seeks the LORD shall come out to the tent of meeting, which is **outside of** the camp.

2 Chronicles 32:3[18]

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[16]Cf. 2 Chr 13:13-14.

[17]For more examples of חוּץ related to מַחֲנֶה, see Exod 29:14; 33:7 (2x); Lev 4:12, 21; 6:4; 8:17; 9:11; 10:4, 5; 13:46; 14:3; 16:27; 17:3; 24:14, 23; Num 5:3, 4; 12:14, 15; 15:35, 36; 19:3, 9; 31:13, 19; Deut 23:11, 13.

[18]For more examples of חוּץ related to עִיר, see Gen 19:16; 24:11; Lev 14:40, 41, 45, 53; Num 35:5; 1 Kgs 21:13; 2 Chr 33:15.

וַיִּוָּעַץ עִם־שָׂרָיו וְגִבֹּרָיו לִסְתֹּם אֶת־מֵימֵי הָעֲיָנֹת אֲשֶׁר **מִחוּץ** לָעִיר וַיַּעְזְרוּהוּ׃

And he consulted with his princes and mighty men to shut up the waters of the springs which were **outside of** the city, and they helped him.

Exodus 26:35a[19]

וְשַׂמְתָּ אֶת־הַשֻּׁלְחָן **מִחוּץ** לַפָּרֹכֶת

And you shall place the table **outside of** the veil.

Exodus 26:33a[20]

וְנָתַתָּה אֶת־הַפָּרֹכֶת תַּחַת הַקְּרָסִים וְהֵבֵאתָ שָׁמָּה **מִבֵּית** לַפָּרֹכֶת אֵת אֲרוֹן הָעֵדֻת

And you shall place the curtain under the hooks, and you shall bring into there the ark of the testimony **inside of** the veil.

1 Kings 7:31a

וּפִיהוּ **מִבֵּית** לַכֹּתֶרֶת וָמַעְלָה בָּאַמָּה

And its opening **inside of** the capital and above was a cubit.

As a relator noun, בַּיִת is not used as much as its counterpart חוּץ. The preposition בְּ is more frequently used in its place because the relator noun and the preposition share a similar meaning.[21] However, the relator nouns חוּץ and בַּיִת can also be used in instances in which they are not grammatically related to another word in the sentence. The preposition בְּ cannot function in this manner, which again demonstrates one main difference between relator nouns and prepositions.[22]

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[19]For more examples of חוּץ related to פָּרֹכֶת, see Exod 27:21; 40:22.

[20]For more examples of בַּיִת related to פָּרֹכֶת, see Lev 16:2, 12, 15; Num 18:7.

[21]The relator noun חוּץ does not share a similar lexical meaning with any preposition; hence, it is more frequently used than בַּיִת. Cf. Lev 17:3, where the preposition בְּ is used to refer to the inside of the מַחֲנֶה; whereas, the relator noun חוּץ is used to refer to the outside of the מַחֲנֶה.

[22]Cf. Ezek 7:15 where both the relator noun בַּיִת and the preposition בְּ refer to the inside of the עִיר, with the exception being that בַּיִת, as a relator noun, is not grammatically linked to עִיר, but בְּ, as a preposition, is.

The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין. The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין also describe spatial relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, referring to the left side, שְׂמֹאל, or the right side, יָמִין, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things or people as אִישׁ, עֻזָּא, גֶּלָּה, הֵימָן, or עֲשָׂהאֵל.[23]

2 Kings 23:8b

וְנָתַץ אֶת־בָּמוֹת הַשְּׁעָרִים אֲשֶׁר־פֶּתַח שַׁעַר יְהוֹשֻׁעַ שַׂר־הָעִיר
אֲשֶׁר־עַל־**שְׂמֹאול** אִישׁ בְּשַׁעַר הָעִיר׃

And he pulled down the heights of the gates which were at the entrance of the gate of Joshua, the leader of the city, which is upon the **left side of** a man in the gate of the city.

Nehemiah 8:4[24]

וַיַּעֲמֹד אֶצְלוֹ מַתִּתְיָה וְשֶׁמַע וַעֲנָיָה וְאוּרִיָּה וְחִלְקִיָּה וּמַעֲשֵׂיָה עַל־**יְמִינוֹ** **וּמִשְּׂמֹאלוֹ** פְּדָיָה
וּמִישָׁאֵל וּמַלְכִּיָּה וְחָשֻׁם וְחַשְׁבַּדָּנָה זְכַרְיָה מְשֻׁלָּם׃

And at his side stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, and Maaseiah on the **right side of** him and on the **left side of** him Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hash-baddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Zechariah 4:3[25]

וּשְׁנַיִם זֵיתִים עָלֶיהָ אֶחָד **מִימִין** הַגֻּלָּה וְאֶחָד עַל־**שְׂמֹאלָהּ**

And there were two olive trees beside it, one on the **right side of** the bowl and the other on the **left side of** it.

1 Chronicles 6:24

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[23]For more examples of שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין referring to the leftside or rightside of a thing or person, see Gen 48:17; Exod 14:22, 29; Judg 3:15, 16, 21; 7:20; 20:16; 2 Sam 16:6; 20:9; 1 Kgs 2:19; 7:39; 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18; Ps 109:6, 31; Eccl10:2; Jer 22:24; Ezek 10:3; 39:3; Zech 3:1; 4:11; 11:17.

[24]Although שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין are grammatically constructed to a pronoun, the antecedent of the pronoun is עֻזָּא (cf. also 1 Chr 6:24; 2 Sam 2:21).

[25]This verse and the previous seem to show that the prepositions מִן and עַל are interchangeable in meaning when used with שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין.

וְאָחִיו אָסָף הָעֹמֵד עַל־**יְמִינוֹ** אָסָף בֶּן־בֶּרֶכְיָהוּ בֶּן־שִׁמְעָא׃

And his brother, Asaph, was standing by the **right side of** him, Asaph the son of Berechiah son of Shimea.

2 Samuel 2:21

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַבְנֵר נְטֵה לְךָ עַל־**יְמִינְךָ** אוֹ עַל־**שְׂמֹאלֶךָ** וֶאֱחֹז לְךָ אֶחָד מֵהַנְּעָרִים

And Abner said to him, "Turn yourself to the **right side of** you or to the **left side of** you and I take one of the young men for you."

The words שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין do not always act as relator nouns. They can also refer to the actual left hand or the right hand of a person,[26] in which instances they are regular nouns. The previous verses, however, demonstrate that the nouns also act relationally, referring to the right side or left side of a thing or person.[27] Unlike prepositions, these relator nouns can also be used in sentences in which they are not grammatically related to another word.

The relator nouns רֹאשׁ and אַחֲרִית. The relator nouns רֹאשׁ and אַחֲרִית describe temporal relationships between themselves and the things to which they are semantically related, usually referring to the beginning, רֹאשׁ, or the end אַחֲרִית, of the related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically and grammatically relative to such things as הָאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַתִּיכוֹנָה, שָׁנָה, דָּבָר, and הָ-.[28]

Judges 7:19a

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[26]Cf. Gen 48:14; Judg 5:26; Pss 21:9; 26:10; 74:11; 89:14, 26; 138:7; 139:10; 144:11; Song of Sol 2:6; 8:3; Isa 48:13; Dan 12:7, but also cf. Gen 48:17; Judg 3:15, 21; 7:20; 20:16; 2 Sam 20:9; Ps 73:23; 121:5; Jer 22:24 Ezek 39:3 where the nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין are actually in construct with the word יַד.

[27]N.b. especially how the two relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun אֵצֶל in Neh 8:4. Cf. also 1 Kgs 7:39 where the relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun כָּתֵף.

[28]For more examples of רֹאשׁ referring to the beginning of something, see Exod 12:2; Num 10:10; 28:11; Lam 2:19. For more examples of אַחֲרִית referring to the end of something see Gen 49:1; Num 23:10; 24:14; Deut 4:30; 32:20; Pss 37:38; 73:17; Prov 14:12; 16:25; Isa 2:2; 47:7; Jer 5:31; 23:20; Lam 1:9; Ezek 23:25; 38:16; Dan 8:19; 11:4; Hos 3:5; Amos 4:2; 9:1; Mic 4:1. N.b. especially Num 24:20; Job 8:7; 42:12, where אַחֲרִית and רֵאשִׁית occur together as an antonymic, relator noun pair.

וַיָּבֹא גִדְעוֹן וּמֵאָה־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אִתּוֹ בִּקְצֵה הַמַּחֲנֶה **רֹאשׁ** הָאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַתִּיכוֹנָה

And Gideon, and the one hundred men with him, came into the outskirts of the camp at the **beginning of** the middle watch.

Ezekiel 40:1a

בְּעֶשְׂרִים וְחָמֵשׁ שָׁנָה לְגָלוּתֵנוּ **בְּרֹאשׁ** הַשָּׁנָה בֶּעָשׂוֹר לַחֹדֶשׁ

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, in the **beginning of** the year on the tenth day of the month,

Deuteronomy 11:12[29]

אֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ דֹּרֵשׁ אֹתָהּ תָּמִיד עֵינֵי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בָּהּ מֵרֵשִׁית הַשָּׁנָה
וְעַד **אַחֲרִית** שָׁנָה׃

a land for which the LORD your God cares, the eyes of the LORD your God are continually upon it; from the beginning of the year until the **end of** the year.

Ecclesiastes 7:8[30]

טוֹב **אַחֲרִית** דָּבָר מֵרֵאשִׁיתוֹ טוֹב אֶרֶךְ־רוּחַ מִגְּבַהּ־רוּחַ׃

The **end of** a matter is better than the beginning of it, *and* patience of spirit is better than pride of spirit.

Amos 8:10

וְהָפַכְתִּי חַגֵּיכֶם לְאֵבֶל וְכָל־שִׁירֵיכֶם לְקִינָה וְהַעֲלֵיתִי עַל־כָּל־מָתְנַיִם שָׂק וְעַל־כָּל־רֹאשׁ
קָרְחָה וְשַׂמְתִּיהָ כְּאֵבֶל יָחִיד **וְאַחֲרִיתָהּ** כְּיוֹם מָר׃

And I will turn your festivals into mourning and all your songs to dirges, and I will put sack cloth upon all loins and baldness upon all heads, and I will make it as the mourning of an only *child*, and the **end of** it will be as a day of bitterness.

These verses demonstrate that temporal relator nouns are less restrictive in their lexical relationships than spatial relator nouns. For instance in Ecclesiastes 7:8, the

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[29]N.b. the use of רֵאשִׁית in this sentence.

[30]N.b. the use of רֵאשִׁית in this sentence as well.

word to which אַחֲרִית is semantically and grammatically related, דָּבָר,[31] does not have a specific meaning. Thus, the meaning to which אַחֲרִית is actually related is communicated in the context of the passage instead of by the word to which it is grammatically linked.[32] Also in Amos 8:10, the pronominal suffix הָ- of the relator noun אַחֲרִית seems to be an inclusive reference to the end of all the events described in Amos 8:8-10. Thus, even though אַחֲרִית is grammatically related to the suffix, it is semantically related to the series of events expressed in the context.[33] Since אַחֲרִית can be semantically related to a series of events, it seems plausible that רֵאשִׁית may function in a similar manner in Genesis 1:1.[34]

The relator noun רֵאשִׁית. The relator noun רֵאשִׁית also describes temporal relationships between itself and the things to which it is semantically related, usually referring to the beginning of the related word or concept. In can be lexically and grammatically relative to such things or people as שָׁנָה (Deut 11:12), אִיּוֹב (Job 8:7; 42:12), חָכְמָה (Ps 111:10; Prov 4:7), דַּעַת (Prov 1:17), דֶּרֶךְ (Prov 8:22), מָדוֹן (Prov 17:14), דָּבָר (Eccl 7:8), מַמְלְכוּת (Jer 26:1; 27:1; 28:1; 49:34), and חַטָּאת (Mic 1:13).[35] Thus, רֵאשִׁית is a relator noun, and it most likely has a relative meaning, even in Genesis 1:1.

The semantic dependence of the words פָּנֶה, אָחוֹר, חוּץ, בַּיִת, שְׂמֹאל, יָמִין, רֹאשׁ, אַחֲרִית, and רֵאשִׁית is what makes them relator nouns, and all of the cited examples demonstrate this trait. In most contexts these relator nouns would be empty of meaning if

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[31]The relator nouns אַחֲרִית, רֵאשִׁית, and רֹאשׁ may be semantically and implicitly related to this word when no other concept is specified in the context of their passages (cf. Gen 1:1; Isa 41:4, 26; 46:10; 48:16).

[32]N.b. that the same applies to the relator noun רֵאשִׁית.

[33]Cf. also Isa 47:7; Jer 5:31.

[34]That is, of course, without the pronominal suffix הָ-.

[35]רֵאשִׁית is also paired with the relator noun אַחֲרִית in Job 42:12; Eccl 7:8; Isa 46:10.

they were not semantically related to another word or concept. For example, if the relator noun רֹאשׁ, "beginning," is not semantically related to the phrase הָאַשְׁמֹרֶת הַתִּיכוֹנָה, "the middle watch," in Judges 7:19a, then no reader would be able to determine what רֹאשׁ is the beginning *of*. However, the main question to be asked now is since relator nouns are lexically relative, do they always have to be in grammatical construct? In other words, do relator nouns always have to be translated with the preposition "of"?

Grammatically Absolute Relator Nouns

Although relator nouns in general are both lexically and grammatically relative to another word, or in the case of some temporal relator nouns another concept, they can also be lexically relative to another word or concept while functioning as a grammatical absolute. Even in English, relator nouns do not have to be grammatically linked to another word. The most notable English example is the use of the relator noun "end" at the conclusion of a story. No English speaker argues that because the word "end" is relative in meaning, the phrase "The End" must be relative in form as well and changed to "The End of." Furthermore, when reading the phrase "The End" at the completion of a book or movie, the English speaker does not ask, "The end of what?" The meaning to which the relator noun "end" is semantically related is implicit in context of the event. Thus, in English, relator nouns can be both lexically relative and grammatically absolute. Similarly, relators nouns in Hebrew can also be both lexically relative and grammatically absolute. In other words, these Hebrew relator nouns, even though they are relative, can stand alone and are not required to be rendered with the preposition "of."

The relator nouns פָּנֶה and אָחוֹר. The relator nouns פָּנֶה and אָחוֹר can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the front, פָּנֶה, or the back, אָחוֹר, of a related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things or people as יוֹאָב, יְהוּדָה, and מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר.

2 Samuel 10:9a

וַיַּרְא יוֹאָב כִּי־הָיְתָה אֵלָיו פְּנֵי הַמִּלְחָמָה **מִפָּנִים וּמֵאָחוֹר**

And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him from the **front** and from the **back**.

1 Chronicles 19:10a

וַיַּרְא יוֹאָב כִּי־הָיְתָה פְּנֵי־הַמִּלְחָמָה אֵלָיו **פָּנִים וְאָחוֹר**

And Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him **front** and **back**.

2 Chronicles 13:14a

וַיִּפְנוּ יְהוּדָה וְהִנֵּה לָהֶם הַמִּלְחָמָה **פָּנִים וְאָחוֹר**

And Judah turned, and behold the battle was against him **front** and **back**.

Ezekiel 2:10a[36]

וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אוֹתָהּ לְפָנַי וְהִיא כְתוּבָה **פָּנִים וְאָחוֹר**

And he spread it out before him, and it was inscribed *on* the **front** and the **back**.

In 2 Chronicles 13:14 both nouns are clearly acting in the place of the prepositions אַחֲרֵי and לִפְנֵי, which are also in relation to יְהוּדָה in 13:13. However, even though the two nouns are relative in meaning to יְהוּדָה they are grammatically absolute. In other words, they have a relative meaning, but are not rendered with the preposition "of."

The relator nouns חוץ and בַּיִת. The relator nouns חוץ and בַּיִת can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the outside, חוץ, or the inside, בַּיִת, of a related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things as מַחֲנֶה, עִיר, תֵּבָה, and אֲרוֹן.

Deuteronomy 23:13-14a

וְיָד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ מִחוּץ לַמַּחֲנֶה וְיָצָאתָ שָׁמָּה **חוּץ**:
וְיָתֵד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ עַל־אֲזֵנֶךָ וְהָיָה בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ **חוּץ** וְחָפַרְתָּה בָּהּ

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[36] פָּנֶה and אָחוֹר are semantically relative to מְגִלַּת־סֵפֶר in Ezek 2:9.

And there shall be a place for you outside of the camp, and you will go out to there *on the* **outside**, and there will be a spade for you among your tools, and it will be, when you sit down **outside,** that you will dig with it,

Genesis 19:16b-17a

וַיֹּצִאֻהוּ וַיַּנִּחֻהוּ מִחוּץ לָעִיר׃
וַיְהִי כְהוֹצִיאָם אֹתָם **הַחוּצָה** וַיֹּאמֶר הִמָּלֵט עַל־נַפְשֶׁךָ

And they brought him out and put him outside of the city, and it came about, when they brought them to the **outside**, that one said, "Flee for your life,

Ezekiel 7:15[37]

הַחֶרֶב **בַּחוּץ** וְהַדֶּבֶר וְהָרָעָב **מִבַּיִת** אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה בַּחֶרֶב יָמוּת וַאֲשֶׁר בָּעִיר רָעָב וָדֶבֶר יֹאכְלֻנּוּ׃

The sword is on the **outside** and the plague and famine are on the **inside** so that in the field, one will die by the sword, and in the city another will be devoured by famine and plague.

Genesis 6:14b

קִנִּים תַּעֲשֶׂה אֶת־הַתֵּבָה וְכָפַרְתָּ אֹתָהּ **מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ** בַּכֹּפֶר׃

You will make the ark with cells, and you will cover it from the **inside** and the **outside** with pitch.

Exodus 37:2a[38]

וַיְצַפֵּהוּ זָהָב טָהוֹר **מִבַּיִת וּמִחוּץ**

And he overlayed it with pure gold from the **inside** and the **outside**.

In Deuteronomy 23:13-14a the relator noun חוּץ is used three times and has the exact same meaning in all three instances. However, in two of the instances the noun is grammatically absolute, but lexically relative to the word מַחֲנֶה.[39] Also, in Ezekiel 7:15 חוּץ and בַּיִת are semantically, not grammatically, related to the word עִיר. The

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[37]חוּץ and בַּיִת are both semantically related to the word עִיר.

[38]חוּץ and בַּיִת are semantically related to אֲרוֹן in Exod 37:1.

[39]Cf. also the two uses of חוּץ in Gen 19:16b-17.

preposition בְּ is also semantically related to עִיר. Again, however, the preposition cannot be grammatically independent. Thus, the grammatically absolute and lexically relative בַּיִת is used in its place and is not translated with the preposition "of."

The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין. The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the left side, שְׂמֹאל, or the right side, יָמִין, of a related word or concept. In the following examples they are lexically, but not grammatically, relative to such things and people as הֵיכָל, מִזְבֵּחַ, הֵימָן, and עֲשָׂהאֵל.

2 Kings 12:10a

וַיִּקַּח יְהוֹיָדָע הַכֹּהֵן אֲרוֹן אֶחָד וַיִּקֹּב חֹר בְּדַלְתּוֹ וַיִּתֵּן אֹתוֹ אֵצֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ **בִּימִין** בְּבֹוא־אִישׁ בֵּית יְהוָה

And Jehoida the priest took a chest and bore a hole into its door and placed it on the side of the altar, on the **right side**, as one is coming into the house of the LORD.

2 Chronicles 3:17a

וַיָּקֶם אֶת־הָעַמּוּדִים עַל־פְּנֵי הַהֵיכָל אֶחָד **מִיָּמִין** וְאֶחָד **מֵהַשְּׂמֹאול**

And he placed the pillars in front of the temple, one on the **right side** and one on the **left side**.

1 Chronicles 6:29

וּבְנֵי מְרָרִי אֲחֵיהֶם עַל־**הַשְּׂמֹאול** אֵיתָן בֶּן־קִישִׁי בֶּן־עַבְדִּי בֶן־מַלּוּךְ׃

And the sons of Merari, their brothers, were upon the **left side**, Ethan son of Kishi, son of Abdi, son of Malluch,

2 Samuel 2:19

וַיִּרְדֹּף עֲשָׂהאֵל אַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר וְלֹא־נָטָה לָלֶכֶת עַל־**הַיָּמִין** וְעַל־**הַשְּׂמֹאול** מֵאַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר׃

And Asahel pursued after Abner and he did not turn to go to the **right side** or the **left side** from *going* after Abner.

In 2 Kings 12:10a the relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין further define the less specific relator noun אֵצֶל, just as they do in Nehemiah 8:4. However, in 2 Kings 12:10a the relator nouns

are grammatically absolute; whereas, in Nehemiah 8:4 they are in grammatical construct.[40] Also in 2 Chronicles 3:17 the phrase in which the relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין are used is nearly identical to the phrase in Zechariah 4:3. However, in 2 Chronicles 3:17 the relator nouns are grammatically absolute; whereas, in Zechariah 4:3 they are in grammatical construct. Finally, in 1 Chronicles 6:29 the grammatically absolute relator noun שְׂמֹאל is semantically related to הֵימָן in 1 Chronicles 6:18, but in 1 Chronicles 6:24 its antonym יָמִין is in grammatical construct with the pronoun whose antecedent is also הֵימָן. Thus, rendering the relator nouns in 2 Kings 12:10a; 2 Chronicles 3:14; and 1 Chronicles 6:29 with the preposition "of" would be grammatically incorrect.

The relator nouns רֹאשׁ and אַחֲרִית. The relator nouns רֹאשׁ and אַחֲרִית can be relative in meaning and grammatically absolute, while still referring to the beginning, רֹאשׁ,[41] or the end, אַחֲרִית, of a related word or concept. However, the things to which they are semantically related are not always explicitly stated in the context of the passage.

Proverbs 8:23[42]

מֵעוֹלָם נְסַכְתִּי **מֵרֹאשׁ** מִקַּדְמֵי־אָרֶץ׃

From everlasting I have been established, from the **beginning**, from before the earth

Ecclesiastes 3:11b[43]

גַּם אֶת־הָעֹלָם נָתַן בְּלִבָּם מִבְּלִי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִמְצָא הָאָדָם אֶת־הַמַּעֲשֶׂה

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[40]Cf. also 1 Kgs 7:39 where the relator nouns further define the less-specific relator noun כָּתֵף even though they are grammatically absolute.

[41]In all of the example passages in which a temporal רֹאשׁ is used in the absolute grammatical state, the LXX translates the word with the Greek equivalent ἀρχὴ.

[42]רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to מִפְעָלָיו in Prov 8:22. In general רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to such implicit concepts as עֵת, "time," or הַכֹּל, "everything," which is used to refer to all of creation in Jer 10:16. The text is not specific about the meaning to which רֹאשׁ is semantically related; nevertheless, the meaning communicated by the verse as a whole is clear.

[43]רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to the words הַכֹּל or בְּעִתּוֹ in Eccl 3:11a. In general רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דָּבָר, "thing or matter" (cf. Eccl 7:8).

אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה הָאֱלֹהִים **מֵרֹאשׁ** וְעַד־סוֹף׃

Moreover, he has set eternity in their heart so that man will not find out the work which God does from **beginning** to end.

Isaiah 40:21[44]

הֲלוֹא תֵדְעוּ הֲלוֹא תִשְׁמָעוּ הֲלוֹא הֻגַּד **מֵרֹאשׁ** לָכֶם הֲלוֹא הִבַּנְתֶּם מוֹסְדוֹת הָאָרֶץ׃

Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the **beginning**? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?

Isaiah 41:4[45]

מִי־פָעַל וְעָשָׂה קֹרֵא הַדֹּרוֹת **מֵרֹאשׁ** אֲנִי יְהוָה רִאשׁוֹן וְאֶת־אַחֲרֹנִים אֲנִי־הוּא׃

Who has done and made *this*, calling the generations from the **beginning**? *It is* I, the LORD, the first and the last. I am He.

Isaiah 41:26a[46]

מִי־הִגִּיד **מֵרֹאשׁ** וְנֵדָעָה וּמִלְפָנִים וְנֹאמַר צַדִּיק

Who has declared it from the **beginning** that we might know and that we might say from former times, "You are righteous."

Isaiah 48:16[47]

קִרְבוּ אֵלַי שִׁמְעוּ־זֹאת לֹא **מֵרֹאשׁ** בַּסֵּתֶר דִּבַּרְתִּי מֵעֵת הֱיוֹתָהּ שָׁם אָנִי

Draw near to me, listen to this, *for* from the **beginning** I have not spoken in secret. From the time of its being there, I *am*.

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[44]רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to מוֹסְדוֹת הָאָרֶץ. In general רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to such implicit concepts as עֵת, "time," הַכֹּל, "everything," or דָּבָר, "thing or matter."

[45]The text gives no specifics about the thing to which רֹאשׁ is semantically related; however, in general it may be semantically related to such implicit concepts as עֵת, "time," הַכֹּל, "everything," or דָּבָר, "thing or matter."

[46]רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to the events described in Isa 41:2, 3, and/or 25. In general רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דָּבָר, "thing or matter."

[47]רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to the events described in Isa 48:14. In general רֹאשׁ may be semantically related to such an implicit concept as דָּבָר, "thing or matter."

Isaiah 46:10a[48]

מַגִּיד מֵרֵאשִׁית **אַחֲרִית** וּמִקֶּדֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־נַעֲשׂוּ

declaring from the beginning, the **end**, and from before, that which has not been done,

Ecclesiastes 10:13[49]

תְּחִלַּת דִּבְרֵי־פִיהוּ סִכְלוּת **וְאַחֲרִית** פִּיהוּ הוֹלֵלוּת רָעָה׃

The beginning of the words of his mouth are folly and the **end** *of the words* of his mouth are evil madness.

These verses demonstrate that even temporal relator nouns can also be grammatically absolute even though they are lexically relative. However, even the meanings to which they are semantically related do not have to be explicitly stated in the verse; rather, the context of the passage as a whole supplies the general concept to which these nouns are semantically related.

The relator noun רֵאשִׁית. In Isaiah 46:10, the relator nouns רֵאשִׁית and אַחֲרִית are grammatically absolute, but semantically related to a meaning that is implicit in the passage. As Humbert notes, the meanings of the words are semantically related to an unspecified *laps de temps* (lapse of time).[50] Like the English phrase "The End," where the meaning of the relator noun is relative to a meaning implicit in the context of the event, the relator nouns רֵאשִׁית and אַחֲרִית are relative to a meaning implicit in the context of Isaiah 46:10a. This implicit relationship in meaning is not lost on Hebrew speakers. Ramban, a Medieval Jewish rabbi, states, "But there is the verse [Isa 46:10] 'Declaring the end from the beginning' (mê-rê'shîth), and if he constructs (the word mê-

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[48]The text is not specific about the concept to which אַחֲרִית is semantically related. In general אַחֲרִית may be semantically related to דָּבָר, "thing or matter."

[49]אַחֲרִית seems to be semantically related to the word דִּבְרֵי. The parallelism suggests that דִּבְרֵי has been elided in the second colon.

[50]Cf. Eccl 7:8 where the two relator nouns are in grammatical construct, but are still lexically relative to something that is unspecified.

rê'shîth) with dâbhâr (thing) understood, here too [in Gen 1:1] it can be constructed (with a word understood) in the same way."[51] Thus, the passage of Isaiah 46:10a demonstrates that the noun רֵאשִׁית can be grammatically absolute and lexically relative to a meaning that is implicit in the context of the passage.[52] It is a perfect parallel to the use of רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1.

All of the other examples demonstrate two things concerning relator nouns as a whole. First, contrary to the views of some scholars, a relative meaning for a relator noun does not require a "relative" construction or translation—i.e. "in the beginning of." Relator nouns can be lexically relative, yet grammatically absolute.[53] This phenomenon is typical of relator nouns and is neither a lexical nor a grammatical anomaly. Second, with respect to temporal relator nouns, the words or concepts to which they are semantically related do not have to be explicitly stated in the context of the passage. Like the English phrase "The End," the context of a relator noun can supply the relational meaning implicitly. In the case of Genesis 1:1, the context tells the reader that the concept to which בְּרֵאשִׁית is semantically related may be the universe, time, or the event of creation

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[51]Jacob Newman, trans., *The Commentary of Nahmanides on Genesis Chapters 1–6*, Pretoria Oriental Series, vol. 4 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), 33. Rashi also understands Isa 46:10a in the same sense. See Rashi, *Genesis*, in *Pentateuch: With Targum Onkelos, Haphtorah and Prayers for Sabbath and Rashi's Commentary*, trans. M. Rosenbaum and A. M. Silbermann (London: Shapiro, Vallentine & Co., 1946), 2. Even the old Karaite scholars 'Ali ben Suleimân and Ibn Janâḥ contemplate the relative nature of רֵאשִׁית and the implicit meaning to which it is semantically related in Gen 1:1. See Solomon L. Skoss, "The Arabic Commentary of 'Ali ben Suleimān the Karaite on the Book of Genesis: Edited from Unique Manuscripts and Provided with Critical Notes and an Introduction" (Ph.D. diss., The Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Learning, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society's Press, 1928), 93 n. 1.2.

[52]Wenham also seems to recognize the word's relationship to a meaning implicit in the context. He states, "In temporal phrases [רֵאשִׁית] is most often used relatively, i.e., it specifies the beginning of a particular period, e.g., 'From the beginning of the year' (Deut 11:12) or 'At the beginning of the reign of' (Jer 26:1). More rarely, as [in Gen 1:1], it is used absolutely, with the period of time left unspecified; only the context shows precisely when is meant, e.g., Isa 46:10. 'Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times (מִקֶּדֶם) things not yet done' (cf. Prov 8:22)." Wenham, *Genesis*, 13–14.

[53]Skinner states, "But [the traditional translation] is not in accordance with the usage of ראשׁית." Skinner, *Genesis*, 13. The cited examples of relator nouns demonstrate this statement to be incorrect.

("In the beginning of all things," "In the beginning of time," or "In the beginning of the creation event"). It may be that the related concept is not specified because Genesis 1:1 describes, all at the same time, the beginning of the universe, time, and the creation event. Most readers of the traditional English translation of Genesis 1:1 understand the word "beginning" to be semantically related to such implicit concepts.

Possible Objections to the "Absolute" Rendering

This dissertation grants opposing scholars the argument that רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning, even in Isaiah 46:10 and Genesis 1:1; however, there are some objections that must be addressed. Scholars of the dependent-clause translation also seem to argue that even if רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 is rendered "In the beginning," then it describes an absolute beginning and has an absolute meaning not a relative meaning. Skinner states,

> In its temporal applications [רֵאשִׁית] is always defined by [a] gen[itive] or suf[fix] except in Is. 46^{10}, where the antithesis to אחרית inevitably suggests the intervening series of which [רֵאשִׁית] is the initial phase. It is therefore doubtful if [בָּרֵאשִׁית] could be used of an absolute beginning detached from its sequel, or of an indefinite past, like בָּרִאשֹׁנָה or בַּתְּחִלָּה (see Is. 1^{26}, Gn. 1^{33}).[54]

Furthermore Humbert argues, "Placés devant l'alternative: *sens* absolu ou sens relative de *rēšīt* dans Gen. 1,1, nous arrivons à la conclusion qu'en aucum des cas où ce sens est temporal il ne s'agit du commencement absolu."[55] Even Lane states,

> [Humbert's analysis that the temporal meaning of בְּרֵאשִׁית never implies the idea of an absolute beginning] leads logically to the conclusion that *rē(')šît* in Gen. i 1 does not have the meaning "the beginning" either. This conclusion is somewhat furthered by the fact that the opposite of *rē(')šît*, *'aḥărît*, is always used with a relative rather than an absolute meaning. It would seem, therefore, that neither *rē(')šît* nor *'aḥărît*

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[54]Ibid., 12 n. 1.

[55]Humbert, "Trois Notes," 87 The translation is, "Placed in front of the alternative: absolute *meaning* or relative meaning of *rēšīt* in Genesis 1:1, we come to the conclusion that in none one of the cases in which the meaning is temporal is it dealing with an absolute beginning."

could be used to indicate the absolute beginning or absolute end.[56]

On this point, whether the rendering "in the beginning" implies an absolute beginning, with an absolute meaning, the debate can become confusing because scholars do not necessarily define the term "absolute beginning."[57]

The reasoning of Skinner and Humbert suggests that their possible explanation for "absolute beginning" has to do with the relator noun's inability to function alone, that is without relation to some word or concept to complete its meaning. Thus, an absolute beginning would be a beginning that is semantically unrelated to anything. Skinner may be arguing that in Isaiah 46:10 the pairing of רֵאשִׁית with אַחֲרִית adds the necessary "sequel" to which רֵאשִׁית becomes related, which would keep it from becoming "absolute." Thus, בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 cannot be rendered as "In the beginning" because it does not have the necessary sequel with which to relate, making it an "absolute beginning" detached from any meaning.

The problem with this argumentation, whether it is Skinner's or not, is that in Isaiah 46:10, אַחֲרִית does nothing to help to supply the meaning of רֵאשִׁית nor relate it to anything. Both are relator nouns that need to be semantically related to something in the sentence or the context to complete their meaning. Without a noun or concept with which to relate, the question in Isaiah 46:10 still arises, "The end and the beginning of what?" However, the meaning to which both אַחֲרִית and רֵאשִׁית are semantically related is implicitly supplied by the context of the passage. Skinner and Humbert would be right to argue, if this is the manner of their argument, that רֵאשִׁית cannot be rendered "In the beginning" if it is detached from a semantic relationship to any other word or concept. This kind of absolute beginning would be a true antithesis to a relative beginning.

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[56]Lane, "Initiation of Creation," 67.

[57]Westermann states, "The discussion has been bound up very much with the question of an absolute or construct state, of whether Gen 1:1 is speaking of an absolute beginning or not. One must be very cautious about using the words absolute and relative here . . . ." Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 96.

However, in the Isaiah 46:10 passage, the context of the verse supplies the answer to the question, "The end and the beginning of what?" The LORD declares from the beginning of an event, its end. The beginning and the end are grammatically absolute, the event or *laps de temps* is contextually implied. Thus, the Isaiah 46:10 passage demonstrates again, as do the uses of other temporal relator nouns, that רֵאשִׁית can be rendered grammatically absolute and can be relative in meaning to a contextually implied concept.

However, in a different objection Lane states, "*rē(')šît* does not refer to the absolute beginning or to any other definite beginning; neither does *'aḥărît* refer to any definite end."[58] This excerpt and the one just cited suggest that he may define the term "absolute beginning" as a reference to the very first beginning of the universe, the cosmological first cause. If this explanation matches his thought, then he may be arguing one of two things. Either רֵאשִׁית never refers to the "absolute beginning" of the world since it is never used to refer to such, or in order to refer to the "absolute beginning" of the world רֵאשִׁית has to have an absolute or non-relative meaning, which as a relator noun it cannot.

The problem with the first argument, whether it is what Lane is arguing or not, is that it confuses the referent of a word with the sign.[59] The temporal meaning of רֵאשִׁית always relates to the beginning of something, whether it is life, wisdom, creation, or anything else. The word רֵאשִׁית can be applied to any type of beginning as long as the referent has the qualities or properties of the sign. The word tree can be applied to any large plant with a wooden stem and branches as long as the referent has those properties

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[58]Lane, "Initiation of Creation," 67.

[59]Murphy explains both concepts in his definition of the word referent, "**referent**. *n.* In theoretical linguistics, an objective thing itself. The referent is contrasted with the sign, which is the word used to denote an object or a concept of some sort. The referent may be either an animate, inanimate, or abstract noun. The words *car* and *automobile* are both signs used in the English language system to refer to a particular referent, a machine designed for transportation." Todd J. Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), s.v. "referent."

that are specific to trees . The same is true for the beginning of creation. As long as the "beginning" of the world has the properties of being a "beginning," namely being the start of something, then the temporal meaning of רֵאשִׁית can be applied to the very beginning of creation. Furthermore, רֵאשִׁית always refers to the beginning of a thing, and not the thing of which it is the beginning. Thus, רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 can refer to the cosmological first cause, the start of the world.

The problem with the second argument is that the absolute beginning of creation, the cosmological first cause, does not itself have an absolute meaning. It has a relative meaning. Even though, the cosmological first cause would be defined as the very first beginning, it is still the beginning of something. It is the beginning of the world. Thus, it makes no sense to argue that if רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 refers to the very first beginning, the cosmological first cause, then it has an absolute meaning. Clearly even the cosmological first beginning is relative in meaning. Thus, רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 can refer to the cosmological first cause and still be relative in meaning. Again, Lane may not be arguing in this manner; nevertheless, if he is, the argument itself does not follow.[60] If Skinner, Humbert, and Lane have some other definitions for the term "absolute beginning" or "absolute meaning" then, they do not define or communicate them.

Lexical Conclusion

The evidence suggests that the word רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning in Genesis 1:1, not an absolute meaning. Even if בְּרֵאשִׁית refers to the beginning of the world, or the cosmological first cause of the world, its meaning is still relative to that event. As a relator noun, רֵאשִׁית is empty of meaning until it is semantically related to something in

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[60]This is most likely Lane's argument if his definition of "absolute beginning" is the cosmological first cause. He states, "This conclusion is somewhat furthered by the fact that the opposite of *rē(')šît*, *'aḥărît*, is always used with a relative rather than an absolute meaning. It would seem, therefore, that neither *rē(')šît* nor *'aḥărît* could be used to indicate the absolute beginning or absolute end." Lane, "Initiation of Creation," 67.

the sentence or context, whether that thing is explicitly or implicitly stated. The evidence also suggests that even though רֵאשִׁית has a relative meaning it can be used in the absolute state. It is common and normal for relator nouns to be used in a grammatically absolute manner, so scholars should not consider it odd that רֵאשִׁית, with its relative meaning, can be grammatically absolute in Genesis 1:1. However, the lexical evidence can only prove that it is possible for בְּרֵאשִׁית to be in the absolute state. It cannot prove that it actually is in the construct state. Thus, further analysis is required at the grammatical and syntactical levels.

The Grammatical Level

At the grammatical level the central debate concerns the pointing of the Genesis 1:1 text, which is problematic for both translational positions. Proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that בְּרֵאשִׁית is in construct with בָּרָא, making the verse a dependent clause, but the pointing of the text sends mixed grammatical signals concerning the possibility of such a construction. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is in construct with בָּרָא, then one would expect בְּרֵאשִׁית to be pointed as it is: with the vocal *shewa*.[61] However, one would also expect בָּרָא to be pointed as an infinitive construct, בְּרֹא, rather than as a finite, perfect verb. Thus, the grammar of this translation seems awkward, but proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that such a construction is possible.

On the other hand, proponents of the traditional translation argue that בְּרֵאשִׁית is in the absolute state, making the verse an independent main clause, but the pointing of the text still sends mixed grammatical signals. If Genesis 1:1 is an independent main clause then one would expect בָּרָא to be pointed as it is: as a finite, perfect verb. However, if בְּרֵאשִׁית is grammatically absolute and definite in meaning,[62] one would also

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[61]The *rectum*, בָּרָא, of a construct chain makes the *regens*, בְּרֵאשִׁית, definite; thus, the lack of the articular *qamets* is expected.

[62]As a relator noun בְּרֵאשִׁית has to be semantically related to another word or concept. This

expect the word to be pointed with an articular *qamets*, בָּרֵאשִׁית, rather than with a vocal *shewa*.[63] Thus, the grammar of this translation seems awkward as well, but proponents of the traditional translation also argue that such a construction is possible.

The Dilemma of the Dependent Clause Translation

Again, the grammar of the dependent-clause translation seems especially awkward considering that in Genesis 5:1 the verb בָּרָא, functioning as the *rectum* of the noun בְּיוֹם, is pointed as an infinitive construct, בְּרֹא.[64] Why then is the verb not pointed in the same manner in Genesis 1:1 when it is the *rectum* of the noun בָּרֵאשִׁית? In order to show that such a construction is possible, proponents of the dependent-clause translation often cite other examples of nouns in grammatical construct with finite verbs. One of the most oft cited examples is from Hosea 1:2a, where the noun תְּחִלָּה is in construct with the verb דִּבֶּר.[65] It states,

תְּחִלַּת דִּבֶּר־יְהוָה בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הוֹשֵׁעַ לֵךְ קַח־לְךָ אֵשֶׁת זְנוּנִים

> When the LORD first spoke to Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, get yourself a wife of whoredom," (NJPS)

The strength of this example is that the structure of the passage is very similar to Genesis 1:1, and the *regens* תְּחִלָּה is nearly identical to רֵאשִׁית in meaning.[66] Furthermore, almost

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relationship makes a relator noun definite in meaning, like the *nomen regens* of a construct chain. If the relator noun were indefinite in meaning it would not be related to anything and would hence be empty of meaning. Thus, if בְּרֵאשִׁית is a relator noun, it must be definite in meaning.

[63]Since there is no morphological difference between the construct and absolute forms of רֵאשִׁית, one must use the pointing of the preposition בְּ to determine whether בְּרֵאשִׁית may be absolute or construct. (Cf. Neh 12:44 where the absolute form of רֵאשִׁית is pointed with an articular *qamets*. Unfortunately this example can only be a morphological parallel to רֵאשִׁית and not a lexical or grammatical parallel since it is not a temporal use of the word.)

[64]Cf. also Gen 2:4 where the infinitive construct עֲשׂוֹת is the *rectum* of בְּיוֹם.

[65]N.b. the construct form of the noun תְּחִלַּת in this passage.

[66]Both words seem to be virtually interchangeable. Cf. Prov 4:7 with 9:10; Jer 26:1 with Ezra 4:6; Isa 46:10 with Eccl 10:13.

all modern translations render Hosea 1:2a with a dependent temporal clause,[67] and some are nearly identical in structure to the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1. For example the NIV renders Hosea 1:2a as "When the LORD began to speak through Hosea;"[68] the NJPS renders Genesis 1:1 as "When God began to create heaven and earth." Thus, if תְּחִלַּת can be in construct with the finite, perfect verb דִּבֶּר in Hosea 1:2a, then it is possible for בְּרֵאשִׁית to be in construct with the finite, perfect verb בָּרָא in Genesis1:1.

In addition to the similarly structured passage of Hosea 1:2a, there are actually a great number of verses in which a noun is in construct with a finite verb. For instance the noun יָד is in construct with a finite verb in Exodus 4:13 and Lamentations 1:14. The noun עֵת is in construct with a finite verb in Job 6:17; Jeremiah 6:15; 49:8; and 50:31. Finally, the noun יוֹם is in construct with a finite verb in Exodus 6:28; Leviticus 14:46; Numbers 3:1; Deuteronomy 4:15; 1 Samuel 25:15; Psalms 18:1; 56:10; 138:3; and Jeremiah 36:2. Many other examples will be cited in the syntactical section of this chapter when this specific grammatical construction is further analyzed. However, for now, the evidence clearly demonstrates that although the construction of a noun with a finite verb seems grammatically awkward, it is actually a common and natural occurrence in Biblical Hebrew. Thus, the grammatical evidence demonstrates that even though בָּרָא could be pointed as an infinitive construct, it is also possible for it to be pointed as a perfect, finite verb.

The Dilemma of the Traditional Translation

Again, the grammar of the traditional translation also seems somewhat

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[67]Cf. ESV, JPS, NASB, NIV, NKJV, NRSV, et al., but n.b. NAB, which seems to follow the rendering of the Vg.

[68]In Gen 1:1 the NIV follows the traditional translation.

awkward. If בְּרֵאשִׁית is grammatically absolute and definite in meaning, then one would expect it to be pointed with an articular *qamets* rather than a vocal *shewa*. In order to show that the construction is not grammatically awkward, proponents of the traditional translation frequently use König's argument[69] that רֵאשִׁית is a type of temporal noun that is often anarthrous when functioning as an adverbial expression of time, like רֹאשׁ, קֶדֶם, and עוֹלָם.[70] Thus, if בְּרֵאשִׁית is functioning in this manner in Genesis 1:1, then it would not have to be pointed with the articular *qamets*. König's argument, however, should be rejected for two reasons. First, it is fraught with many problems and doesn't necessarily explain why these types of words are frequently anarthrous. Second, there is a better explanation for why בְּרֵאשִׁית is pointed with a vocal *shewa* that is more reflective of the evidence.

The complications of König's argument. As König argues, the word בְּרֵאשִׁית can certainly be classified as a temporal noun; however, many problems arise when he classifies it with other types of temporal nouns. First, temporal nouns like רֵאשִׁית and רֹאשׁ are not lexically analogous to קֶדֶם and עוֹלָם. The former nouns frequently refer to specific moments or periods in time: the beginning of something. The latter refer to indefinite periods of time. For instance, the temporal noun קֶדֶם almost always refers to an unspecified, immeasurable period of past time, and the temporal noun עוֹלָם is so

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[69]König, *Die Genesis*, 130 n. 1. Scholars who use König's argument are the following: Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), 92; Hasel, "Recent Translations," 158–59; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 96; Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Pre-creation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (July 1975): 223; Wenham, *Genesis*, 12; James Barr, "Was Everything That God Created Really Good?" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggeman*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 58; John C. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 51 n. 50.

[70]Cf. רֹאשׁ (Isa 40:21; 41:4, 26; 48:16; Prov 8:23, Eccl 3:11); קֶדֶם (Mic 5:1; Hab 1:12); עוֹלָם (Gen 3:22; 6:3, 4; Ps 90:2; Prov 8:23).

undefinable that it can refer to an indefinite period of past *or* future time.[71] Thus, a possible explanation for why both קֶדֶם and עוֹלָם can be both anarthrous and grammatically absolute is that they are lexically indefinite; an article would seem to imply a lexically definite meaning.[72] Thus, these nouns cannot be used as examples to explain why a definite בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 can be both anarthrous and grammatically absolute.

König and the proponents of his argument might then counter that רֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 also has a lexically indefinite meaning like that of קֶדֶם and עוֹלָם,[73] but in all its temporal uses, whether in construct or absolute (Isa 46:10), רֵאשִׁית always has a definite meaning, קֶדֶם and עוֹלָם never do. Furthermore, as a relator noun, the meaning of רֵאשִׁית is always semantically related to another word or concept, which makes the word naturally definite even if it is not grammatically related to another word. Anyone who might argue that רֵאשִׁית has an indefinite meaning in Genesis 1:1 would have to argue that it has a non-relative meaning, which seems antithetical to the relator noun concept.

Second, proponents of the dependent-clause translation challenge König's argument. They counter that the examples with which he compares בְּרֵאשִׁית are all taken from poetic texts which do not frequently use definite articles. Brown states,

> In addition, all the examples of related words used absolutely but without the article (*mērōʾš* in Isa 40:21; 41:4, 26; 48:16; *miqqedem* in Isa 46:10; *mēʿôlām* in Isa 46:9) are culled from poetic texts, which by nature tend to "omit" the articles for nouns considered definite. Thus, on methodological grounds alone the comparison of poetic texts with Genesis 1 is problematic when used to argue for the absolute function of *bĕrēʾšît* in Gen 1:1. Indeed, the absence of the article still supports the interpretation of *bĕrēʾšît* as a construct.[74]

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[71]See BDB, s.v. "עוֹלָם."

[72]Even when it has the definite article, the word עוֹלָם has an indefinite meaning (cf. 1 Chr 16:36; Neh 9:5; Pss 41:14; 106:48).

[73]Although most modern scholars do not make this argument for the traditional translation, this may have been the view of the targumic translators of Gen 1:1 and the LXX translators of Isa 46:10.

[74]William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, Dissertation Series/Society of Biblical Literature, no. 132 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 64. In order to counter this charge, Heidel suggests that the text of Gen 1 may itself be more poetic than prosaic.

Even though opponents raise this objection, proponents of König's argument rarely cite prose examples, even though they do exist and are a counter this challenge.[75] However, if רֵאשִׁית and רֹאשׁ are not semantically analogous to קֶדֶם and עוֹלָם, then there are no other prose examples with which to compare רֵאשִׁית. Isaiah 46:10 is a great parallel verse in which רֵאשִׁית is grammatically absolute, definite in meaning, and anarthrous, but a proponent of the dependent-clause translation can easily argue that the word would have a definite article if it were not in a poetic passage.

Third, since the temporal nouns רֵאשִׁית and רֹאשׁ almost always refer to the beginning of something, they are much more comparable to the temporal relator noun תְּחִלָּה, which at times is semantically interchangeable with רֵאשִׁית.[76] The word's semantic proximity to רֵאשִׁית and רֹאשׁ makes it a better methodological candidate for grammatical comparison. However, this is a problem for König and the proponents of his argument because even though תְּחִלָּה is often grammatically absolute, it always functions in this manner with the article, not without.[77] Thus, according to this bit of evidence, the lexically comparable רֵאשִׁית should also have the article when it is grammatically absolute. The evidence as a whole demonstrates the weakness of König's argument, which makes the plausibility of the traditional translation weak as well. However, there is a better explanation for why a lexically definite and grammatically absolute בְּרֵאשִׁית is not pointed an articular *qamets*.

בְּרֵאשִׁית is a relator noun. The previous lexical discussion has already

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See Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, 92 n. 41. However, no other proponents of the traditional translation seem to make this argument.

[75]Cf. קֶדֶם Neh 12:46; עוֹלָם Gen 3:22; 6:4; 13:15; Exod 3:15; et al.

[76]Cf. Prov 4:7 with 9:10; Jer 26:1 with Ezra 4:6; Isa 46:10 with Eccl 10:13.

[77]Gen 13:3; 41:21; 43:18, 20; Judg 1:1; 20:18; 2 Sam 17:9; Neh 11:17; Isa 1:26; Dan 8:1; 9:21.

established that רֵאשִׁית is a relator noun. As shown earlier, the relator noun classification demonstrates that relator nouns, like רֵאשִׁית, can be grammatically absolute even though they are relative in meaning. This classification, however, can also explain why בְּרֵאשִׁית is pointed with a vocal *shewa* instead of an articular *qamets*.

Because relator nouns are relative in meaning to another word or concept, they are definite in meaning by nature.[78] The following verses will demonstrate, however, that when they function as grammatical absolutes they can frequently be found with or without the article in passages of both prose and poetry. Consider the use of the relator nouns חוּץ and בַּיִת:

Ezekiel 7:15

הַחֶרֶב **בַּחוּץ** וְהַדֶּבֶר וְהָרָעָב **מִבָּיִת** אֲשֶׁר בַּשָּׂדֶה בַּחֶרֶב יָמוּת וַאֲשֶׁר בָּעִיר רָעָב וָדֶבֶר יֹאכְלֶנּוּ׃

The sword is on the **outside** and the plague and famine are on *the* **inside** so that in the field, one will die by the sword, and in the city another will be devoured by famine and plague.

Lamentations 1:20b[79]

מֵעַי חֳמַרְמָרוּ נֶהְפַּךְ לִבִּי בְקִרְבִּי כִּי מָרוֹ מָרִיתִי **מִחוּץ** שִׁכְּלָה־חֶרֶב **בַּבַּיִת** כַּמָּוֶת׃

my organs are in turmoil, my heart is turned within me for I have certainly rebelled. On *the* **outside** the sword makes childless, on the **inside** it is like death.

In these verses חוּץ and בַּיִת are paired together, like they are in other passages,[80] and both are semantically related to the word עִיר. However, in both instances one relator noun is pointed with the article, but the other is not, even though both nouns are grammatically

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[78]This natural definiteness of relator nouns is similar to the natural definiteness of cardinal numbers. See GKC § 134l

[79]There are a couple of reasons to translate the verse in this manner. First, Lam 1:19 suggests that the speaker of this passage is referring to the inside and the outside of a city during a siege, not the inside of a house. Second, the parallel language of Ezek 7:15 (cf. also Deut 32:25) matches the situation described in Lam 1:19-20 exactly. There are those who die by the sword outside of the city and those who perish of famine inside. Although Lam 2:21 does describe death by the sword in the streets, the more technical form חוּצוֹת is used in the passage rather than simply חוּץ.

[80]Gen 6:14; Exod 25:11; 37:2; 1 Kgs 7:9.

absolute and definite in meaning. Thus, the grammar of the passages demonstrates that a relator noun can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning, but still be anarthrous.

Deuteronomy 23:13-14a[81]

וְיָד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ **מִחוּץ** לַמַּחֲנֶה וְיָצָאתָ שָׁמָּה **חוּץ**׃
וְיָתֵד תִּהְיֶה לְךָ עַל־אֲזֵנֶךָ וְהָיָה בְּשִׁבְתְּךָ **חוּץ** וְחָפַרְתָּה בָּהּ

> And there shall be a place for you **outside** of the camp, and you will go out to there *on the* **outside**, and there will be a spade for you among your tools, and it will be when you sit down *on the* **outside**, you will dig with it,

In this example the relator noun חוּץ in the first clause of verse 13 is semantically and grammatically related to מַחֲנֶה and is clearly definite in meaning. However, in the latter half of verses 13 and 14, חוּץ is grammatically absolute, but still relative in meaning to מַחֲנֶה. However, in its grammatically absolute form, חוּץ is anarthrous even though it is definite in meaning. Again, the evidence demonstrates that an anarthrous relator noun can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning.

The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין can also function in the same manner. Consider the following uses.

2 Samuel 2:21

וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אַבְנֵר נְטֵה לְךָ עַל־**יְמִינְךָ** אוֹ עַל־**שְׂמֹאלֶךָ** וֶאֱחֹז לְךָ אֶחָד מֵהַנְּעָרִים

> And Abner said to him, "Turn yourself to the **right side** of you or to the **left side** of you and I will take one of the young men for you."

2 Samuel 2:19

וַיֵּרֶד עֲשָׂהאֵל אַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר וְלֹא־נָטָה לָלֶכֶת עַל־**הַיָּמִין** וְעַל־**הַשְּׂמֹאול** מֵאַחֲרֵי אַבְנֵר׃

> And Asahel pursued after Abner and he did not turn to go to the **right side** or the **left side** from *going* after Abner

Numbers 20:17b

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[81]The words "*on the*" are added to the translation to bring out the definiteness of the word חוּץ.

דֶּרֶךְ הַמֶּלֶךְ נֵלֵךְ לֹא נִטֶּה יָמִין **וּשְׂמֹאול** עַד אֲשֶׁר־נַעֲבֹר גְּבוּלֶךָ׃

We will go the way of the king; we will not turn to *the* **right side** or *the* **left side** until we cross your territory.

Numbers 22:26

וַיּוֹסֶף מַלְאַךְ־יְהוָה עֲבֹור וַיַּעֲמֹד בְּמָקוֹם צָר אֲשֶׁר אֵין־דֶּרֶךְ לִנְטֹות יָמִין **וּשְׂמֹאול**׃

And the messenger of the LORD passed on further, and stood in the narrow place in which there is not a way to turn to *the* **right side** or *the* **left side**.

In these examples, the relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין are used with the verb נָטָה to describe turning from the path either to the right side or the left side of oneself (cf. 2 Sam 2:21). The Numbers passages, however, demonstrate that this word pair, when used in the same way with the same verb, can be grammatically absolute and definite in meaning even though both words are anarthrous.[82]

1 Kings 7:39a

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַמְּכֹנֹות חָמֵשׁ עַל־כֶּתֶף הַבַּיִת **מִיָּמִין** וְחָמֵשׁ עַל־כֶּתֶף הַבַּיִת **מִשְּׂמֹאלֹו**

And he placed the stands, five on the side of the temple on *the* **right side** and five upon the side of the temple on its **left side**.

2 Chronicles 3:17a

וַיָּקֶם אֶת־הָעַמּוּדִים עַל־פְּנֵי הַהֵיכָל אֶחָד **מִיָּמִין** וְאֶחָד **מֵהַשְּׂמֹאול**

And he placed the pillars in front of the temple, one on *the* **right side** and one on the **left side**.

Finally, both of these examples demonstrate that even though שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין are used in exactly the same manner, שְׂמֹאל is grammatically definite and יָמִין is not. Both, however, are definite in meaning, which again suggests that relator nouns can be both

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[82]Num 20:17 and Deut 2:27 describe very similar happenings where the Israelites request a nation's permission to travel through their land, and they swear not to deviate to their left or to their right from the path. However, Num 20:17 uses the verb נָטָה to describe not turning to one's left or right, and Deut 2:27 uses the verb סוּר. These parallel verses suggest that the act of turning, or not turning, to one's left or right can be described by both verbs. The examples from 2 Samuel suggest that the relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין when used either with נָטָה or סוּר are definite in meaning even though they are anarthrous.

grammatically absolute and definite in meaning, yet anarthrous in form.

In addition to these passages, there are a number of verses in which a definite and grammatically absolute relator noun can be either articulated or anarthrous. The relator nouns אָחוֹר and פָּנֶה are always anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute (2 Sam 10:9; 1 Chr 19:10; 2 Chr 13:14; Ps 139:5; and Ezek 2:10). The relator nouns חוּץ and בַּיִת can be pointed with the article when they are grammatically absolute (Gen 9:22; 19:17; 24:31; 39:11; Exod 21:19; Lev 18:9; Deut 24:11; 25:5; Judg 12:9; 19:25; 2 Sam 13:18; 2 Kgs 4:3; 2 Kgs 10:24 Ezra 10:13 Job 31:32; Ps 41:7; Prov 22:13; 24:27 Song of Sol 8:1; Ezek 41:9, 17, 25; Hos 7:1), but there are other passages in which they are anarthrous (Gen 6:14; Exod 12:46; 25:11; 37:2; Lev 14:41; Deut 23:13, 14; 32:25; 1 Kgs 6:6, 15, 16; 7:9; Isa 33:7; Lam 1:20; Ezek 7:15; 40:5, 19; 46:2; 47:2). The relator nouns שְׂמֹאל and יָמִין can also be pointed with an article when they are grammatically absolute (Gen 13:9; 2 Sam 2:19; 1 Chr 6:29; 2 Chr 3:17; Neh 12:31; Ezek 1:10), but mostly they are anarthrous (Gen 24:49; Num 20:17; 22:26; Deut 2:27; 5:32; 17:11, 20; 28:14; Josh 1:7; 17:7 19:27; 23:6; 1 Sam 6:12; 1 Kgs 7:39, 49; 2 Kgs 12:10; 22:2; 2 Chr 3:17; 4:6, 7, 8; 34:2; Job 23:9; 30:12; Ps 142:5; Prov 4:27; Isa 54:3). Finally, the temporal relator nouns רֹאשׁ and אַחֲרִית are almost always anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute (Ps 37:37; Prov 8:23; 23:18; 24:14; 24:20; Eccl 3:11; 10:13; Isa 40:21; 41:4, 26; 46:10; 48:16; Jer 29:11).[83]

The main reason that relator nouns can be anarthrous when they are grammatically absolute and definite in meaning is that they are in a state of flux. On the one hand, they are in an almost implicit grammatical construction with a related thing or

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[83]One could argue that in some cases, in which אַחֲרִית is grammatically absolute, it should be rendered as "future" rather than "end," which would mean that the word is not being used as a relator noun (cf. Ps 37:37; Prov 23:18; 24:14, 20; Jer 29:11). However, אַחֲרִית is often semantically related to a person and is used as a reference to the latter days of that person's life (Num 23:10; Job 8:7; 42:12; Prov 5:11; 19:20; Jer 17:11). Thus, in the cases where אַחֲרִית is grammatically absolute, but implicitly related to a person, it still functions as a relator noun even though it could be rendered as "future."

concept,[84] and on the other hand, they are grammatically absolute with a definite meaning. Because these nouns are lexically dependent on another word or concept to complete their meaning, like a noun in grammatical construct, one would expect grammatically absolute relator nouns to be anarthrous. However, because they have a definite meaning when they are grammatically absolute, one would also expect them to have the definite article. Thus, it is not surprising that absolute relator nouns can occur with or without the article. Thus, if the relator noun בְּרֵאשִׁית is grammatically absolute in Genesis 1:1, it does not have to be pointed with an articular *qamets*, even though it could be. Such is the nature of relator nouns in this grammatical state of flux.

Grammatical Conclusion

The grammatical evidence clearly demonstrates that בְּרֵאשִׁית can be both a grammatical absolute or construct, making both translations possible. Even though the grammar of the dependent-clause translation suggests that the first two words of Genesis 1:1 should be pointed as בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרֹא, the grammatical evidence demonstrates that בְּרֵאשִׁית can be in construct with a perfect, finite verb like בָּרָא. Furthermore, even though the grammar of the traditional translation suggests that the first two words of Genesis 1:1 should also be pointed as בָּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא, the grammatical evidence demonstrates that a relator noun like בְּרֵאשִׁית can either have the article or be anarthrous when it is definite in meaning and grammatically absolute. However, up to this point, the lexical and grammatical evidences only demonstrate that both the dependent-clause translation and the traditional translation are possible. The syntactical evidence, however, will demonstrate which translation is the more probable.

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[84]This is BDB's description of אַחֲרִית in Isa 46:10. It is absolute, but implicitly it is the end of a phase of history. See BDB, s.v. "אַחֲרִית."

The Syntactical Level

Most scholars agree that lexical and grammatical arguments alone cannot solve the complex issue of translating Genesis 1:1; thus, many turn to the syntactical evidence to determine whether בְּרֵאשִׁית can be absolute or construct. With respect to the traditional translation, nearly every scholar agrees that it has no problematic syntactical issues. As an independent clause, Genesis 1:1 fits neatly into the syntactical structure of Genesis 1:1-3. However, there are syntactical complications when Genesis 1:1 is rendered with a dependent clause. Thus, the central debate at the syntactical level is whether the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1 is syntactically probable or even possible.

Is Genesis 1:1 Subordinate to Genesis 1:2a or 1:3?

Before determining the syntactical probability of the dependent-clause translation, one must first determine which dependent-clause translation to analyze. If Genesis 1:1 is a dependent clause, it is subordinate to a main clause, but to which main clause? There are two options. Some proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that Genesis 1:1 is syntactically subordinate to the first clause of Genesis 1:2a. However, most argue that Genesis 1:1 is syntactically subordinate to Genesis 1:3, with Genesis 1:2 being a parenthetical sentence.[85]

Genesis 1:2a as the main clause. Arguing that Genesis 1:1 is subordinate to Genesis 1:2a is the more difficult of the two options, which explains why so few scholars support this translation.[86] It has serious syntactical complications. On the one hand, Keil

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[85]Westermann only cites Hugo Grotius as a proponent of the former dependent-clause translation, but cites many others as proponents of the latter. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 95.

[86]The Medieval Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra was the first to suggest that Gen 1:1 is subordinate to Gen 1:2a.

and Delitzsch argue that if Genesis 1:2a is the main clause, then it would have to start with the construction וַתְּהִי הָאָרֶץ.[87] Waltke argues that 1:2a would have to start with the construction הָיְתָה הָאָרֶץ, like the main clauses in Jeremiah 26:1; 27:1; and 28:1.[88] On the other hand, Ross and Wenham argue that the manner in which Genesis 1:2a actually begins, וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה, demonstrates that it is a circumstantial clause,[89] which would make Genesis 1:2a a dependent clause and not the main clause of Genesis 1:1. Thus, the syntactical arguments suggest that the subordination of Genesis 1:1 to 1:2a is unlikely.

Other scholars, however, argue that the subordination of Genesis 1:1 to 1:2a is still possible. Both Skinner and Gross note that although Genesis 1:2a has the structure of a circumstantial clause, there is no absolute rule against a main clause having a similar structure when it is the apodosis of a temporal clause.[90] Skinner cites Genesis 7:10; 22:1; and Leviticus 7:16b as examples of such a construction, and Gross cites Isaiah 6:1. However, at least two of the examples are not precise parallels,[91] and the small sampling

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[87]C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, vol. 1 of *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1872), 46. Many later commentators argue this same point. See H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1950), 45; Heidel, *Babylonian Genesis*, 94; Edward J. Young, "The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three," *Westminster Theological Journal* 21 (1958): 133 n. 1; U. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah: A Commentary on Genesis I-VI 8*, vol. 1 of *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1961), 19; Matthews, *Genesis*, 137 n. 98.

[88]Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 222 See also Cassuto, *Genesis*, 19.

[89]Wenham, *Genesis*, 12; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 719.

[90]Skinner, *Genesis*, 14–15 n. 1; Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 72.

[91]In Skinner's example of Lev 7:16b, the syntactical relationship between the clauses is much more different than that of Gen 1:1-2. Gen 1:1-2 has a *waw* separating the two clauses; whereas, there is no *waw* separating the clauses in Lev 7:16b בְּיוֹם הַקְרִיבוֹ אֶת־זִבְחוֹ יֵאָכֵל. The reason there is no *waw* separating the clauses in Lev 7:16b is that the clause הַקְרִיבוֹ אֶת־זִבְחוֹ is an embedded genitive clause that is the *rectum* of the governing noun בְּיוֹם, which itself is part of the main clause. A *waw* would separate the main clause element בְּיוֹם from the main clause verb יֵאָכֵל. Concerning Gross's example of Isa 6:1, Brown states, "However, the example drawn from Isaiah does not resolve the issue, since the verb is "pronounless" (*bišnat môt hammelek ʿuzziyyāhû wāʾerʾeh ʾet ʾădonāy* . . .), in contrast to the clause beginning with the subject in [Gen] 1:2." Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 72. Isa 6:1 is actually a better example of the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3.

of evidence suggest that the translation is still unlikely. Nevertheless, the syntactical analysis of this section is still applicable to this unlikely translational option.

Genesis 1:3 as the main clause. Scholars who argue that Genesis 1:1 is subordinate to Genesis 1:3 maintain that Genesis 1:2 is a parenthetical comment.[92] The main argument is that the word order of Genesis 1:2 is typical of a parenthetical construction (subject-verb-object).[93] Furthermore, Genesis 1:3 begins with the more appropriate *waw*-consecutive.[94] The subordination of a dependent clause, especially a temporal clause, to a main clause that begins with a *waw*-consecutive is a natural feature of Biblical Hebrew, thus making the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3 entirely probable.

Some scholars challenge the idea that Genesis 1:2 could be a parenthetical construction. Cassuto, a proponent of the traditional translation, argues that if Genesis 1:2 were a parenthetical clause, it would not contain the verb הָיָה. Thus, since Genesis 1:2a is not parenthetical and since it is not the main clause of Genesis 1:1, the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1 is impossible on syntactical grounds.[95] However, Waltke, another proponent of the traditional translation argues that the copula הָיָה is often

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[92]The Medieval Jewish scholar Rashi was the first to argue this position. According to Westermann, Heinrich Ewald is one of the first modern commentators to make this argument. See Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 95.

[93]Lane, "Initiation of Creation," 70–71; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 12; Harry Orlinsky, foreword to *Genesis: The N. J. V. Translation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Harper Torch Books; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, The Temple Library, 1966), xv; Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 73.

[94]Brown stresses that parenthetical constructions are syntactically dependent and are usually introduced by an explanatory or parenthetical disjunctive *waw* (i.e., Gen 13:7; 29:16; Ruth 4:6-7; 1 Sam 1:9). See Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 72–73.

[95]Cassuto, *Genesis*, 19–20. Cassuto's argument is used by later scholars to argue against the dependent-clause translation. See Young, "Relation of the First Verse of Genesis," 134 n. 2; Hasel, "Recent Translations," 160; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 117.

present in parenthetical clauses that, like Genesis 1:2, have the pattern waw + noun + verb (cf. Jonah 3:3; Zech 3:2-3).[96] Thus, even major proponents of the contrary traditional translation, such as Waltke and Westermann,[97] argue that the dependent-clause translation, in which Genesis 1:2 is a parenthetical comment, should not be rejected on syntactical grounds.

With respect to the dependent-clause translation in general, most modern scholars render Genesis 1:1 as a temporal clause and make syntactical comparisons with other types of temporal clauses. Orlinsky states,

> Scholars have long recognized the fact that the first vowel in the first word in Hebrew, *b^{e}(reshíth)*, in the place of expected *ba(reshíth)*—indeed the very word itself (as distinct from *barishonáh*)—points to the meaning "In the beginning of (God's creating . . .)," that is, "When God began (to create)." Secondly, when the story of creation is resumed later, in 2.4, it is again the temporal ("when") construction that is employed: "When the LORD God made earth and heaven." The best known parallel is the Babylonian account of the rise of Marduk and creation, *Enuma Elish*, and it likewise begins with the "when" sentence structure.[98]

Thus, it is not surprising that opponents of the dependent-clause translation, like Waltke and Westermann, would defend its syntactical viability. Since temporal clauses are frequently subordinate to their main clauses by means of a *waw*-consecutive, and since Genesis 1:2 can syntactically function as a parenthetical clause, there seems to be no syntactical issues with rendering Genesis 1:1 as a dependent temporal clause. However, the problem with comparing the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3 with the syntactical relationship between a temporal clauses and a *waw*-consecutive clause is that if בְּרֵאשִׁית is in construct with בָּרָא, then the construction does not create a simple temporal clause. Thus, from a methodological perspective, any syntactical

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[96]Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 225.

[97]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 96.

[98]Orlinsky, foreword to *Genesis*, xiv. The comparisons made in this citation attempt to demonstrate that the evidence from the parallel literature supports the dependent-clause translation. However, it is plain that Orlinsky treats a dependent Gen 1:1 as a temporal clause.

comparisons should be made with similar types of grammatical constructions, not with syntactically unrelated temporal clauses. However, before such comparisons can be made, one must determine what type of clause Genesis 1:1 is if בְּרֵאשִׁית is in construct with בָּרָא.

The Clause Type of the Dependent Clause Translation

The discussion at the grammatical level in this chapter cites many example verses where nouns are in construct with verbs, and such grammatical constructions are clearly possible, but the construction is not simply the case of a noun governing a finite verb. Rather, it is the case of a noun governing an entire clause. Thus, in Genesis 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית does not simply govern the verb בָּרָא it governs the clause בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. Such a construction cannot be classified as a simple temporal clause, but how then should it be classified? In the broadest sense Genesis 1:1 is a substantival clause, or rather a whole clause that is functioning as a single substantive. Concerning such clauses, Joüon states,

> A nominal or verbal clause may form a unit which can be considered and treated as a substantive. Thus, "I know *that you arrived*" is equivalent to "I know (of) *your arrival*"; the clause *that you arrived* is a substantival clause equivalent to the substantival phrase *your arrival*, and just as the phrase is an object, *that you arrived* may be analysed as an object clause. Like a substantive, a substantival clause can function as the subject or predicate of a sentence, and as the complement of a preposition or genitive, and occur in apposition. But it is mainly as an object that it is commonly used.[99]

IBHS also states, "It is common for a clause to stand in a case frame usually occupied by a noun; such a dependent clause is called a *noun* clause or a constituent noun clause."[100] Thus, rather than being temporal, the clause of Genesis 1:1 is a substantival clause.

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[99]Joüon § 157a.

[100]*IBHS* § 38.8a. Instead of noun clause or constituent noun clause, this dissertation uses the term substantival clause.

There are, however, various types of substantival clauses. The three main types are the subject, object, and genitive clauses. Since the clause of Genesis 1:1 is in construct with the word בְּרֵאשִׁית, it is a genitive-type substantival clause. Joüon adds,

> A clause, whether verbal or nominal forms a block which may, in some cases, be regarded as a substantive; it will therefore be possible to consider it as a genitive in relation to a preceding noun, which will act as its *nomen regens*. In fact the following are found used as *nomen regens* in this position: 1) mainly nouns which have become prepositions; 2) some nouns used in an almost prepositional fashion; 3) (rather rarely) pure substantives keeping their full nominal value.[101]

All the previous citations in the grammatical discussion where a noun is in construct with a verb are thus examples of this genitive-type substantival clause (herein after referred to as a genitive clause). Thus, if בְּרֵאשִׁית is in the construct state, then the rest of Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause.

However, the genitive clause can be further divided into either relative or non-relative types.[102] Thus, in most modern grammars, one can find examples of genitive clauses in sections dealing with the relative clause,[103] sections dealing with the genitive case or construct state,[104] and sections dealing with substantival clauses.[105] However, regardless of the section of the specific grammar, all such examples are genitive clauses. Thus, if Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause then any syntactical comparisons must be made with genitive clauses, not syntactically unrelated temporal clauses.

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[101]Joüon § 129p.

[102]Ibid., § 129p-q. Interestingly, Joüon classifies nouns that are constructed onto a clause in two ways: nouns with ordinary clauses and nouns with relative clauses. In almost all instances in which Joüon cites examples of nouns with ordinary clauses, one could argue that they are nouns with relative clauses. In fact, many such "ordinary clauses" are translated as relative clauses in the targumim, LXX, and Vg.

[103]GKC § 155c-n; Joüon § 158 a-dc; *IBHS* § 19.6a-b.

[104]GKC § 130d; Joüon § 129p-q; *IBHS* § 9.6a-e.

[105]Joüon § 157a; *IBHS* § 38.8c.

A Syntactical Analysis of the Genitive Clause

In order to determine the syntactical viability of the dependent-clause translation, one must analyze the syntactical characteristics of genitive clauses. Fortunately, the Hebrew Old Testament has a large pool of evidence in which genitive clauses occur in both prose and poetry. Using this author's own searches in *BibleWorks 6* and the examples in Joüon and GKC, this author has found 210 examples of genitive clauses (see Appendix).[106] However, unlike Genesis 1:1, some of these examples do not have the noun directly in construct with the verb, and some do not have a noun as the governing element—some are governed by a pronoun, preposition, or an implied *regens*. Nevertheless, since they are all clauses governed by a *regens*, they are all genitive clauses, and a simple analysis of them demonstrates that they have two main syntactical characteristics.

First syntactical characteristic. In nearly every one of the 210 examples, the genitive clause is not separated from the main clause by either a clause-level *waw*[107] or a *soph passuq*. The genitive clause functions as the *rectum* of a governing element; thus, it is not necessarily subordinate to the main clause, but is rather an embedded participant in it. For instance, in 1 Samuel 25:15b the genitive clause הִתְהַלַּכְנוּ אִתָּם בִּהְיוֹתֵנוּ בַּשָּׂדֶה is an embedded participant in the main clause וְלֹא־פָקַדְנוּ מְאוּמָה כָּל־יְמֵי. It functions as the *rectum* of the governing noun יְמֵי. Thus, if Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause, it is either embedded in the main clause of Genesis 1:2a or 1:3. However, Genesis 1:1 is separated from its main clause—whether that be Genesis 1:2a or 1:3—by both a clause-level *waw*

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[106]Although the list of these examples is not exhaustive, the pool of evidence is large enough to draw sound syntactical conclusions. Some of the examples from the grammars may be disputable (e.g., 1 Chr 17:13; 2 Chr 31:19; Neh 8:10), but most are not.

[107]Even though the clause-level *waw* acts as a conjunction, its main syntactical function is to distinguish one clause and its elements from another.

and a *soph passuq*, which suggests that it is not a genitive clause.

Second syntactical characteristic. In nearly every one of the 210 examples of genitive clauses, the *regens* that governs the genitive clause is not separated from its clause by either a clause-level *waw* or a *soph passuq* because it is an active element in the main clause. The *regens* has a dual function. It is the governing element of the genitive clause, and it is also an active participant in the main clause in which the genitive clause is embedded. For instance, in Exodus 18:20b the noun דֶּרֶךְ governs the genitive clause יֵלְכוּ בָהּ. However, the governing noun דֶּרֶךְ is also the direct object in the main clause, וְהוֹדַעְתָּ לָהֶם אֶת־הַדֶּרֶךְ, in which the genitive clause is embedded. Thus, the noun דֶּרֶךְ functions as both the direct object in the main clause and the governing noun of the genitive clause. If in Genesis 1:1 the noun בְּרֵאשִׁית governs the genitive clause בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ, then it participates in a different clause (herein after referred to as the participatory clause). However, the governing noun בְּרֵאשִׁית in Genesis 1:1 is separated from the participatory clause—whether that be Genesis 1:2a or 1:3—by both a *waw* and a *soph passuq*, which suggests that it does not govern the clause of Genesis 1:1, nor does it participate in the clause of Genesis 1:2a or 1:3. Thus, בְּרֵאשִׁית is probably not in construct with Genesis 1:1. However, there are a small number of exceptions to these syntactical characteristics that require examination.

Exceptions to the Syntactical Characteristics

Even though בְּרֵאשִׁית and the rest of Genesis 1:1 do not have the dominate, syntactical characteristics of a genitive clause and its *regens*, there are a few genitive clauses and their *regentes* that do not have these syntactical characteristics either. Of the 210 examples of genitive clauses, there are eleven in which the genitive clause and/or its *regens* seem to be separated from the participatory clause by either a clause-level *waw* or *soph passuq*, though not by both These exceptions are found in Numbers 23:3; 2

Chronicles 30:19; Job3:15; 7:2 (2x); Psalms 83:15 (2x); 138:3; 148:6; Jeremiah 14:18; and Hosea 1:2.

Genitive clauses separated from the *regens*. The genitive clause in Jeremiah 14:18[108] seems to be an example of a clause-level *waw* that separates the genitive clause from both its *regens* and the participatory clause. However, the sentence of Jeremiah 14:18b, כִּי־גַם־נָבִיא גַּם־כֹּהֵן סָחֲרוּ אֶל־אֶרֶץ וְלֹא יָדָעוּ, can be rendered in two ways, as either "For both prophet and priest peddle in the land which they do not know,"[109] or "For both prophet and priest peddle in the land, but they do not know."[110] The intervention of the clause-level *waw* between the genitive clause and its *regens* suggests that the latter rendering is more appropriate, which would mean that there is no genitive clause in Jeremiah 14:18b.

However, both the modern and ancient translations are divided on how to render Jeremiah 14:18b. The NASB, NIV, NKJV, LXX, and Vulgate render the supposed genitive clause with a relative clause modifying the *regens* אֶרֶץ.[111] However, the ESV, NLT, NRSV, and the targumim render the sentence of 14:18b with two separate independent clauses.[112] The most likely explanation for this discrepancy is that the former group of translations treat the last clause of 14:18b as a circumstantial clause rather than a genitive clause, which is also grammatically and syntactically possible.[113]

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[108]GKC § 155h. However, GKC seems to suggest there should be no intervening *waw*.

[109]This translation seems to render the passage with a genitive clause (cf. NASB, NIV, NKJV).

[110]This translation does not render the passage with a genitive clause (cf. ESV, NLT, NRSV).

[111]The LXX and Vg mostly use a relative clause or participle to render a Hebrew genitive clause.

[112]The targumim also mostly use a relative clause to render a Hebrew genitive clause.

[113]Cf. Gen 16:1; 22:24; 24:29; Esth 2:21 where the translators of the LXX and Vg render the circumstantial clauses with a relative construction, but the targumim render it with a similar circumstantial clause. This is probably what each translation is doing with the last clause of Jer 14:18b.

However, whether or not the last clause in Jeremiah 14:18b is a separate independent clause, a circumstantial clause, or a genitive clause, there is no syntactical parallel between it and Genesis 1:1 because a clause-level *waw* does not separate the genitive clause of Genesis 1:1 from its *regens* בְּרֵאשִׁית.

Genitive clauses separated by a *soph passuq*. The genitive clauses in 2 Chronicles 30:19;[114] Job 3:15;[115] 7:2 (2x);[116] and Psalm 83:15 (2x)[117] are all examples in which the *soph passuq* separates the genitive clause and its *regens* from the participatory clause. One may argue that in each case the genitive clause and the *regens* are outside the bounds of the *soph passuq* because the sentence as a whole is too long. Genesis 1:1-3 would then be a perfectly matching example. However, the genitive clause and its *regens* can just as well be found at the end of long sentences in which the limits of the *soph passuq* stretch quite far (cf. 2 Kgs 8:6; 1 Chr 15:12; 2 Chr 31:19; Jer 2:6; 17:4; 52:12), and the verses of Job 3:15; 7:2; and Psalm 83:15 are short. Thus, sentence length may not be an adequate explanation for all of these examples since as a general rule, the Masoretes did not usually allow the *soph passuq* to separate the elements of a clause from the clause itself.

With respect to the poetic verses of Job 3:17, 7:2 and Psalm 83:15, the *soph passuq* seems to separate the genitive clauses and their *regens* from the participatory clause because they are part of a different poetic colon, not because the sentence is too long.[118] Thus, they cannot be syntactical parallels to the prose verses of Genesis 1:1-3.

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[114]GKC § 155n; Joüon § 129q.

[115]GKC § 155e; Joüon § 158b.

[116]GKC § 155g.

[117]Ibid.

[118]Even the preceding verse of Job 3:14 is not the main clause but is rather an extended phrase, like Job 3:15, of the main clause that starts in Job 3:13.

With respect to 2 Chronicles 30:19, sentence length does seem to be the only explanation for why the *soph passuq* separates the genitive clause and its *regens* from the participatory clause in 2 Chronicles 30:18.[119] However, 2 Chronicles 30:19 would then be the only true parallel to Genesis 1:1-3. Only one parallel example out of 210 strongly suggests that Genesis 1:1 is not a genitive clause.

Genitive clauses separated by a clause-level *waw*. The genitive clauses in Numbers 23:3;[120] Psalm 138:3;[121] Psalm 148:6;[122] and Hosea 1:2[123] are all examples in which a clause-level *waw* separates the genitive clause and its *regens* from the participatory clause.[124] These examples are the closest syntactical parallels to Genesis

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[119]Even the ESV, NIV, and NRSV have difficulty with this irregularity in that they move the *regens*, the direct object of the main clause, to the preceding verse of 31:18 even though in the Hebrew the *regens* is in 31:19.

[120]GKC § 130d.

[121]Ibid.

[122]This example is from this author's own research.

[123]GKC § 130d; Joüon § 129p.

[124]One could argue that the genitive clauses in Exod 6:28; 1 Sam 5:9; and 2 Chr 24:11 belong to this list of exceptions. The genitive clauses in these verses seem to show a genitive clause and its *regens* separated from the main clause by a *waw*. They even seem to show that the genitive clause rather than being embedded in the main clause can be an external dependent clause along with its *regens*. In fact, some English translations render the verses in either way. (In Exod 6:28, the ESV and NRSV render the *regens* as a participant in the succeeding *waw*-consecutive clause, and the NIV renders the genitive clause as if it were an unembedded dependent clause. In 1 Sam 5:9, the ESV, NASB, NIV, and NRSV render the genitive clause as if it were an unembedded dependent clause. Finally, in 2 Chr 24:11, the ESV and NRSV render the genitive clause as if it were an unembedded dependent clause. In these verses the meaning in the differing translations is the same as that of the Hebrew text, but the grammar is vastly different.) However, each *regens* in these clauses is preceded by the common verbal phrase וַיְהִי. The וַיְהִי verbal phrase is actually a clause in and of itself, even when only a single determinate noun is its object. (Cf. Gen 26:32; Gen 39:11; Judg 6:25; 7:9; 2 Sam 7:4; 2 Kgs 19:35; 1 Chr 17:3. Cf. also the use of וְהָיָה in Isa 22:20; 23:15; Hos 1:5; Amos 8:9; Mic 5:9.) Thus, in Exod 6:28, 1 Sam 5:9, and 2 Chr 24:11, the *regens* in each verse, יוֹם, עֵת, and אַחֲרֵי, participates in the וַיְהִי clause, and the genitive clause is also embedded in it. The functions of the embedded genitive clauses are not to be subordinate to the succeeding *waw*-consecutive clauses, but are to be more descriptive of their *regens*. (Cf. Gen 31:10; Exod 12:29, 41; 14:24; Num 7:1; Deut 27:2; Ruth 1:1; 1 Sam 3:2; 30:25.) The וַיְהִי clause is a complete clause in and of itself and is the participatory clause of the *regens*, not the succeeding *waw*-consecutive clause. Thus, Exod 6:28; 1 Sam 5:9; and 2 Chr 24:11 are not exceptions to the syntactical markers of the genitive clause and are not true

1:1, but even they are not without problems. In Psalm 148:6 the sentence חָק־נָתַן וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר could be rendered in two ways as either "The statute which he has given will not pass away"[125] or as "He gave a statute, and it will not pass away." The former rendering could be a syntactical parallel to the dependent-clause translation of Genesis 1:1 in that the *regens* and its genitive clause are separated from the participatory clause by a clause-level *waw*. However, since the latter translation is also possible and the syntax is more regular, it is the more likely translation of the two. Furthermore, the LXX, Vulgate, and targumim all follow the latter rendering of the verse. These ancient translators did not usually miss translating the genitive clause; thus, they most likely recognized the intervening clause-level *waw* to be a marker of a separate independent clause.

As previously noted, the syntactical structure of Hosea 1:2 is a commonly used parallel to the syntactical structure of Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. First, in Hosea 1:2, the genitive clause and its *regens* are separated from the participatory clause by a *waw*-consecutive, just like Genesis 1:1 is separated from 1:3. Second, in both verses the verb of the genitive clause is in the perfect conjugation. Finally, in both verses, nouns of nearly identical semantic meaning, רֵאשִׁית and תְּחִלָּה, are the *regens*. However, in ancient translations and older codices the syntactical structure of Hosea 1:2 is much different from the many modern translations.

Current and ancient evidences suggest that in Hosea 1:2, the verb of the genitive clause, דַּבֶּר, may actually be a noun. First, BDB suggests that הַדַּבֶּר in Jeremiah

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parallels to the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. Even if, however, the *waw*-consecutive clause was the participatory clause of the *regens*, Gen 1:1 would still not be a viable syntactical parallel since it does not begin with the verbal phrase וַיְהִי.

[125]In this translation the clause וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר is the participatory clause and the verb נָתַן comprises the genitive clause. However, is seems as if the the ESV, NASB, NIV, NJPS, and NKJV have reversed the roles of each clause making the participatory clause the genitive clause and the genitive the participatory. The syntax does not allow such a construction; thus, the most likely explanation is that the translations are treating the clause וְלֹא יַעֲבוֹר circumstantially, in which case there is then no genitive clause in the verse.

5:13 is a noun,[126] which would take the form דְּבָר in Hosea 1:2, and Collins notes that דִּבֶּר functions as a noun in Rabbinic and Modern Hebrew.[127] Second, in both the Leningrad and Aleppo Codices, a paragraph break separates the alleged genitive clause and its *regens*, תְּחִלַּת דִּבֶּר־יְהוָה בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ from the participatory clause, וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־הוֹשֵׁעַ.[128] This break creates such separation that the communities that produced these codices probably did not think that Hosea 1:2 contained a genitive clause, nor did they think that the two clauses were even related. Finally, both the LXX and the targumim render the word דְּבָר as a regular noun, λόγος and פתגם, and the Vulgate renders it as a gerund, *loquendi*.[129] The evidence from these sources suggests that the phrase תְּחִלַּת דִּבֶּר־יְהוָה בְּהוֹשֵׁעַ could very well have been read by earlier Jews as a simple, clauseless introduction to the book. Thus, Hosea 1:2 may not even contain a genitive clause.

The examples from Psalm 138:3 and Numbers 23:3, however, appear to be true parallels to the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. In Psalm 138:3 the genitive clause קָרָאתִי and its *regens* בְּיוֹם are clearly separated from the participatory clause, וַתַּעֲנֵנִי, by a *waw*-consecutive. However, not only is this example seemingly irregular for genitive clauses, it is irregular for most sentences that begin with the construction בְּיוֹם or בַּיּוֹם. When these words begin a sentence they are rarely separated from their participatory clause, by a *waw*-consecutive.[130] Nevertheless, there is no

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[126]BDB, s.v., "דִּבֶּר."

[127]Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 51.

[128]David Noel Freedman, Astrid B. Beck, and Bruce E. Zuckerman, eds., *The Leningrad Codex: A Facsimile Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1998), 619; Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, ed., *The Aleppo Codex* (Jerusalem: The Magness Press for the Hebrew University Bible Project, 1976), שעט.

[129]The presence of the gerund, *loquendi*, suggests that the word in the Hebrew text used by the translator was an infinitive rather than a finite verb. Of course it is entirely possible that the text did have a finite verb and that the translator, because of the genitive clause, rendered it as a gerund. However, the Vg almost always renders genitive clauses with a participle or relative clause, not a gerund.

[130]Interestingly the only other example this author could find in which the word בְּיוֹם or בַּיּוֹם

denying the syntactical structure of Psalm 138:3. Thus, it closely parallels the syntactical structure of Genesis 1:1 and 1:3.

Numbers 23:3 acts the same way. The genitive clause מַה־יֵּרָאֵנִי and its *regens* וְדָבָר are also separated from the participatory clause וְהַגֵּדְתִּי לָךְ by a *waw*-consecutive, making the syntactical structure of the verse a close parallel to the syntactical structure of Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. However, even though Psalm 138:3 and Numbers 23:3, and possibly Hosea 1:2, may be close syntactical parallels, the case that Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause is less convincing when the evidence of these verses is placed in the overall context of the data.

Syntactical Conclusion

Substantival clauses in general and genitive clauses in particular are a unique type of clause in that they are actual participants in the clauses in which they are embedded. With respect to genitive clauses, even their *regentes* are active elements in the participatory clause. Thus, it not surprising that nearly all of the 210 examples of genitive clauses do not have a clause-level *waw* or a *soph passuq*, markers that usually separate elements of one clause from another, separating the genitive clause and its *regens* from the participatory clause. Thus, the evidence as a whole strongly suggests that Genesis 1:1 does not contain a genitive clause. Consider the following data: More than 97 percent of genitive clauses and their *regentes* are not separated from their participatory clauses by a *soph passuq*; Genesis 1:1 is.[131] More than 98 percent of genitive clauses and their *regentes* are not separated from their participatory clauses by a clauses-level *waw*;

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begins a sentence and is separated from its participatory clause by a *waw*-consecutive is in Gen 22:4. The Vg does not translate the *waw*-consecutive of this sentence, but the LXX and the targumim do.

[131]This figure also counts the five examples where the genitive clause is separated from the participatory clause to balance the poetic lines. Thus, there is only one prose example (less than 1 percent) that is comparable to Gen 1:1.

Genesis 1:1 is.[132] Exactly 100 percent of genitive clauses and their *regentes* are not separated from their participatory clauses by both a clause-level *waw* and a *soph passuq*; Genesis 1:1 is. Exactly 100 percent of genitive clauses and their *regentes* are not separated from their participatory clauses by a parenthetical clause; Genesis 1:1 is.[133] If Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause, then it is unparalleled in that it has more syntactical separation from the participatory clause than any of the other 210 genitive clauses.[134] The intervening *waw*-consecutive, *soph passuq*, and parenthetical clause of Genesis 1:2 suggest that Genesis 1:1 is not a genitive clause and בְּרֵאשִׁית is not in construct with it. Thus, the syntactical evidence strongly suggests that Genesis 1:1 is an independent main clause, which means the traditional translation is much more congruent with the syntactical evidence.

Conclusion

Once בְּרֵאשִׁית is identified as a relator noun, a better methodology can be established for collecting and analyzing the lexical and grammatical evidences. This chapter has shown that when בְּרֵאשִׁית is compared with other types of relator nouns, the lexical evidence demonstrates that it can be grammatically absolute even though it is lexically relative. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that when בְּרֵאשִׁית is again compared with other types of relator nouns, the grammatical evidence demonstrates that it can be anarthrous even though it is grammatically absolute and definite in meaning. Thus, both the lexical and grammatical evidences suggest that בְּרֵאשִׁית can be in the

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[132]This figure includes Num 23:3; Ps 138:3; and Hos 1:2.

[133]This is of course treating Gen 1:3 as the participatory claues. This statistic does not apply if Gen 1:2 is the participatory clause.

[134]If Gen 1:2 is the participatory clause, then there is no parenthetical clause separating the genitive clause from it. However, in the three examples in which a *waw* separates the genitive clause from the participatory clause, the *waw* is a *waw*-consecutive. Thus, if Gen 1:2 is the participatory clause, it is also without a syntactical example.

absolute state in Genesis 1:1. However, they also suggest that בְּרֵאשִׁית can be in the construct state. Thus, at the lexical and grammatical level both the dependent-clause translation and the traditional translation are equally probable.

Once Genesis 1:1 is defined as a genitive clause, a better methodology can be established for collecting and analyzing the syntactical evidence as well. This chapter has shown that when Genesis 1:1 is compared with other types of genitive clauses, the syntactical evidence demonstrates that it is most likely not a genitive clause. Thus, the syntactical evidence also suggests that בְּרֵאשִׁית is not in the construct state; rather, it is in the absolute state. Though the dependent-clause translation and the traditional translation are equally probable at the lexical and grammatical levels, they are not at the syntactical level. The evidence for the dependent-clause translation breaks down at the syntactical level. Thus, the traditional translation is more faithful to the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical evidences in particular and more faithful to the principles of Classical-Hebrew linguistics in general.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1:1

Introduction

In the debate over the interpretation of Genesis 1:1, the major issue concerns the relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. On the one hand, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation argue that there is no semantic continuity between the two verses. Genesis 1:1 is a title or a summary of the creation chapter. The narrative itself, they argue, does not start until Genesis 1:2, and the first act of creation does not take place until Genesis 1:3. Thus, Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 are almost as detached from one another as the title of a psalm from the psalm itself.[1] On the other hand, proponents of the traditional interpretation argue that there is semantic continuity between the two verses. Genesis 1:1, they argue, narrates the first act of creation, the creation of the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1:2 then is a description of the earth created in 1:1. The narrative then continues with the second act of creation in Genesis 1:3. Thus, Genesis 1:1 shares a close semantic relationship with Genesis 1:2. Again, the central issue between the two interpretations is whether or not there is semantic continuity between 1:1 and 1:2.

Similarly to the discussion on the translation of Genesis 1:1, there are also many different levels at which various proponents of each interpretation argue their positions. Some use lexical evidences. Some use theological and historical evidences.

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[1]N.b. again that Waltke and Barr, summary-statement proponents, also argue that Gen 1:2 temporally *precedes* the time frame of Gen 1:1. Thus, there is also no temporal continuity between the two verses. See Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 60; James Barr, "Was Everything That God Created Really Good?" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggeman*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 58.

Some use evidences from the parallel ancient Near Eastern literature. All of these different types of evidence are valid areas of investigation, but again the most weighty are those focused upon the linguistics of the text, such as the lexical and syntactical evidences. These linguistic evidences have methodological priority since they can determine what the text can or cannot say. For instance, if the traditional interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is linguistically improbable, then even the overwhelming historical evidence loses much of its weight. Thus, though the other types of evidences are deserving of further study and analysis, this chapter will limit itself to only the linguistic evidences involved in interpreting Genesis 1:1.

As also stated in the previous chapter, even the linguistic evidences have a proper methodological order. In this chapter the first analyses will start at the most basic level, the lexical level. One of the central issues at this level is whether the word אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 corresponds in *meaning* to the word אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2. The focus of this discussion is on the meaning of the compound phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ. Another less weighty, but still relevant issue at the lexical level is whether the אֶרֶץ of 1:1 corresponds in *state* to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2. The focus of this discussion is on the meaning of the compound phrase תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ in Genesis 1:2. The final analysis will end at the syntactical level. The central issue at this level is whether or not Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 syntactically relate to one another. In the end this chapter will argue that the traditional interpretation is more faithful to the linguistic data.

The Lexical Level - אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ

One of the strongest evidences favoring semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is the two occurrences of the word אֶרֶץ at the end of 1:1 and the beginning of 1:2. The two identical words literally occur back-to-back in the text. Such close proximity between these two identical words, strongly suggests that they correspond to one another. Such a correspondence then suggests that the two verses correspond to one

another and share a semantic continuity. This is the plainest and simplest reading of the text. However, even though there seems to be a proximal correspondence between the two identical words, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation argue that the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 and the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 do not and cannot correspond to one another in meaning.

Because the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 occurs in the compound phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ, summary-statement proponents raise two main objections against its correspondence in meaning to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2. First, many argue that the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ is a merism, "[a] poetic technique by which a whole is referred to by either its two major parts or two extremities."[2] Since the phrase is a merism, the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 cannot correspond to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 because the אֶרֶץ of 1:1, being compounded with the word שָׁמַיִם, has a different meaning from the word אֶרֶץ in isolation. Waltke, a proponent of the summary-statement interpretation, explains this concept in the following manner:

> Verse 1 is the prologue to the entire narrative. This understanding becomes apparent with a proper understanding of the expression "heaven and earth." Linguists refer to such a construction as a collocation or a syntagm: two or more words that when combined yield a tertiary meaning. Two parts hydrogen combined with one part oxygen produce "water," a very different substance than gases in isolation. *Butterfly* is quite different from *butter* and *fly*, and the "free and easy" (i.e., marked by informality and without restraint) is not the same as either word in isolation. Moreover, the frequently used biblical compound phrase "heaven and earth" is a merism, a statement of opposites, that elsewhere indicates the totality of the organized universe (i.e., "the cosmos").[3]

Since the word pair communicates a "tertiary meaning," then the meaning of the compounded אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 is as unrelated in meaning to the individual אֶרֶץ in 1:2 as the compounded "butter-" in butterfly is to the individual word "butter." Thus, even

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[2]Todd J. Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary for the Study of Biblical Hebrew* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), s.v., "merismus."

[3]Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 179.

though the two words in Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 are identical and occur one right after the other, they do not have the same meaning and cannot correspond to one another.

Second, summary-statement proponents also argue that the phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ refers to the "totality of the organized universe." Since the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 describes a universe that is incomplete and not yet organized, then it cannot correspond with the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 which, combined with שָׁמַיִם, describes a universe that *is* complete and organized. Consider the following quotes from Young and Waltke:

> At the same time the word הָאָרֶץ does not have precisely the same connotation which it bore in verse one. In the first verse it went with the word הַשָּׁמַיִם to form a combination which designates the well-ordered world and universe that we now know. In verse two, however, it depicts the earth as being in an uninhabitable condition.[4]

> If this understanding [of אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ], based on its extensive and unambiguous usage in the creation account itself and elsewhere, is allowed, then Genesis 1:2 cannot be construed as a circumstantial clause. Logic will not allow us to entertain the contradictory notions: God created the organized heavens and earth; the earth was unorganized.[5]

If it is impossible for the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 to correspond to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 in meaning, then the probability that there is semantic continuity between the two verses is less likely, which is favorable to the summary-statement interpretation.[6]

These objections against the proximal correspondence of the two occurrences of the word אֶרֶץ also raise ancillary questions. First, is the merism label appropriate for the compounded word pair אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ in Genesis 1:1? Aside from the characteristics that come with the merism label, are there any other lexical or contextual

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[4]Edward J. Young, "The Interpretation of Genesis 1:2," *Westminster Theological Journal* 23 (1961): 168.

[5]Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Pre-creation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 527 (July 1975): 219.

[6]Oddly enough, Wenham, a proponent of the traditional interpretation, makes a similar argument when he states, "The very different contexts show that it is wrong to identify the sense of ארץ in v[erse] 1 with its sense in v[erse] 2 too precisely." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 15.

indicators suggesting the ancient Hebrews understood the compounded form of the word אֶרֶץ to have such a distinctly different meaning from the word אֶרֶץ in isolation? Second, although it is clearly evident that the ancient Hebrews used the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם to refer to the "organized universe," does the word pair always have this meaning? Are there any indicators which suggest that at times it communicates a different meaning? Answering these questions will help to determine the lexical validity of both the traditional and summary-statement interpretations, and considering the major theological implications of both, these issues demand continued investigation.

Is the Merism Label Appropriate for the Word Pair?

The characteristics of the merism. Although the label of merism is frequently applied to the compounded word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in Genesis 1:1, knowing the characteristics of a merism is important for understanding the implications that come with the label. In his extensive study on the use of the merism in biblical Hebrew, Krašovec summarizes its typical characteristics in the following statement:

> Firstly, merism is the art of expressing a totality by mentioning the parts, usually the two extremes, concerning a given idea, quality or quantity; consequently polar expression is the most usual form of merism. Secondly, merism is substitution for abstract words "all", "every", "always" etc. Thirdly, the mentioned parts have figurative or metaphorical sense; literal interpretation proves to be in many cases totally incongruous. Fourthly, merism should not be confounded with antithesis, for in contrast to merism in antithesis opposed extremes do not express the same aspects of the same idea in its totality, but opposite aspects of the same idea in their mutual exclusion.[7]

Since a merism is a rhetorical device that communicates the whole by naming the parts, it essentially communicates a tertiary[8] meaning: a meaning that is distinct from the

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[7]Jože Krašovec, "Merism - Polar Expression in Biblical Hebrew," *Biblica* 64 (1983): 232. Krašovec's fourth observed characteristic distinguishes the merism from any antithetic parallelism where the word pair would work in opposition instead of in unity. Thus, this characteristic does not further define what a merism is, but rather what it is not and cannot be.

[8]Again, this is the adjective that Waltke uses to describe the new meaning expressed by the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in compound. See Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 179.

meanings of the individual words that comprise the merism. Krašovec does not explicitly state that when a word pair is used in a merism, it takes on a tertiary meaning, but the concept is strongly implied in his observations. Other scholars who have studied or commented on the use of merisms in biblical Hebrew also implicitly describe this characteristic of a tertiary meaning. Honeyman states,

> Merismus, which is a figure of speech akin in some respects to synecdoche, consists in detailing the individual members, or some of them—usually the first and last, or the more prominent—of a series, and thereby indicating either the genus of which those members are species or the abstract quality which characterises the genus and which the species have in common.[9]

Thus, the meaning of a merism is not expressed in the meanings of the individual species, but in the tertiary genus or its abstract quality to which the species belong. Finally, Watson, in his description of the merism, similarly states, "It is the total concept that is important; the components are not significant in isolation. Merismus, then, is an abbreviated way of expressing a totality."[10] Thus, one of the major, and one could say implicit, characteristics of a merism is the tertiary meaning.

The concept of the tertiary meaning in a merism has two major implications for the meanings of the individual words that make up this rhetorical device. First, since a merism takes on a tertiary meaning, the meanings of the individual words then cannot together communicate what the tertiary meaning of the merism does. If the meanings of the individual words could together communicate the same idea that the tertiary meaning communicates, then there would be no need for a tertiary meaning. Second, since the meanings of the individual words cannot communicate the tertiary meaning of the merism, the meanings of the individual words in the merism must be displaced with an

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[9]A. M. Honeyman, "Merismus in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 71 (1952): 13–14.

[10]Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 26 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984), 321.

almost zero value in order to yield to the tertiary meaning expressed by the merism.[11] Without this displacement in the meanings of the individual words, there would be a semantic cacophony within the merism. These two implications can be observed in some of the known merisms of English and Hebrew.

In the English expression "the people come from near and far," the word pair near/far is properly used as a merism since it has all the merismic characteristics that Krašovec observes. First, "near and far" is an expression in which the word pair are two parts of a given idea. The individual words are opposite ends of a spatial spectrum, but together they express the totality of that spectrum. Second, the word pair is used to express the idea of "everywhere." Third, the meanings of the individual words in the word pair cannot together communicate the tertiary meaning of the merism; thus, the tertiary meaning expressed in their collocation displaces their individual meanings. The collocation of the word pair is not communicating the idea that the people come from only near and only far, even though the individual meanings of the words do communicate such a concept. Rather, whatever else is between the spatial spectrum of the near and the far is also included in the new, tertiary meaning that the word pair communicates as a merism. Thus, the expression "the people come from near and far" uses the tertiary concept of a merism to communicate the idea that the people came from everywhere.

In a Hebrew example, the word pair לַיְלָה/יוֹם also functions as a frequent merism. First, the word pair is itself a polar expression and is often used to express the duration ("all the time") of an action within a usually undefined period of time.[12] Second, the compound form of the word pair occurs in parallel with other, singular words that

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[11]This second implication is Krašovec's third observation of the merism.

[12]For the word pair in compound, see Exod 13:21; Lev 8:35; Josh 1:8; 1 Kgs 8:29, 59; 1 Chr 9:33; 2 Chr 6:20; 4:9; Neh 1:6; Ps 1:2. For the word pair in parallel bicola, see Pss 22:3; 42:9; 88:2 (cf. AV, RSV, et al. 88:1); 91:5; 121:6; Isa 21:8; Hos 4:5.

express the meaning of "all", "every", or "always."[13] Third, since the meaning of the compounded word pair can be expressed in parallel with the meaning of other words that express the concept of "all", "every", or "always," the meanings of the individual words are displaced in order to express the tertiary idea of "continuously" or "all the time." Again, the collocation of the words express the tertiary idea, not the individual meanings of the words themselves.[14] Thus, the merism in Nehemiah 1:6, which says, "I am praying before you today, day and night," אָנֹכִי מִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם יוֹמָם וָלַיְלָה, communicates the tertiary idea of "I am praying before you today continuously," אָנֹכִי מִתְפַּלֵּל לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם תָּמִיד.[15] Again, the individual meanings in the word pair לַיְלָה/יוֹם are displaced since they together cannot communicate the same concept as the tertiary meaning of the merism.

As noted before, Waltke and other scholars of the summary-statement interpretation argue that the merism label, along with the implications of the tertiary meaning, should also be applied to the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in Genesis 1:1. Indeed, many of Waltke's statements regarding the word pair are very similar to Krašovec's own observations. Consider the following excerpts:

> Cyrus Gordon noted that pairs of antonyms often mean "everything" or "everyone." For example, in English, the expression "they came great and small" means that everybody came." The Hebrew language is filled with such antonymic pairs called merisms. For example, the psalmist says that the blessed man meditates in God's law "day and night," i.e., "all the time." So here, "the heavens and the earth" are antonyms to designate "everything," and more specifically "the organized universe, the cosmos."[16]
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> Moreover, the frequently used biblical compound phrase "heaven and earth" is a merism, a statement of opposites, that elsewhere indicates the totality of the organized universe (i.e., "the cosmos"). Similarly, the merism "day and night"

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[13] 1 Sam 25:16; Ps 42:4; Isa 34:10; 60:11; Jer 14:17; Lam 2:18.

[14] Even though the compound phrase has these characteristics, it does not always have the same value or meaning as "continuously." In certain instances the parts of the phrase take on a literal meaning, in which case the phrase is not acting as a merism (cf. Gen 1:18; 8:22; Jer 33:20, 25).

[15] Cf. Isa 60:11.

[16] Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 218.

means "all the time," and "summer and winter" means "year round."[17]

These statements mirror Krašovec's first and second observations. Another of Waltke's statements matches Krašovec's third observation in which the meanings of the individual words in a merism are displaced. Consider the following excerpt:

> A merism is a statement of opposites to indicate totality. For instance, "day and night" means "all the time." In such usage the words cannot be understood separately but must be taken as a unity. Just as the English expression "part and parcel" cannot be understood by studying *part* and *parcel* as independent terms, so the merism of the Hebrew words *heavens* (*šāmayim*) and *earth* (*'ereṣ*) cannot be understood by studying the words separately but only by studying the unit. As a unit this refers to the organized universe.[18]

Again, the merism label implies first of all that the meanings of the individual words of the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם cannot communicate the meaning of the "organized universe," and second, their meanings must be displaced with a separate and distinct tertiary meaning. However, conflicting data from the Hebrew Old Testament suggests that when the word pair communicates the meaning of the "organized universe," the individual words of the word pair do not lose their individual meanings.

Conflicting data. There is no doubt that the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם does communicate the idea of the "organized universe." This is especially evident in Exodus 31:17b, which states,

כִּי־שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפַשׁ׃

> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

If the merism label is appropriate for this word pair, then in the contexts in which it functions as a merism, its individual words, שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ, should never be treated as if they have individual meanings because the individual meanings of words in a merism are

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[17]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 179.

[18]Waltke, *Genesis*, 59 n. 18.

displaced. Nevertheless, this is exactly what happens in some contexts.

There are at least two instances in the Hebrew Bible in which the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם precedes a clause or colon in which one or both of the individual words and their meanings are treated individually. One instance is found in the passage of Psalm 115:14-16,[19] which states,

יֹסֵף יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם עֲלֵיכֶם וְעַל־בְּנֵיכֶם׃[14]
בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃[15]
הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי־אָדָם׃[16]

[14]Let the LORD be the adder unto you, unto you and your sons.
[15]Be blessed of the LORD, the maker of the heavens and the earth.
[16](*For* the heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of man.)

In 115:15 the compound form of the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם communicates the meaning of the "organized universe," just as it does in Exodus 31:17. In 115:16 the individual words of the word pair and their individual meanings are being used in contrasting parallelism to describe the individual realms of dominion that the LORD has assigned to Himself and to man. The parallel form of the word pair in 115:16 is not being used as a merism since the individual meanings of the words are retained for the purpose of contrast.[20] However, the individual meanings of שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ in the bicola of 115:16 refer back to and treat שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ in 115:15 as words with individual meanings.[21] If the word pair in 115:15 is

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[19]For an Aramaic example of this phenomenon see Jer 10:11.

[20]Again, Krašovec's fourth characteristic explains that word pairs cannot be merisms if they are being used in antithetic parallelism. See Jože Krašovec, "Merism," 232.

[21]Avishur refers to this textual phenomenon, in which identical word pairs are used together in two differing ways, as "[p]airs in syndetic parataxis[, or compound form,] and parallelism." Yitzhak Avishur, *Stylistic Studies of Word-Pairs in Biblical and Ancient Semitic Literatures*, Alter Orient und Altes Testament 210 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, Germany: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1984), 260. He states, "The simplest and clearest form of integration is the one that has two modes of pairing, where in the first one, the components are paired in syndetic parataxis followed by parallelism, (in succession and proximal one to the other or at times at specific spaced intervals), which have the pair components in parallel cola. This phenomenon occurs both in prose and poetry, with the prose evincing a congruent symmetry, rather than parallelism." Ibid. Along with Ps 115:15-16, he lists many other examples of word pairs acting in this manner.

being used as a merism to communicate the idea of the "organized universe," then it is quite anomalous for the very next verse to treat its individual members as if they had individual meanings. The strict application of the merism label cannot explain this anomaly.

The second instance occurs in the passage of Isaiah 45:18. The word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם acts in a similar manner to that of Psalm 115:15-16. In the Isaiah passage, however, the word pair is not in compound, but is in parallel bicola, another way in which the merism concept is communicated.[22] Indeed, the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם is frequently used in both compound[23] and parallel bicola[24] to communicate the meaning of the "organized universe."[25] The Isaiah passage states,

כִּי כֹה אָמַר־יְהוָה

בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים
יֹצֵר הָאָרֶץ וְעֹשָׂהּ הוּא כֹוֽנְנָהּ
לֹא־תֹהוּ בְרָאָהּ
לָשֶׁבֶת יְצָרָהּ
אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵין עוֹד׃

For thus says the LORD,

"The one who created the Heavens, He is God
The one who formed the earth and made it, He established it
He did not create it formless
He formed it to be inhabited
I am the LORD, and there is no other."

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[22]In fact, the merismic studies of Krašovec, Honeyman, and Watson, all discuss and analyze the merism as a device of poetic parallelism. See Honeyman, "Merismus," 11–18; Jože Krašovec, "Merism," 231–39; Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 321–24.

[23]Gen 14:19, 22; Exod 31:17; Deut 4:26; 30:19; 31:28; 2 Kgs 19:15; 2 Chr 2:11; Pss 115:15; 121:2; 124:8; 134:3; Isa 37:16; 65:17; 66:22; Jer 32:17; Joel 4:16; Hag 2:21.

[24]Ps 102:26; Prov 3:19; Isa 44:24; 48:13; 51:13, 16; Jer 10:12; 51:15; Zech 12:1.

[25]Waltke's argument focuses on the compound form of the word pair. He states, "In all its uses in the Old Testament, this phrase [אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ] functions as a compound referring to the organized universe." Waltke, *Genesis*, 59. However, the argument also extends to the uses of the word pair in parallel bicola since it also communicates the same meaning as the word pair in compound.

In this passage the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם, in parallel bicola, communicates the meaning of the "organized universe." However, both the pronominal suffixes in the second colon and the entirety of the third and fourth cola refer back to and treat the word אֶרֶץ as a word with individual meaning. The context suggests that the word pair is not a merism. However, the meaning that the word pair communicates is the same as that of the compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17, which proponents of the summary-statement interpretation would argue *is* a merism. Thus, the use of the word pair in Isaiah 45:18 also seems to be anomalous to the strict application of the merism label.

Again, if the meanings of the individual words in a merism are displaced by the tertiary meaning, then the individual words should not be treated as words with individual meanings. The evidence from these two verses, however, suggest that the strict application of the merism label to the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם cannot account for the entirety of the data. However, these verses are not the only problematic data for the merism argument. Again, the merism label also implies that the meanings of the individual words in the word pair cannot together communicate the meaning of "organized universe"—otherwise there would be no need for a tertiary meaning. However, a study of the individual words of the word pair suggests that their individual meanings actually can together communicate this "tertiary" meaning.[26]

The meaning communicated by the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם. Before any study of the individual words in the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם can proceed, a more concrete picture

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[26]Waltke argues that since the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם creates a tertiary meaning, any study of its individual words is "erroneous." See Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 218; Waltke, *Genesis*, 59 n. 18; and Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 279. (In this last citation, Waltke does not explicitly state that study of the independent words is not possible; however, he does state that the tertiary meaning of the word pair is separate from the meanings of the individual words in isolation.) Again, if the meanings of the individual words cannot communicate what the word pair in collocation can, there really is no reason to study the words individually. However, a study of the individual words actually helps to explain how and why the word pair can communicate the meaning of "organized universe" even though it may not have some merismic characteristics.

of what the word pair actually communicate is necessary. Without a more literal understanding of this tertiary meaning, it is impossible to determine whether or not the individual words in the word pair can or cannot communicate it. As stated earlier, Waltke argues that the meaning communicated by the compounded form of the word pair is that of the "organized universe." However, the term "universe" is too abstract, and the modern reader's perception of the term is vastly different from that of the ancient's. Furthermore, with such an abstract, undefined meaning, there is no verifiable means of determining whether or not the individual words in the word pair can communicate it.

Two verses from the book of Exodus, however, can help create a more objective and controlled understanding of what the word pair does communicate when it is in compound or parallel bicola. Both are from the book of Exodus, and both use differing vocabulary to communicate the same idea of the "organized universe." The first, which has already been noted, is from Exodus 31:17. Again, it states,.

כִּי־שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שָׁבַת וַיִּנָּפַשׁ׃

> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.

In this verse the compounded word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם is used to look back to and summarize the creation account in Genesis 1:1. The word pair clearly communicates the same meaning that summary-statement proponents would apply to the compounded word pair in Genesis 1:1. The second verse is the almost parallel passage of Exodus 20:11. It states,

כִּי שֵׁשֶׁת־יָמִים עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם
וַיָּנַח בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי

> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the seas and all that is in them, and he rested on the seventh day.

In this verse the tripartite phrase אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם is also used to look back to and summarize the creation account in Genesis 1:1. It too communicates the same meaning that is communicated in Exodus 31:17. However, in Exodus 20:11 all the individual members of the tripartite phrase retain their individual

meanings and communicate the concept of the "organized universe" in a more literal manner.

In Exodus 20:11 the individual meanings of the words in the tripartite together describe the ancient Hebrews' conception of the "organized universe" as a set of containers and their contents.[27] However, in Exodus 20:11 the meanings of the individual words אֶרֶץ and שָׁמַיִם only refer to the containers of the "organized universe" and not the contents;[28] whereas, the meaning of the compounded word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in Exodus 31:17 refers to both the containers *and* their contents. Thus, if the individual meanings of the word pair can communicate the meaning of "organized universe," they must include the concepts of both the containers and their contents individually.

The cosmological identities of the word אֶרֶץ. In Exodus 20:11, the literal meaning of the word אֶרֶץ is used in the tripartite phrase to describe a cosmological container separate and distinct from its own contents and from the other cosmological containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the יָם. In this verse the cosmological range of the word אֶרֶץ is limited to the container of the "dry land", יַבָּשָׁה, which is in contradistinction to the container of the "sea", יָם.[29] The יָם is a container for such things as "fish", דָּג, and "sea

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[27]The use of the tripartite phrase in Neh 9:6 demonstrates that the meanings of the words in the tripartite phrase of Exod 20:11 must be understood literally. Furthermore, it confirms the Hebrews' conception of the universe as a set of containers and their contents. The verse states,

> אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדֶּךָ אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיַּמִּים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כֻּלָּם וּצְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים׃
>
> You are He. You alone are LORD. You made the heavens, the heavens of the heavens and all their hosts, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the host of the heavens worship you.

Unlike the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם, the tripartite phrase never communicates the concept of the whole of creation without the mention of the contents that fill the containers. If the tripartite phrase does not mention the contents, then the individual members of the phrase only refer to the literal containers (cf. Ps 135:6).

[28]The phrase וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם refers to the contents of these containers.

[29]See also Ps 95:5; Jonah 1:9; and Hag 2:6 for other examples of this antithesis at the cosmological level. Ottoson adds, "Along with the bipartite division, there is also a tripartite division of the

monsters", תַּנִּין,[30] while the אֶרֶץ, or יַבָּשָׁה, is a container for "man", אָדָם and the "animal of the field", חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה. Thus, the ancient Hebrews' conception of the world included distinctions between differing cosmological containers and distinctions between these containers and their contents. Consider the following verses:

Genesis 1:10a[31]

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים לַיַּבָּשָׁה אֶרֶץ וּלְמִקְוֵה הַמַּיִם קָרָא יַמִּים

And God called the dry land "earth", and the gathering of the waters He called "sea".

Genesis 1:22

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים לֵאמֹר פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הַמַּיִם בַּיַּמִּים וְהָעוֹף יִרֶב בָּאָרֶץ׃

And God blessed them saying, "Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the waters of the sea, but let the birds multiply on the earth."

Genesis 1:28

וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁהָ
וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל־חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל־הָאָרֶץ׃

And God blessed them, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, and every animal that creeps upon the earth

Genesis 9:2a

וּמוֹרַאֲכֶם וְחִתְּכֶם יִהְיֶה עַל כָּל־חַיַּת הָאָרֶץ וְעַל כָּל־עוֹף הַשָּׁמָיִם בְּכֹל
אֲשֶׁר תִּרְמֹשׂ הָאֲדָמָה וּבְכָל־דְּגֵי הַיָּם

But your fear and your terror will be upon every animal of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, and in everything which will creep on the ground and in all the fish of the sea.

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universe into heaven, earth, and sea (water) in the OT. In Gen 1:10, *'erets* is defined as "the dry land," and forms the antithesis to the gathering together of the water, i.e., to the sea." Ottosson, "אֶרֶץ (*'erets*)," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis. 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 1:397.

[30]Gen 1:21; Job 7:12; Ps 74:13; Isa 27:1; Ezek 32:2.

[31]Cf. Jonah 1:9; Ps 95:5.

Nehemiah 9:6

אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדֶּךָ אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר
עָלֶיהָ הַיַּמִּים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כֻּלָּם וּצְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים:

You are He. You alone are LORD. You made the heavens, the heavens of the heavens and all their hosts, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the host of the heavens bow down to you.

In nearly every cited passage there is both a clear distinction between the container of the אֶרֶץ and the other cosmological containers and a clear distinction between the אֶרֶץ and its contents. Only in Genesis 1:10 is there no distinction between the container and the contents since in the context of the passage the contents are not yet created.

Even though the word אֶרֶץ, in a limited sense, can refer to the container of the יַבָּשָׁה, in contradistinction to the container of the יָם, it can also refer to a much larger cosmological container. The word אֶרֶץ also describes a cosmological container that encompasses all the realms, or containers, that are under the container of the שָׁמַיִם. Thus, the cosmological range of the word אֶרֶץ can also encompass both the container of the יַבָּשָׁה and the container of the יָם. In this sense, the word אֶרֶץ functions very much like the English word "earth" when referring to Planet Earth.[32] Consider the following verses:

Genesis 1:2

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם:

Now the earth was formless and void with darkness upon the face of the deep and the Spirit of God hovering above the surface of the waters.

Psalm 104:5-6

יָסַד־אֶרֶץ עַל־מְכוֹנֶיהָ בַּל־תִּמּוֹט עוֹלָם וָעֶד: 5
תְּהוֹם כַּלְבּוּשׁ כִּסִּיתָו עַל־הָרִים יַעַמְדוּ־מָיִם: 6

[5]He established the earth upon its foundations, it will not be moved forever.

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[32]Harrison states, "While used in most of the senses of *'adāmâ 'ereṣ* often indicated the earth as a planet rather than as soil or ground." Roland K. Harrison, "Earth," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 2:3. This description does not mean that the ancient Hebrews readers had the same conception of the planet as that of the modern reader. It simply means that their word for earth, אֶרֶץ, like the English word "earth," can encompass more than just *terra firma*.

[6]He has covered it with the deep like a garment, the waters were standing above the mountains.[33]

Psalm 148:7[34]

הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ תַּנִּינִים וְכָל־תְּהֹמוֹת׃

Praise the LORD from the earth, *you* sea monsters and all depths.

Amos 9:6b

הַקּוֹרֵא לְמֵי־הַיָּם וַיִּשְׁפְּכֵם עַל־פְּנֵי הָאָרֶץ יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ׃

The One who calls the waters of the sea and pours them out upon the surface of the earth, the LORD is his name.

By describing both the יָם and the תְּהוֹם, "deep," as parts of the container of the אֶרֶץ, these passages demonstrate this larger cosmological dimension of the word. Other studies on the ancient Hebrews' conception of the אֶרֶץ also recognize this larger, cosmological dimension of the word. For instance, Stadelmann states,

> What we designate "the universe," they [the Hebrews] regarded as two separate entities:
>
> > The heavens are the heaven of the Lord,
> > But the earth has he given to mankind.
>
> By earth[, אֶרֶץ,] here is to be understood everything under the heavens, including the seas:
>
> > Praise the Lord from the earth;
> > Sea-monsters and all the deeps.[35]

Janzen also states,

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[33]For an explanation of the difference in gender between the pronominal suffix and its antecedent, see Amos Hakham, *Psalm 101–150*, vol. 3 of *Psalms*, The Koschitzky ed., The Bible with the Jerusalem Commentary (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 2003), 38 n. 8b. See also the previous discusion of this verse in Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

[34]The inclusion of the sea monsters, תַּנִּין, (cf. Gen 1:21) as dwellers of the אֶרֶץ demonstrates that in a larger cosmological sense, the אֶרֶץ is a container for both the יָם and its contents.

[35]Luis I. J. Stadelmann, *The Hebrew Conception of the World*, Analecta Biblica 39 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 3. Stadelmann also states, "The earth was regarded as a vast plain, occupied partly by the sea, partly by continents studded with mountains, furrowed by rivers, and dotted with lakes." Ibid., 126.

> Somewhat ambivalent in this structure [of the universe] is the place of the sea(s) or water(s), the deep, and the underworld. The seas can be spoken of as familiar reality, in which the fish and other water creatures swarm (Gen 1:20, 22, 26, etc.) and on which humans move in ships (Ps 104:25-26; 107:23; Prov 30:19; Ezek 27:9). As such, the sea forms part of the earth, i.e., the flat surface below juxtaposed to the heavens above.[36]

Thus, when used to make cosmological references, the word אֶרֶץ can have two meanings. It can refer to the cosmological container of only the יַבָּשָׁה, or it can refer to the larger container that encompasses both the יַבָּשָׁה and the יָם. Ottosson writes,

> The Heb. *'erets* combines the same nuances of meaning as the related words discussed above [in the etymology section]: "earth" in the cosmic sense as an antithesis to "heaven," "land" in antithesis to "sea," . . . .[37]

Schmid also writes, "(a) *ʾereṣ* indicates (1) cosmologically: the earth (in contrast to heaven) and the dry land (in contrast to the waters) . . . ."[38]

When the larger cosmological dimension of the word is communicated, the container of the אֶרֶץ is no longer in contradistinction to the container of the sea, יָם, since the יָם is now a part of this larger container. Rather, the container of the אֶרֶץ is in contradistinction to the container of the שָׁמַיִם. Thus, in a literal sense, the שָׁמַיִם are a container for all the contents above, and the אֶרֶץ is a container for all the contents below. Rather than being a container for just man and beast, the אֶרֶץ is also a container for the fish, the sea monsters, and everything else that can be classified as under the שָׁמַיִם.

Again, the word אֶרֶץ in Exodus 20:11 is used literally in a tripartite phrase that communicates the same meaning that the compounded word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם communicates in Exodus 31:17. Since the word can also communicate the idea of the larger cosmological container that encompasses the contents of the יַבָּשָׁה and the יָם, then

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[36]W. Janzen, "Earth," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:246.

[37]Ottosson, "אֶרֶץ (*'erets*)," 1:393.

[38]H. H. Schmid, "אֶרֶץ *'ereṣ* earth, land," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle. 3 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1:173.

the tripartite phrase אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֶת־הַיָּם וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם could be replaced with the bipartite phrase אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּם. The two words of the bipartite phrase then would still retain their individual meanings, and the phrase would still communicate the same meaning as that of the compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17.[39]

However, even though the word אֶרֶץ can describe the larger cosmological container that is in contradistinction to the שָׁמַיִם, there is still a distinction between it and its contents, much like there is a distinction between the smaller container of the יַבָּשָׁה and its contents. This distinction is shown in the following passages.

Deuteronomy 10:14

הֶן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ׃

Behold, to the LORD your God belong the heaven and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that is in it.

Psalm 104:24[40]

מָה־רַבּוּ מַעֲשֶׂיךָ יְהוָה כֻּלָּם בְּחָכְמָה עָשִׂיתָ מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנֶךָ׃

How great are your works, LORD. You made all of them in your wisdom; the earth is full of your possessions.

Psalm 148:7[41]

הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ תַּנִּינִים וְכָל־תְּהֹמוֹת׃

Praise the LORD from the earth, *you* sea monsters and all depths.

Isaiah 34:1b

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[39]The bipartite phrases in Gen 2:1 and Jer 51:48 communicate the same meaning that the word pair in Exod 30:17 communicates; however, the words of the bipartite phrase retain their individual literal meanings.

[40]The context of the chapter discusses the LORD's creation of the אֶרֶץ, the larger cosmological container, and his dealings with it. The following verses, 25-26, talk about the יָם and its creatures making them apart of all the creatures of the אֶרֶץ that are in the LORD's care (104:27-30).

[41]The container of the אֶרֶץ is depicted first, but its contents are distinctly described in verses 7-12.

תִּשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ וּמְלֹאָהּ תֵּבֵל וְכָל־צֶאֱצָאֶיהָ׃

Let the earth and all its fullness hear, the world and all its produce

Micah 1:2a

שִׁמְעוּ עַמִּים כֻּלָּם הַקְשִׁיבִי אֶרֶץ וּמְלֹאָהּ

Hear, nations, all of you. Listen, earth and its fullness.

In these passages the distinction between container and contents is maintained even when the word אֶרֶץ refers to the larger cosmological container of all that is under the שָׁמַיִם.

The word אֶרֶץ, however, can also express another cosmological meaning. There are other instances in the Hebrew Old Testament in which there is no distinction between the container and the contents of the אֶרֶץ. In these instances the word אֶרֶץ communicates the meaning of both.[42]

Genesis 6:11

וַתִּשָּׁחֵת הָאָרֶץ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים וַתִּמָּלֵא הָאָרֶץ חָמָס׃

Now the earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

Exodus 19:5b

וְהְיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃

And you will be my possession from all the peoples, for the all the earth is mine.

Psalm 89:12

לְךָ שָׁמַיִם אַף־לְךָ אָרֶץ תֵּבֵל וּמְלֹאָהּ אַתָּה יְסַדְתָּם׃

The heavens are yours. Moreover the earth is yours, the world and its fullness. You have established them.

Psalm 115: 15-16

[15]בְּרוּכִים אַתֶּם לַיהוָה עֹשֵׂה שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ׃
[16]הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי־אָדָם׃

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[42]Cf. BDB, s.v. "אֶרֶץ," which has under definition 1.c., "*earth*=inhabitants of earth."

> [15]Be blessed of the LORD, the maker of the heavens and the earth.
> [16](*For* the heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of man.)

Isaiah 54:5b

וְהָיִיתֶם לִי סְגֻלָּה מִכָּל־הָעַמִּים כִּי־לִי כָּל־הָאָרֶץ׃

> And you will be my possession from all the peoples, for the all the earth is mine.

Other scholars also recognize this added cosmological dimension of the word.

Stadelmann states,

> Since the concept of an external world seems to be a Greek abstraction, unknown, at all events, to the Semites, it is not surprising that the Bible does not distinguish container from contents, or, conversely, the living from its environment. Thus, for example, space never appears as an inert, lifeless receptacle; it is the sea where fish swim, the ground on which beasts tread, the land belonging to such and such people, the heavens where the winds are stored, the snow and hail are kept.[43]

Schimd also states,

> To be sure, the OT is not concerned with the earth as part of the cosmos so much as with that which fills the earth (*ʾereṣ ûmᵉlōʾāh*, Deut 33:16; Isa 34:1; Jer 8:16, etc.), its inhabitants (Isa 24:1, 5f., 17; Jer 25:29f.; Psa 33:14, etc.), peoples (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; Deut 28:10, etc.), kingdoms (Deut 28:25; 2 Kgs 19:15, etc.), and the like. Thus the term "earth" in some passages can indicate—as in other languages—both the earth and its inhabitants (Gen 6:11, etc.).[44]

Thus, if the word אֶרֶץ can communicate the meaning of both container and contents, then by itself, it can refer to an entire half of all that is said to be created in Exodus 20:11, and as a consequence half of all that is said to be created in Exodus 31:17. In other words, אֶרֶץ can refer to one half of the "organized universe."

The cosmological identities of the word שָׁמַיִם. Much like the word אֶרֶץ, the word שָׁמַיִם also communicates the idea of a cosmological container separate and distinct from its contents. In many passages the word is depicted as a container for the host of the heavens, צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם, such as the sun, שֶׁמֶשׁ, moon יָרֵחַ, stars כּוֹכָבִים, and the

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[43]Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 2.

[44]Schmid, "אֶרֶץ," 1:175.

angels/messengers, מַלְאָכִים.[45] Consider the following examples:

Nehemiah 9:6

אַתָּה־הוּא יְהוָה לְבַדֶּךָ אַתָּה עָשִׂיתָ אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם שְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר עָלֶיהָ הַיַּמִּים וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם וְאַתָּה מְחַיֶּה אֶת־כֻּלָּם וּצְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם לְךָ מִשְׁתַּחֲוִים׃

You are He. You alone are LORD. You made the heavens, the heavens of the heavens and all their hosts, the earth and all that is upon it, the seas and all that is in them. You give life to all of them, and the host of the heavens worships you.

Psalm 33:6

בִּדְבַר יְהוָה שָׁמַיִם נַעֲשׂוּ וּבְרוּחַ פִּיו כָּל־צְבָאָם׃

By the word of the LORD were the heavens made and by the breath of His mouth all their hosts

Psalm 148:1[46]

הַלְלוּ יָהּ הַלְלוּ אֶת־יְהוָה מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם הַלְלוּהוּ בַּמְּרוֹמִים׃

Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD from the heavens! Praise Him from the heights!

Isaiah 34:4

וְנָמַקּוּ כָּל־צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנָגֹלּוּ כַסֵּפֶר הַשָּׁמָיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם יִבּוֹל כִּנְבֹל עָלֶה מִגָּפֶן וּכְנֹבֶלֶת מִתְאֵנָה׃

All the host of the heavens will decay, and the heavens will be rolled up as a scroll. And all their hosts will droop as a drooping leaf from a vine as a drooping fig tree.

Isaiah 45:12

אָנֹכִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶרֶץ וְאָדָם עָלֶיהָ בָּרָאתִי אֲנִי יָדַי נָטוּ שָׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם צִוִּיתִי׃

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[45]For more uses of the phrase צְבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם and its relation to the sun, moon, stars, and angels, see Deut 4:19; 17:3; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Kgs 17:16; 21:3, 5; 23:4, 5; 2 Chr 18:18; 33:3, 5; Neh 9:6; Ps 33:6; Isa 34:4; 45:12; Jer 8:2; 19:13; 33:22; Dan 8:10; Zeph 1:5. See also Tsumura's article which includes all of these as the inhabitants of the heavens. David Toshio Tsumura, "שָׁמַיִם," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 4:162–63.

[46]The contents of the שָׁמַיִם are described in verses 1-6 marking a clear distinction between container and contents.

> I made the earth and I created man upon it. I, with my hand, stretched out the heavens and commanded all their hosts.

Jeremiah 2:12

שֹׁמּוּ שָׁמַיִם עַל־זֹאת וְשַׂעֲרוּ חָרְבוּ מְאֹד נְאֻם־יְהוָה׃

> "Be desolate, heavens, concerning this. Bristle with horror and be wasted," declares the LORD.

In all of these passages there is a clear distinction between container and contents.

Now just as the word אֶרֶץ can refer to the smaller container of the 'dry land," יַבָּשָׁה, which is a part of the larger cosmological אֶרֶץ, so too the word שָׁמַיִם can refer to the smaller container of the "firmament," רָקִיעַ, which also seems to be only a part of a larger cosmological שָׁמַיִם. Unfortunately, since ancient Hebrews were incapable of interacting with the שָׁמַיִם, there is not as much data regarding the details of its physical makeup. Most word studies, however, do agree that with the word שָׁמַיִם there is some kind of semantic distinction between the realm of the רָקִיעַ, the phenomenological sky, which contains the sun, moon, and stars, and the realm of the מְכוֹן שֶׁבֶת, God's abode,[47] which contains the angels/messengers and anything else that is above the רָקִיעַ.[48] However, as Bartelmus has noted, when the word שָׁמַיִם is used, it can be very difficult to distinguish which of the two realms is implied in the context of a passage.[49] Nevertheless, in the Hebrew Old Testament the word שָׁמַיִם also seems to refer to a single,

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[47]This is the phrase that is most frequently used to refer to God's dwelling place. See 1 Kgs 8:39, 43, 49; 2 Chr 6:30, 33, 39. However, the phrase מְעוֹן קָדְשׁ can also refer to His dwelling place. See Deut 26:15; 2 Chr 30:27; Ps 68:5; Jer 25:30.

[48]See BDB and *HALOT*, s.v. "שָׁמַיִם." See also Carmen Blacker and Michael Loewe, eds., *Ancient Cosmologies* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1975), 70; Bartelmus, "שָׁמַיִם (*šāmayim*)," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis. 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 15:223; Hermann J. Austel, "שָׁמַיִם (*shāmayim*) *heaven, heavens, sky*," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:2407; Tsumura, "שָׁמַיִם," 4:160.

[49]Bartelmus, "שָׁמַיִם (*šāmayim*)," 226.

overall cosmological container, that encompasses both the containers of the רָקִיעַ and the מְכוֹן שֶׁבֶת.[50] Again, this lexical phenomenon is much like the meaning of the word אֶרֶץ, which also encompasses both of the realms of the יַבָּשָׁה, and the יָם. Thus, just as the אֶרֶץ can be a container for all the contents that exist below the שָׁמַיִם, the שָׁמַיִם can be a container for all the contents that exist above the אֶרֶץ, including the contents that exist above the רָקִיעַ. However, these lexical similarities between the two words do not end here.

Just as there are instances in which there is no distinction between the container and the contents of the אֶרֶץ, there are also instances in which there is no distinction between the container and the contents of the שָׁמַיִם. Consider the following verses:[51]

1 Chronicles 16:26

כִּֽי כָל־אֱלֹהֵ֣י הָעַמִּ֗ים אֱלִילִים֙ וַיהוָ֣ה שָׁמַ֔יִם עָשָֽׂה׃

For all the gods of the peoples are worthless, but the LORD made the heavens

Psalm 8:4

כִּֽי־אֶרְאֶ֣ה שָׁמֶ֭יךָ מַעֲשֵׂ֣י אֶצְבְּעֹתֶ֑יךָ יָרֵ֥חַ וְכוֹכָבִ֗ים אֲשֶׁ֥ר כּוֹנָֽנְתָּה׃

When I see your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon, and the stars which you established,

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[50]N.b. that the word שָׁמַיִם encompasses both these realms in Ps 148:1-6. Other scholars also recognize this all-inclusive nature of the word. Stadelmann states, "All these luminaries are said to be located in the expanse of the 'firmament,' which seems to be included in the general concept of 'heaven.' The term *šmym* (heaven) designates the space above the earth, including the atmosphere, the region of the clouds, the heavenly vault, the firmament, and that which exists above the firmament." Stadelmann, *Hebrew Conception*, 180. Reddish states, "Whereas the firmament referred specifically to the canopy covering the earth, heaven often had a broader meaning, referring to all that was above the earth, including the firmament." Mitchell G. Reddish, "Heaven," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:90. Finally Muller states, "The term heavens refers to all that is above the earth; the air and the clouds, the firmament, and the spaces above the firmament." R. A. Muller, "World," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:1113.

[51]Some of the examples most likely do refer to the smaller שָׁמַיִם, the רָקִיעַ, rather than the larger, all-encompassing שָׁמַיִם (cf. Ps 19:2), but such examples still demonstrate that the word שָׁמַיִם does function like the word אֶרֶץ in that it can refer to both container and its contents.

Psalm 19:2

הַשָּׁמַיִם מְסַפְּרִים כְּבוֹד־אֵל וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו מַגִּיד הָרָקִיעַ׃

The heavens recount the glory of God, and the firmament declares the works of His hands.

Psalm 136:5

לְעֹשֵׂה הַשָּׁמַיִם בִּתְבוּנָה כִּי לְעוֹלָם חַסְדּוֹ׃

To the One who made the heavens with understanding, for his mercy is forever.

Psalm 115:16

הַשָּׁמַיִם שָׁמַיִם לַיהוָה וְהָאָרֶץ נָתַן לִבְנֵי־אָדָם׃

(*For* the heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of man.)

In some of these passages the word שָׁמַיִם may only refer to the רָקִיעַ or the מְכוֹן שֶׁבֶת; nevertheless, if the meaning of the word שָׁמַיִם can include both the container and the contents when referring to these smaller containers, it is logical to assume that it can have this meaning when referring to the larger cosmological container (cf. 1 Chr 16:26; Ps 115:16; Ps 136:5) especially considering that its normal antonym אֶרֶץ functions in the same manner.

Therefore, just as the word אֶרֶץ can refer to the container and the contents of all that is below the שָׁמַיִם, it seems as if the word שָׁמַיִם can also refer to the container and the contents of all that is above the אֶרֶץ. Thus, the word שָׁמַיִם, by itself, can refer to the other half of all that is said to be created in Exodus 20:11, and as a consequence all that is said to be created in Exodus 31:17. In other words, it can refer to the other half of the "organized universe." If the individual words of the word pair can truly communicate these meanings, then the characteristic tertiary meaning is unnecessary. The individual meanings that can be applied to the words אֶרֶץ and שָׁמַיִם, when they are in compound or parallel bicola may together refer to the "organized universe." This understanding of the word pair makes better sense of the previously mentioned data that conflicts with the strict application of the merism label. It also makes better sense of the following data,

which also conflicts with the merism label.

More conflicting data. There are also at least two passages in which one individual word of the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם seems to refer to the container and its contents, while the other seems to refer to just the container. In all of these passages, however, the meaning communicated by the clause or cola in which the word pair occurs is that of the "organized universe." In a sense, if the word pair is a merism, then these passages only contain half of it. The first is from Deuteronomy 10:14, which states,

הֶן לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ הַשָּׁמַיִם וּשְׁמֵי הַשָּׁמָיִם הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ׃

> Behold, to the LORD our God belong the heavens and the heavens of the heavens, the earth and all that is in it.

In this verse the word שָׁמַיִם refers to the cosmological container and its contents, but the word אֶרֶץ only refers to the container. The phrase וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ refers to the contents of the אֶרֶץ. Nevertheless, the meaning communicated by the word שָׁמַיִם and the phrase הָאָרֶץ וְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ is that of the "organized universe." However, it seems that in this verse only half of the merism is being used, while the other half is not acting like the other component of a merism. Nevertheless, the meaning communicated is the same as that of the compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17: the "organized universe." Unfortunately the strict application of the merism label cannot account for this anomalous piece of data, but according to the previous discussion, the data fits perfectly.

The second passage is from Isaiah 42:5,[52] which also states,

כֹּה־אָמַר הָאֵל יְהוָה
בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם וְנֹטֵיהֶם
רֹקַע הָאָרֶץ וְצֶאֱצָאֶיהָ
נֹתֵן נְשָׁמָה לָעָם עָלֶיהָ
וְרוּחַ לַהֹלְכִים בָּהּ׃

Thus says the God, the LORD,

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[52]See also Jer 10:12 and 51:15 where the next verses (10:13 and 51:16) seem to refer back to the individual words of the word pair.

who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and its offspring,
who gives breath to the people upon it,
and spirit to those who walk upon it,

In this passage the word שָׁמַיִם also refers to the container and the contents; whereas, the word אֶרֶץ only refers to the container, and the word וְצֶאֱצָאֶיהָ refers to its contents. Furthermore, the last two cola of the verse treat the word אֶרֶץ as if it had an individual, literal meaning. Nevertheless, the meaning communicated by the individual word שָׁמַיִם and the phrase הָאָרֶץ וְצֶאֱצָאֶיהָ is that of the "organized universe," the same meaning communicated by the compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17. These two passages further demonstrate that the strict application of the merism label to the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם cannot account for the entirety of the data. However, by recognizing that the individual words of the word pair can communicate the meaning of "organized universe," the entirety of the data can be accounted for and properly explained. Should then the merism label be dropped?

The verdict on the merism label. If the data from the Hebrew Old Testament shows that the individual words of the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם can retain their individual meanings when they are in compound or parallel bicola, is the word pair then really a merism? Furthermore, if the data shows that the meanings of the individual words can together communicate the concept of the "organized universe," is the word pair then really a merism? The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם is a polar expression that does indicate a totality, which is a common characteristic of merisms. On the other hand, as the evidence has shown, the individual words of the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם together make up the that totality. They are the most prominent parts of the whole because they are the two halves that comprise it. This phenomenon explains the conflicting data. Thus, in one sense the word pair is different from most merisms. This difference, however, should not disqualify the word pair from

being labeled as a merism, for nearly every study on the merism includes this word pair as an example.[53] However, based upon the evidence and the uniqueness of this word pair, summary-statement proponents should not use the merism label to argue that the compounded אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 cannot correspond to the isolated אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2. The close proximity of the two identical words suggests that they do correspond to one another, and whether they actually do or do not has nothing to do with the merism label.

Does the Word Pair Always Communicate this Meaning?

Though the preceding investigation demonstrates that the merism label cannot prevent traditional proponents from arguing that the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 corresponds with the אֶרֶץ of 1:2, the evidence still suggests that the word pair does refer to the "organized universe." Waltke even argues that the word pair has this meaning in all its uses.[54] According to the traditional interpretation, the word pair cannot have this meaning because the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2, which refers back to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1, clearly does not describe a universe that is in any way organized or complete. The previous discussion, however, suggests that when the word pair occurs in collocation, it may have another meaning as well.

The previous study of the individual words שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ demonstrates that individually they can refer to either the container and its contents or to the larger cosmological container alone. The former explains how the individual meanings of the two words can together communicate the idea of the "organized universe." However, if

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[53]N.b. again Murphy's short definition which describes a merism as, "A poetic technique by which a whole is referred to by either its two major parts or two extremities. Thus, 'heavens and earth' refers to the entire cosmos, and 'mountains and valleys' refers to the total terrain." Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary*, s.v., "merismus.".

[54]Waltke, *Genesis*, 59 "In *all* [(emphasis mine)] its uses in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 2:1, 4; Deut. 3:24; Isa. 65:17; Jer. 23:24), this phrase functions as a compound referring to the organized universe." As noted earlier, Waltke limits his claim to the use of the word pair in compound. However, previous discussion showed that it can also extend to the word pair in parallel bicola.

the two words by themselves can refer to either the container or both the container and its contents, then it is possible that the two words maintain these same aspects even when they are in collocation. In other words, there should be examples where the word pair in compound or parallel bicola only refers to the containers and not to both the containers and the contents.

Not surprisingly, the word pair actually does act in this manner when it is in collocation, and there are three ways in which it does so. First, like the tripartite phrase in Exodus 20:11, the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם can be used in a bipartite phrase where the meanings of the words שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ only refer to the all-encompassing cosmological containers, but not the contents. Consider the following examples:

Genesis 2:1

וַיְכֻלּוּ הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ וְכָל־צְבָאָם׃

And God completed the heavens and the earth and all their hosts.

Jeremiah 51:48a

וְרִנְּנוּ עַל־בָּבֶל שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ וְכֹל אֲשֶׁר בָּהֶם

Shout over Babylon, heavens and earth and all that is in them.

In these examples the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם only refers to the cosmological containers. Thus, it does not communicate the same meaning that the word pair communicates in Exodus 31:17. Surprisingly, even Waltke agrees with this assessment in his comments on Genesis 2:1. He states,

> 1. **the heavens and the earth were completed.** The concluding summary statement [in Genesis 2:1] underscores that the creator has perfectly executed his will with regard to the first triad[, the first three days of creation].
> **the vast array.** This refers to the second triad[, the second three days].[55]
>
> The summary statement in 2:1 is a janus, functioning both as an inclusio (an envelope) with verse 1:1 and introducing the epilogue. Here "the heavens and the earth" refers to the first three days of creation that feature the essential spheres of the cosmos. "All their vast array" refers to the manifold forms of creation housed in

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[55]Waltke, *Genesis*, 67.

> these spheres, such as luminaries in the heavens, birds in the sky, fish in the sea, and "creepy-crawlies," animals, and human beings on the land.[56]

In these citations, Waltke acknowledges two things. First, he acknowledges that there is a distinction between container and contents; although, he uses the terms "spheres" and "inhabitants."[57] Second, Waltke also acknowledges this distinction exists in Genesis 2:1 where the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם does not refer to the containers and the contents, the "organized universe," but to the containers alone. Thus, even Waltke applies a different meaning to the word pair in Genesis 2:1 than he applies to the word pair in Genesis 1:1.

Second, in Isaiah 45:12 the word pair is used in parallel bicola; however, the word pair only refers to the cosmological containers and not their contents.

Isaiah 45:12

אָנֹכִי עָשִׂיתִי אֶרֶץ וְאָדָם עָלֶיהָ בָּרָאתִי
אֲנִי יָדַי נָטוּ שָׁמַיִם וְכָל־צְבָאָם צִוִּיתִי׃

> I myself made the earth, and I created man upon it.
> I with my hands stretched out the heavens, and commanded all their host.

Thus, again the word pair does *not* communicate the same meaning that is does in Psalm 102:26; Proverbs 3:19; Isaiah 44:24; 48:13; 51:13, 16; Jeremiah 10:12; 51:15; and Zechariah 12:1, where the word pair is used in parallel bicola to communicate the same meaning as the compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17. Rather, the word pair in Isaiah 45:12 communicates the same meaning as the compounded word pair in Genesis 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:48. It only refers to the containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ.

Third, in other instances in which the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם is governed by a preposition, the word pair again only refers to the containers and not the contents. Consider the following examples:

2 Samuel 18:9b

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[56]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 186.

[57]Waltke refers to the "inhabitants in the second triad" in a subtitle. See ibid., 186.

וַיֶּחֱזַק רֹאשׁוֹ בָּאֵלָה וַיֻּתַּן בֵּין הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבֵין הָאָרֶץ וְהַפֶּרֶד אֲשֶׁר־תַּחְתָּיו עָבָר׃

And his head was held strong in the oak, and he was left between the heavens and the earth, while his mule which was under him passed on.

1 Kings 8:23b[58]

וַיֹּאמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין־כָּמוֹךָ אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת

And he said, "LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in the heavens above and upon the earth beneath."

2 Chronicles 6:14[59]

וַיֹּאמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵין־כָּמוֹךָ אֱלֹהִים בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ

And he said, "LORD, God of Israel, there is no god like you in the heavens and the earth."

In the first example from 2 Samuel 18:9, the word pair is in compound and is governed by the same preposition, בֵּין. However, the individual words of the word pair clearly refer to only the cosmological containers of the heavens and the earth. The last two examples are from the parallel accounts of Solomon's prayer at the dedication ceremony of the temple. The phrase בַּשָּׁמַיִם מִמַּעַל וְעַל־הָאָרֶץ מִתָּחַת used in 1 Kings 8:23 is rendered as בַּשָּׁמַיִם וּבָאָרֶץ in 2 Chronicles 6:14. The only difference between the two is that the words of the phrase in 1 Kings 8:23 are governed by different prepositions and are not quite in compound. However, the word pair in 1 Kings 8:23 is governed by the same preposition, בְּ, and clearly refers to only the cosmological containers of the heavens and the earth, and not the contents. This suggests that the compounded word pair in the parallel account of 2 Chronicles 6:14 shares the same meaning with the longer phrase in 1 Kings 8:2, which again only refers to the containers. Thus, the compounded word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in 2 Samuel 18:9 and 2 Chronicles 6:14 does not have the same meaning as the

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[58]Cf. Deut 4:39; Josh 2:11.

[59]Cf. Deut 3:24; 1 Chr 29:11; Ps 113:6.

compounded word pair in Exodus 31:17. Rather, the word pair of these passages has the same meaning as the compounded word pair in Genesis 2:1 and Jeremiah 51:48, which only refers to the cosmological containers.[60] The word pair in collocation predictably varies in meaning in the same manner in which the words do individually. Thus, it is entirely possible that the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם in Genesis 1:1 can refer to the creation of only the all-encompassing, cosmological containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ.[61]

Lexical Conclusion

Based upon the preceding analysis, summary-statement proponents cannot argue that it is impossible for the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 to correspond to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 in meaning simply because the former occurs in compound with שָׁמַיִם. Again, the close proximity of the two identical words strongly suggests that they *do* correspond to one another in meaning, just as they do in other similar verses.[62] Brown aptly states,

> The two products of creation have been commonly considered a merismus that constitutes the whole of creation, i.e., the cosmos, but no commentator I am aware of has ever offered such a rendering *as a translation*. The difficulty for such a rendering is that the first word of v 2, *hā'āreṣ*, clearly has some point of semantic continuity with the last word of v 1. Thus its occurrence in v 1 is not simply meant to function as one part of a merismus without independent meaning.[63]

Again, in order for the summary-statement interpretation to be not only sustainable, but more probable than the traditional interpretation, the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 must not be able to correspond to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 in meaning. Nevertheless, the previous

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[60]See Dan 6:28 for an Aramaic example of this phenomenon.

[61]The examples from this discussion are also a continuation of the evidence against the strict application of the merism label.

[62]Cf. again Ps 115:15-16.

[63]William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1–2:3*, Dissertation Series/Society of Biblical Literature, no. 132 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 102 n. 12. Later in the quote Brown does argue that the word pair refers to the totality of creation, but he is able to argue for a semantic continuity between the two verses because he favors the dependent-clause translation of Gen 1:1. In this translation, it is possible for the two verses to share a semantic relationship even when the word pair refers to the totality of creation.

discussion demonstrates that they can, which consequently suggests that the two verses share a semantic continuity.

According to the traditional interpretation, Genesis 1:1 does not describe the creation of the "organized universe;" rather, it describes the creation of something less. Since the word pair שָׁמַיִם/אֶרֶץ can also refer to only the containers of the שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ, the creation of such in Genesis 1:1 perfectly fits the traditional interpretation as well as the context of the passage and the larger narrative.[64] The corresponding אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2, whose syntactical construction is typically descriptive, specifies the state of the אֶרֶץ in 1:1 as only a container. Furthermore, the following creation narrative describes the shaping and filling of both the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ, the all-encompassing cosmological containers. Again, the traditional interpretation is the plainest and simplest reading of the text, and it works with the proximal correspondence of the two occurrences of אֶרֶץ, not against it. However, summary-statement proponents have another means by which they argue against this correspondence of the two identical words.

The Lexical Level - תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ

As previously stated, one of the strongest arguments in favor of the traditional interpretation is the proximal correspondence between the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 and the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2. The previous discussion demonstrates that the two identical words *can* correspond to one another in meaning even when the former is in compound with the

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[64]In the larger narrative of Genesis 1, the רָקִיעַ created in Gen 1:6-8, which is given the name שָׁמַיִם, and the יַבָּשָׁה created in Gen 1:9-10, which is given the name אֶרֶץ, are clearly only parts of the larger cosmological containers. Without the traditional interpretation there is no account of the origins of the larger cosmological containers of the שָׁמַיִם and אֶרֶץ, which seems odd in the origins-oriented narrative. N.b. also the interpretation of Samuel David Luzzatto, the nineteenth-century Jewish scholar, who states, "The 'heaven' and 'earth' mentioned here [in Gen 1:1] are not exactly the same heaven and earth that are later specified on the second and third days. The 'heaven' mentioned here includes everything above the earth, while the heaven mentioned on the second day includes only that part of it known to man. The 'earth' mentioned here includes the land with the water, and the air above it, while the earth mentioned on the third day includes only the dry land." S. D. Luzzatto, *The Book of Genesis: A Commentary by ShaDaL (S. D. Luzzatto)*, trans. Daniel A. Klein (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson Inc., 1998), 3.

word שָׁמַיִם. Again, this proximal correspondence between the two identical words also suggests that there is semantic correspondence between the two verses. This is the plainest and simplest reading of the text. However, many proponents of the summary-statement interpretation still separate any kind of semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 by also arguing that the אֶרֶץ of 1:1 cannot correspond to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 in state.

Summary-statement proponents use the phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ to argue that the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 is actually in a chaotic state. Since the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 is in a chaotic state, it cannot correspond to the created אֶרֶץ of 1:1 because chaos is contrary to creation. Gunkel, a proponent of the summary-statement interpretation, argues, "The notion of a creation of Chaos is intrinsically contradictory and odd, for Chaos is the world before the Creation."[65] Childs, another proponent, also states,

> [S]ince the beginning of the Christian era careful exegetes have been perplexed regarding the manner in which verse 1 should be related to verse 2. Is the chaos conceived of as being before or after the creation? Does the chaos exist independently of God's creative activity? It is rather generally acknowledged that the suggestion of God's first creating a chaos is a logical contradiction and must be rejected.[66]

Finally, Waltke states,

> It is concluded, therefore, that though it is possible to take verse 2 as a circumstantial clause [to verse 1] on syntactical grounds, it is impossible to do so on philological grounds, and that it seems unlikely it should be so construed on theological grounds, for it makes God the Creator of disorder, darkness, and deep, a situation not tolerated in the perfect cosmos and never said to have been called into existence by the Word of God.[67]

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[65]Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle, Mercer Library of Biblical Studies (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997), 103.

[66]Brevard S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, Studies in Biblical Theology (Chatham, England: W. & J. MacKay & Co Ltd, 1960; Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, Inc., 1960), 30.

[67]Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 221. Although, Waltke does not directly call the phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ chaos in this article, he certainly describes it in the same manner as the modern understanding of chaos, namely as "disorder," and he refers to it as chaos in other publications. See *IBHS*, § 30.3a; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181 n. 16.

If it is impossible for the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 to correspond to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 in state, then it is more likely that there is a semantic discontinuity between the two verses even if the two identical words can correspond to one another in meaning. What, however, is the rationale for arguing that the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 is in a chaotic state? Answering this question will also help to determine the lexical validity of both interpretations, and again, the theological implications require this continued investigation.

Framing the Discussion and Giving it Context

Defining the term "chaos." Before examining the evidence of whether the אֶרֶץ is in a chaotic state in Genesis 1:2, the term "chaos" must first be defined. Most modern speakers understand the word "chaos" to mean some kind of disorder or confusion. The term "chaos," however, and the concepts associated with it are mostly Greek, and they can be quite different from the typical, modern understanding of the word. According to the LSJ, the Greek definition of the word χάος refers to the original state of the universe; space or the expanse of air; the nether abyss or infinite darkness; or any vast gulf or chasm.[68] Some of these Greek definitions do overlap with other modern definitions of the word, but the actual modern understanding of it as a kind of disorder or confusion actually comes from its use by the later Roman poet Ovid.[69] Thus, the meaning of the term "chaos" can vary from one person to the next, especially when cultural contexts are considered. Watson aptly states,

> The difficulty [with using the term "chaos" to describe a Hebrew concept] is compounded by the fact that both Greek and modern European definitions (which, of course are anyway derivative upon the Greek) are very wide-ranging and

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[68]LSJ, s.v. "χάος."

[69]*Encyclopedia Britannica* states, "The modern meaning of the word is derived from Ovid, who saw Chaos as the original disordered and formless mass, from which the maker of the Cosmos produced the ordered universe. This concept of Chaos also was applied to the interpretation of the creation story in Genesis 1 (to which it is not native) by the early church fathers." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Chaos."

inconsistent.[70]

With such a varying definition for the term "chaos," the main question then is how do proponents of the summary-statement interpretation define it?

The quotes from the introduction of this section suggest that summary-statement proponents seem to use at least two definitions of the term. Chaos can mean the early state of the world before creation, or it can mean disorder and confusion. The following excerpts, however, suggest that defining the term according to its usage by summary-statement proponents is much more complex. They state,

> We can understand then why the state which is opposed to and precedes creation is called תהו.[71]

> [Gen 1:2] serves to picture through its chaos, the 'negative' side of the creation. The creation is not contrasted with a condition of nothingness, but rather with a chaos. This reality is not a creation of God, nor is it a dualistic principle of evil independent of God. Nevertheless, the OT writer struggles to contrast the creation, not with a background of empty neutrality, but with an active chaos standing in opposition to the will of God. It is a reality which continues to exist and continues to threaten his creation. The chaos is a reality rejected by God. It forms no part of the creation, but exists nevertheless as a threatening possibility.[72]

> The writer speaks out of the ordered universe of his experience in which with unerring regularity day follows night, season follows season, plants sprout and animals breed at their proper times, and water and land have their proper place. Verse 2 describes the opposite of this. It is chaos as opposed to "cosmos" (the Greek word for order). There is confusion, darkness, wetness, and wind.[73]

> The term *tōhû* is common in the vocabulary of creation. Its function is to indicate

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[70]Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated: A Reassessment of the Theme of "Chaos" in the Hebrew Bible*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlich Wissenschaft, Band 341 (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 2005), 13.

[71]Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1990), 103.

[72]Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 42.

[73]John J. Scullion, *Genesis*, Old Testament Studies, vol. 6 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 16–17.

chaos in contrast to the order of creation.[74]

> **formless and empty** [*tōhû wāḇōhû*]. This phrase is an *antonym* [(emphasis mine)] to the "heavens and the earth," signifying something uncreated or disordered (Jer 4:23-27). . . . Chronologically, this must describe the state of the earth prior to verse 1, as it would be a contradiction to represent the creation as formed cosmos and the earth as unformed.[75]

> The summary statement [in Genesis 1:1] entails that the chaos of verse 2 does not exist independently from God, but the text does not explain the connection between God and chaos. Rather, verse 2 supplies the context in order to interpret the significance of the creation—namely, Israel's covenant-keeping God overcomes the chaos to bring about his good pleasure. The chaos "is a reality rejected by God." . . . The inchoate dark abyss is not good because it resists life. It is a surd [evil] (i.e., irrational, such as wind or floods that destroy crops), not a theological good (such as a windmill that pumps water to nurture crops). The origin of the surd [evil] (i.e., God does not call the earth good until it is restrained by light and by land that foster human life) is as mysterious as the diabolical lying and murdering Serpent who incarnates moral evil in Genesis 3:1-5. . . . To answer the whence and why of both surd and social evils, appeal has been made to highly figurative texts such as Ezekiel 28 and Revelation 13, but these highly figurative texts do not provide a firm foundation for dogma. On the other hand, neither surd nor moral evil are presented as eternal, unlike God. Since the darkness and abyss [of Gen 1:2] will be eliminated in the new heaven and earth (Rev. 21-22), they are not eternal; their beginnings are cloaked in mystery. The absence of data is not an argument for eternal dualism. "Formless and empty" (*tōhû wāḇōhû*) indicate this negative, "not good," state of the earth. Accordingly, the creation narrative is a story of redemption, of triumph of light over darkness, of land and sky over water, both of which are essential for life.[76]

Based upon these and the preceding quotations, there is no explicit, uniform definition of the term "chaos" from summary-statement proponents. However, a common thread does seem to weave through their arguments and explanations. The term "chaos," at the least, is the opposite of creation, the opposite of order. In other words, whatever is created is in the state of A, and whatever is chaotic is in the state of non-A. Chaos is a state that cannot be created because if it were, it would be both A and non-A at the same time and

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[74]A. H. Konkel, "בֹּהוּ," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:607.

[75]Waltke, *Genesis*, 59–60.

[76]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180–81.

in the same respect, a logical contradiction.[77] Thus, aside from the inappropriate and anachronistic application of the concept of chaos[78] to the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:2, the next question to be asked is what element(s) in Genesis 1:2 cause(s) scholars to argue that this definition of chaos is a proper description of the state of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2?

Determining what makes the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 a chaos. At the lexical level, many scholars of the summary-statement interpretation argue that it is the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ that depicts the אֶרֶץ as being in a state of chaos. Consider the following explanations:

> The sound as well as the meaning of the pair of words [תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ] is awe-inspiring; the earth according to its substratum was a desolate and dead mass, in a word chaos (χάος).[79]

> "Heb. *tōhū wā-bōhū*—an alliterative description of *chaos*, in which nothing can be distinguished or defined. *Tōhū* is a word which is difficult to express consistently in English: but it denotes mostly something *unsubstantial*, or (fig.) *unreal* . . . ."[80]

> "Tohuwabohu" means the formless; the primeval waters over which darkness was superimposed characterizes the chaos materially as a watery primeval element, but at the same time gives a dimensional association: *t^ehōm* ("sea of chaos") is the cosmic abyss.[81]

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[77]Waltke states, "To take Genesis 1:2, therefore, as a circumstantial clause presents the contradiction: He created. . . and the earth was uncreated." Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 220.

[78]By using the term "chaos" to describe the state of the אֶרֶץ in Gen 1:2, scholars take a Greek word, with a modern meaning, which was first employed by a Roman poet, and apply it to an ancient Hebrew concept. Watson states, "The term 'chaos' derives from Greek cosmology, in which context it pertains to a world-view quite distinct from the Hebrew. From here, it entered the current of Western philosophy and literature from which Gunkel drew. However, the Old Testament itself lacks any overarching designation for the entities (dragons, the sea) classified by Gunkel as 'chaotic', or any corresponding philosophical conception, so it thus seems to represent a superimposition from one matrix to another." Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*, 13. Many ancient Christian commentators, and even some modern commentators, likewise misapply the Greek concept of formless matter to the description of the אֶרֶץ in Gen 1:2.

[79]Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), 78.

[80]S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 2nd ed., Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), 3–4.

[81]Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., rev., trans. John H. Marks, The Old

> 'And the earth was waste and void' (*wĕhāʾāreṣ hāyĕthāh thōhû wābhōhû*). The verb 'was' is somewhat surprising since in a nominal clause it is superfluous. What we actually have is a nominal clause of circumstantial force used to specify a condition in its proper sphere of time: 'the earth having been chaos'.[82]
>
> It is therefore still legitimate to assume that the word pair *tōhû wāb̲ōhû* is ground semantically in the characteristic of menacing reality that can be represented by the term "chaos," albeit with reservations.[83]
>
> "Formless and empty" (*tōhû wāb̲ōhû*) indicate this negative, "not good," state of the earth.[84]

Thus, based upon these explanations from summary-statement proponents, the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ is clearly the main reason for arguing that Genesis 1:2 describes the אֶרֶץ in a state of chaos.

Some proponents of the summary-statement interpretation do appeal to the other lexical elements in Genesis 1:2 to support the idea that the verse describes the אֶרֶץ in a state of chaos. For instance, Gunkel argues that the word תְּהוֹם in the second clause of Genesis 1:2 is etymologically related to the Babylonian *Tiâmat*,[85] the primordial sea

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Testament Library (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1963), 47.

[82]Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 32.

[83]Manfred Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis. 15 vols. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 15:571.

[84]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181. Waltke clearly sees this phrase as a reference to chaos since in his own footnote to this excerpt he writes, "To capture both the negative denotation and connotation of *tōhû*, 'chaos' is more apt than 'emptiness.'" Ibid., 181 n. 16. N.b. also in his grammar the translation of Gen 1:2a as "Now the earth *was* chaotic." *IBHS*, § 30.3a.

[85]Tsumura counters Gunkel's claim stating, "The earlier scholars who followed Gunkel usually held that the author of Genesis had borrowed the Babylonian proper name Tiamat and demythologized it. However, if the Hebrew *tĕhôm* were an Akkadian loanword, there should be a closer phonetic similarity to *tiʾāmat*. The expected Hébrew form would be something like *tiʾāmat > tiʾōmat > tĕʾōmát. This could have been subsequently changed to *tĕʾōmāh, with the loss of the final /t/, but never to *tĕhôm*, with the loss of the entire feminine morpheme /-at/.

Moreover, because the second consonant of Tiamat is /ʾ/, a glottal stop, which often disappears in the intervocalic position, so that the resultant vowel cluster experiences so-called vowel *sandhi* in Akkadian as tiʾāmtum > tiāmtum > tâmtum, it is very unlikely that a West Semitic speaker would represent the second consonant as a fricative [h]. In fact, there is no example of West Semitic borrowing Akkadian /ʾ/ as /h/, except Akkadian *ilku* "duty" as *hlkʾ* (Aram.) with the word initial /h/. It is almost impossible to conclude that Akkadian *Tiamat* was borrowed by Hebrew as *tĕhôm* with the intervocalic /h/,

goddess of *Enûma Elish* who clashes with the god Marduk in a pre-creation theomachy.[86] Thus, Genesis 1:2 is a remnant description of the *chaoskampf* motif of *Enûma Elish.*[87] Westermann, another proponent of the summary-statement interpretation, argues that the word חֹשֶׁךְ in the second clause of Gen 1:2 refers to a much more sinister darkness that is more reflective of a pre-creation chaos.[88] He also argues that the phrase רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים in the third clause of Gen 1:2 is best translated as "mighty wind" because it is also syntactically a part of the description of the chaos.[89] Although these elements in Genesis 1:2 might support the argument that the verse describes the אֶרֶץ in a state of chaos, it is the original attribution of this concept to the meaning of the phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ that drives this interpretation of the verse. Without identifying the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ as chaos, there is no need to interpret the words תְּהוֹם, חֹשֶׁךְ, and רוּחַ[90] as elements of that chaos since they are also elements of the natural phenomena of creation and order. However, even though summary-statement proponents argue that the word pair is a description of a chaos contrary to creation, the actual data for determining the most appropriate meaning for the

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for the latter also tends to disappear in Hebrew (e.g., /h/ in the definite article /ha-/in the intervocalic position)." David Toshio Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction: A Reappraisal of the Choaskampf Theory in the Old Testament* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 36–37. See also his continued discussion on the etymology and use of the root **thm*. In this discussion he further argues that there is no etymological relationship between Genesis 1:2 and the *chaoskampf* motif. Ibid., 42-57.

[86]For a more detailed explanation of the theomachy theme see John Walton, "Creation in Genesis 1:1–2:3 and the Ancient Near East: Order Out of Disorder After *Chaoskampf*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 48–63.

[87]Gunkel, *Genesis*, 105.

[88]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 104. See also Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 33.

[89]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 108. See also Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 32–35.

[90]Some scholars and translations render the word רוּחַ as "wind" rather than "S/spirit." For instance Waltke states, "The Hebrew phrase *rûaḥ ʾelōhîm* grammatically can mean 'spirit of God,' 'wind from God,' or 'mighty wind,' but contextually it probably means 'wind from God' (see NRSV)." Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 182. Therefore, it is important to note that the word רוּחַ as "wind" is also an element of the natural phenomena of creation and order.

word pair is extremely sparse.[91]

The paucity of lexical data. There is little if any consensus on the etymology of the compound phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ. On the one hand, Tsumura proposes that the compound phrase is etymologically related to a possible Ugaritic phrase *tu-a-bi-*[*ú*(?)]. The proposed Ugaritic phrase is parallel to the Akkadian term *nabalkutu*, which he argues describes certain words like *erṣetu*, earth, and *rēmu*, womb, and may mean "to be unproductive," not "to turn over" or "upset" as he declares that some have suggested.[92] However, on the other hand, Görg argues that Tsumura's proposal is based upon a problematic reading of *tu-a-bi-*[*ú*(?)] which itself may not even "represent an actual Ugaritic word (or syntagm)."[93] He instead proposes that the words תֹּהוּ and בֹּהוּ may be etymologically related to the Egyptian lexemes *th3* and *bh3*,[94] which mean "to deviate" (*abweichen*) and "to flee panic-stricken" (*kopflos fliehen*).[95] If the compound phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ in Genesis 1:2 is etymologically related to these Egyptian lexemes then its most likely meaning is that of "unstable and unformed" (*haltlos und gestaltlos*), which would make the compound phrase more descriptive of a chaotic state than an unproductive

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[91]N.b. that at the comparative-literature level many scholars argue that Gen 1:2 contains remnants of the ancient Near Eastern *chaoskampf* motif. In this motif a creator god battles a watery chaos monster. After the monster's defeat, the creator god creates the world out of the monster's watery body. Thus, some summary-statement proponents argue that Gen 1:2 is a demythologized version of the *chaoskampf* motif, making Gen 1:2 a description of chaos. An analysis at the comparative-literature level is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but other scholars, such as Tsumura, Watson, and Walton convincingly argue that the *chaoskampf* motif has nothing to do with creation nor a creator god. Also, according to these scholars, the merging of the *chaoskampf* motif with creation in *Enûma Elish*, the first ancient Near Eastern document to be compared with the creation account of Genesis, is a late conflation of two different traditions. See these works: Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*; Rebecca S. Watson, *Chaos Uncreated*; John Walton, "Creation in Genesis".

[92]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 15–22.

[93]Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:567.

[94]Ibid., 15:567–68, 571.

[95]Görg's German phrases and some of his explanations are taken from Brown's analysis of his argument. See Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 74.

state.[96] Tsumura, however, rejects Görg's proposal arguing that there is no evidence that the Egyptian lexemes even have a nominalized form, nor do they occur as a hendiadys in Egyptian.[97] Furthermore, Brown wonders how Görg can "make the semantic jump from verbal bases that imply aimless *motion*" to a meaning that is related to condition,—the condition of Genesis 1:2—not direction or motion.[98] Brown instead proposes abandoning the etymological route and argues that the word is a farrago describing the אֶרֶץ in its early state as a "hodgepodge."[99] Based upon, these varying arguments and the lack of data, the etymological derivation of the compound phrase may never be known.

Even with respect to the individual words תֹּהוּ and בֹּהוּ the etymology of either is still questionable. Görg states,

> Attempts to find an etymology for *bōhû* among other Near Eastern languages have so far proved unsuccessful. Neither the name of the Sumerian deity Bau nor the figure of Baau mentioned by Philo of Byblos is semantically or etymologically relevant.[100]

Furthermore, listing the many arguments for the etymological derivations of both תֹּהוּ and בֹּהוּ, Konkel likewise states,

> The nom. *thw*[, a possible derivation of תֹּהוּ,] may be found in the Ugar. Baal cycle in the encounter with Mot the god of death (*KTU*, 1.5 i 15). In describing the insatiable appetite of Mot the text uses the metaphor of *lb ʾīm thw* (*CTA*, 5 1.15); Gibson interprets this as the "appetite of lions (in) the waste" (*CML*, 68). Translating *thw* as "in the desert" may be compared to Job 6:18, where the streams go up *battōhû*, in the desert, or to Deut 32:10, where Yahweh finds Israel in the wilderness and *bᵉtōhû*, in the desert, though the Ugar. lacks the preposition. Like Mot, the Heb. compares Sheol to a devouring lion (Isa 5:14; Hab 2:5), and similarly uses the metaphor of the insatiable appetite of the lion for flesh (Deut 33:20; Hos 13:8). DeMoor translates the metaphor as the lion "craving live prey," a paraphrase that takes *thw* as related to the Arab. *hawiya*, to desire, and analyzing [*sic*] it as a verbal form (cf. Aistleitner, *WUS*, 820). Deitrich, Loretz, and Sanmartin take *thw* as a scribal error for *thwt* (cf. KTU, 1.133) to be understood as the Heb. *taʿᵃwâ*,

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[96]Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:571.

[97]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 14–15.

[98]Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 74.

[99]Ibid., 60, 74–75.

[100]Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:571.

> meaning greed or desire (536-537). Gordon does not provide a translation (*UT*, 19.2536). . . . The nom. *bōhû* may also be compared to the Phoen. goddess Baau or to the Babylonian mother goddess *bau* (*HALAT* 107). *The derivation of both bōhû and tōhû is unknown* [(emphasis mine)].[101]

Many etymological suggestions for the individual words and the compound phrase have been offered, examined, accepted, and rejected, and there is still no consensus.[102]

The paucity of the etymological data has even caused some scholars to suggest other avenues for determining the word pair's meaning. Commenting on the word תֹּהוּ, Youngblood states, "Since the word has no certain cognates in other languages, its meaning must be determined solely from its OT contexts."[103] Brown also states, "One need not, however, take the etymological route, on which countless suggestions have been made. There are enough occurrences of *tōhû* in the Hebrew literature to connote "devastation" of some sort."[104] Finally, Matthews states,

> The etymology of the word [*bōhû*] remains a mystery, and we are left with the meaning of *tōhû* to clarify the sense of the couplet.
>
> Although the etymology is also unclear for *tōhû*, it occurs sufficiently in the Old Testament (twenty times) to indicate its meaning.[105]

Thus, the actual consensus seems to be that the etymological evidence is too limited for determining the meaning of both the word pair as a whole and its individual words. At best the etymological evidence can only support what the context of the Hebrew Old Testament suggests.

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[101]Konkel, "בֹּהוּ," 1:606.

[102]For some of the more robust etymological discussions, n.b. the following works, which are by no means in agreement with one another: Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 73–75; Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 9–22; Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:565–68.

[103]Ronald F. Youngblood, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*) *confusion*," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:964.

[104]Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 74.

[105]Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, The New American Commentary, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 131.

However, even though scholars seem to have abandoned the etymological route because of the paucity of the data, the data from the Hebrew Old Testament is also quite sparse. By itself, the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ occurs only three times in the entirety of the literature (Gen 1:2; Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23) with only Genesis 1:2 being descriptive of the creation event. To further complicate the issue, the second word of the word pair, בֹּהוּ, only occurs in these three instances. It does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Old Testament. Considering the rarity of בֹּהוּ, the actual means for determining the meaning of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ seems to lie solely with the word תֹהוּ.

The word תֹהוּ has challenges of its own as well. Aside from its three occurrences with בֹּהוּ, the word תֹהוּ is only used 17 other times in the Hebrew Old Testament.[106] However, its meaning within a given context is not so easy to ascertain. *HALOT* states, "The rendering of the Heb. sbst. [תֹהוּ] is not easy for it vacillates in meaning and the meanings are not able clearly to be segregated from one another."[107] Even BDB makes the parenthetical note of "primary meaning difficult to seize."[108] Furthermore, the word is only used in three instances as a descriptor of the creation event (Gen 1:2; Job 26:7?; Isa 45:18).[109] Thus, even the data from the Hebrew Old Testament is extremely limited for determining the meaning of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in Genesis 1:2. Görg apply states, "To this day the proverbial word pair *tōhû wāḇōhû* has not found a universally satisfactory explanation."[110] Nevertheless, summary-statement proponents are somehow able to extract from the exiguous data the complicated and technical

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[106]Deut 32:10; 1 Sam 12:21 (2x); Job 6:18; 12:24; 26:7; Ps 107:70; Isa 24:10; 29:21; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:18, 19; 49:4; 59:4.

[107]*HALOT*, s.v. "תֹהוּ."

[108]BDB, s.v. "תֹהוּ."

[109]In both Gen 1:2 and Isa 45:18, תֹהוּ is used to describe the word אֶרֶץ.

[110]Görg, "תֹהוּ (*tōhû*)," 570.

definition of a chaos contrary to creation? The paucity of the data and the following analysis, however, suggest that the word pair requires a much simpler definition.

A Contextual and Thematic Analysis of the Word Pair

Proponents of both interpretations, the summary-statement and the traditional, frequently use the contexts of certain passage like Isaiah 34:11, Jeremiah 4:23, and Isaiah 45:18 to argue for a specific definition of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ and the word תֹהוּ. However, the evidence for determining the meaning of the word pair and the singular word תֹהוּ is not limited to the context alone The word pair used in Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23 also occurs within two judgment-themed oracles, as does the singular תֹהוּ in Isaiah 24:10. These judgment-themed oracles against specific lands or city-states are common in the prophetic literature and are excellent sources of data for determining the meaning communicated by the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ and the individual תֹהוּ. Thus, the following analysis will consider both the context and the theme of these passages.[111]

A contextual analysis of Isaiah 34:11. Even though the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ occurs only three times, all of its occurrences describe the state of the word אֶרֶץ. Contextually, the word pair in Isaiah 34:11 is used to describe God's future judgment upon the land, or אֶרֶץ, of Edom. The verse states,

וְיִרְשׁוּהָ קָאַת וְקִפּוֹד וְיַנְשׁוֹף וְעֹרֵב יִשְׁכְּנוּ־בָהּ וְנָטָה עָלֶיהָ קַו־תֹּהוּ וְאַבְנֵי־בֹהוּ׃

> And the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it and the owl and the raven will dwell in it and he will stretch over it the line of *tōhû* and the stones of *bōhû*.

By itself, the verse only states that the pelican, porcupine, owl, and raven will inhabit the land, and the line of תֹהוּ, *tōhû*, and the stones of בֹהוּ, *bōhû*, will be stretched over it. The verse alone offers no help in determining the meaning of the word pair.

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[111]For other, more comprehensive analyses of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ see also Roberto Ouro, "The Earth of Genesis 1:2: Abiotic or Chaotic? Part I," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35, no. 2 (Autumn 1998): 264–76; Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 9–35.

The imagery in Isaiah 34:11, however, contributes to a larger picture (34:10b-15) describing a land devoid of human habitation and oversight. It is the desolation of the land of Edom as a result of God's judgment. The larger passage communicates this desolation in three ways. First, the usual inhabitants, such as humans and domesticated livestock, are absent from the land (34:10b, 12) Second, the land is reinhabited by undomesticated or wild animals (34:11a, 13b-15).[112] Third, the land is overgrown with wild vegetation (34:13a).[113] These three pictures describe a land that has been desolated by God's judgment and the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ contributes to this picture.

A thematic analysis of Isaiah 34:10b-15. The desolation described in Isaiah 34:11 is actually a common motif in other judgment-themed oracles.[114] Such oracles also describe this desolation as a reinhabiting of a deserted land or city by wild animals. Consider the following verses:

Isaiah 13:20-22a[115]

20 לֹא־תֵשֵׁב לָנֶצַח וְלֹא תִשָּׁכֵן עַד־דֹּור וָדֹור וְלֹא־יֶהֱלֹ שָׁם עֲרָבִי וְרֹעִים לֹא־יַרְבִּצוּ שָׁם׃
21 וְרָבְצוּ־שָׁם צִיִּים וּמָלְאוּ בָתֵּיהֶם אֹחִים וְשָׁכְנוּ שָׁם בְּנוֹת יַעֲנָה וּשְׂעִירִים יְרַקְּדוּ־שָׁם׃
22 וְעָנָה אִיִּים בְּאַלְמְנוֹתָיו וְתַנִּים בְּהֵיכְלֵי עֹנֶג

20 It, [Babylon,] will not be inhabited forever nor will it be settled from generation to generation. The Arab will not pitch his tent there, nor will shepherds lay down *flocks* there.
21 But the wild beasts will lie down there, and the owls will fill their houses, and the offspring of the ostrich will dwell there, and goats will leap there.
22 Hyenas will howl in its citadels and jackals in the exquisite temples.

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[112]Görg, who argues that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ describes chaos in Gen 1:2, states, "In a similar vein Isa 34:11 uses the image of beasts in the wilderness to describe baleful desolation; the phrase 'line of *tōhû*' describes the desolate existence that Yahweh will impose on the land of Edom (cf. also v. 17)." Görg, "תֹהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:569. Konkel, who also sees Gen 1:2 as a description of chaos, states, "Isaiah juxtaposes the two[, תֹהוּ and בֹּהוּ,] in the judgment against Edom (Isa 34:11) to describe the total depopulation and destruction of the land, so it is a waste fit only for desert animals." Konkel, "בֹּהוּ," 1:606.

[113]Though it is not common, the picture of wild vegetation is used in Zeph 2:9 to describe the desolation of Moab and Ammon as מְמִשַׁק חָרוּל, "a possession of weeds."

[114]The desolation motif is further explained in a later section.

[115]Cf. Isa 14:23.

Jeremiah 49:33[116]

וְהָיְתָה חָצוֹר לְמְעוֹן תַּנִּים שְׁמָמָה עַד־עוֹלָם לֹא־יֵשֵׁב שָׁם אִישׁ וְלֹא־יָגוּר בָּהּ בֶּן־אָדָם׃

And Hazor will become a habitation of jackals, a desolation forever; no man will live there nor will a son of man sojourn in it.

Zephaniah 2:13b-14

[13b]וְיַשֵּׁם אֶת־נִינְוֵה לִשְׁמָמָה צִיָּה כַּמִּדְבָּר׃ [14]וְרָבְצוּ בְתוֹכָהּ עֲדָרִים כָּל־חַיְתוֹ־גּוֹי
גַּם־קָאַת גַּם־קִפֹּד בְּכַפְתֹּרֶיהָ יָלִינוּ קוֹל יְשׁוֹרֵר בַּחַלּוֹן חָרֵב בַּסַּף כִּי אַרְזָהּ עֵרָה׃

[13b]And he will make Nineveh a desolation, a dryness like the wilderness. [14]And all flocks of all the livestock of the nations; even the pelican and the porcupine will sleep in the tops of her pillars; a voice singing in her windows; desolation in the threshold, for he has laid bare the cedar work.

In these passages the language clearly communicates the idea that the land or city has been cleared of all its typical inhabitants and has been reinhabited with wild animals. Thus, the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in Isaiah 34:11 contributes to the description of a desolation that is similarly described in the desolation motifs of Isaiah 13:20-21; Jeremiah 49:33; and Zephaniah 2:13b-14. None of these passages, however, describe the desolation as a chaos contrary to creation.

Is Isaiah 34:11 chaos contrary to creation? How then do scholars argue that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in Isaiah 34:11 describes a chaos contrary to creation? Görg argues,

> In Isa. 34:11 the parallelism "*tōhû* line" and "*bōhû* stones" symbolizes the desolation of Edom ordained by Yahweh. This metaphor can already indicate that the two nouns belong to a sphere that stands in opposition to the ordered world. Weights and measures have their meaning within the framework of ordered everyday life. For example, in Egypt they are the subject of regulations reflecting an "administrative professional ethics." A land becomes all the more chaotic when infected with unpredictable caprice.[117]

Similarly, Waltke argues,

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[116]Cf. Jer 51:27.

[117]Görg, "תֹהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:570.

> In the immediate context of 34:11, Isaiah sees the destruction of Edom. As part of his evocative imagery, he implicitly likens Edom's destruction to the dismantling of a house to its precreated state. He predicts God's destruction on Edom: "And He shall stretch over it the line of desolation (תֹהוּ, "formlessness") and the stones of emptiness (בֹהוּ)." The line and stones (plummets) of the builder are employed here not for erecting a building but for dismantling it. Once again God's judgment results in the return of the object of His wrath to its original state.[118]

Both of these scholars refer to the imagery reflected in the two substantives "line," קָו, and "stone," אֶבֶן, as a basis for their interpretations of the passage.

Neither of these scholars' arguments, however, adequately explain how the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ describes a chaos contrary to creation. With respect to Görg's interpretation, it is difficult to determine how he can argue that use of the word pair and the two substantives, קָו and אֶבֶן, belong to a sphere that stands in opposition to the created world. This interpretation is not suggested by the context of the passage nor by the desolation motif of judgment-themed oracles. This explanation seems to be more of a statement than an actual argument. If it is an argument, it is a *non sequitur*. With respect to Waltke's argument, he does not even argue that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ describes a chaos contrary to creation in Isaiah 34:11;[119] rather, he argues that the two substantives קָו and אֶבֶן describe a dismantling of the land. However, the context of the verse and the theme of the oracle are more descriptive of an emptying of the land than a dismantling. Nevertheless, even if the passage uses the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ to describe the dismantling of the land back to a state similar to that of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2, there is no evidence suggesting such a state describes a chaos contrary to creation. Furthermore, there is no evidence suggesting that such a state is "precreative." One could just as easily argue that Isaiah 34:11 describes the dismantling of the land of Edom back to an "initial-creative"

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[118]Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3, Part II: The Restitution Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132, no. 526 (April 1975): 142. Waltke also refers to Edom in Isa 34:11 as a "chaotic desolation." See Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181 n. 16.

[119]In the previously cited excerpt, Waltke's argument is against the views of the gap theory; nevertheless, he refers back to this argument in order to support his conclusion that in Isaiah 34:11, "תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ denotes the antithesis of creation." See Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 220.

state. One's interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2 determines how one would perceive the alleged dismantled state of the land of Edom in Isaiah 34:11, but it doesn't prove what the definition of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ actually is.

Summary-statement proponents do not offer any valid reasons for why or how the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ describes a chaos contrary to creation in Isaiah 34:11. Although the theme of judgment in this oracle creates a negative picture of the consequences of God's judgment on the land of Edom, Isaiah 34:11 itself clearly parallels other passages using the desolation motif to describe a land desolate of its typical inhabitants. Tsumura aptly states, "Isa 34:11 simply means that 'the land will become a desolation and waste so that it can no more receive inhabitants.' From the context of the Isaiah passage it is rather difficult to see any direct connection with the Genesis creation story."[120] If the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ better describes the desolation of the land, אֶרֶץ, of Edom in Isaiah 34:11 than it describes a chaos contrary to creation, then it is logical to assume that the word pair describes the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 in the same manner.

A contextual analysis of Jeremiah 4:23. The word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in Jeremiah 4:23 is also used to describe God's judgment upon the land, or אֶרֶץ, of Judah in another judgment-themed oracle. The verses states,

רָאִיתִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה־תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְאֶל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵין אוֹרָם׃

> I saw the land, and behold, it was *tōhû* and *bōhû*, and I looked to the heavens and their light was not there.

By itself, the verse only describes the state of the אֶרֶץ as תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ and the state of the שָׁמַיִם as without their light, אֵין אוֹרָם. The language of the oracle does bring to mind Genesis 1:2 in which the state of the אֶרֶץ is also a darkened תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ.[121]

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[120]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 32.

[121]For a more detailed analysis of the literary parallels between Genesis 1 and Jeremiah 4, see Michael Fishbane, "Jeremiah IV 23–26 and Job III 3–13: A Recovered Use of the Creation Pattern," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 (April 1971): 151–53. For a counter to Fishbane's proposal see Tsumura, *Creation and*

Although the verse itself does not shed any light on the meaning of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ, the context does. Both the אֶרֶץ and the שָׁמַיִם are mentioned in 4:23; however, verses 4:24-26 focus more on the description of the אֶרֶץ. Verse 4:24 describes an earthquake that shakes the mountains and the hills of the אֶרֶץ, while verses 4:25-26 describe the אֶרֶץ as devoid of human habitation. Both situations are a result of God's judgment upon the אֶרֶץ. Thus, verses 4:24-26 is a more detailed description of the אֶרֶץ in its state of תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ. The presence of the earthquake in 4:24 can certainly portray a picture of disorder or confusion, a chaos, but no other use of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ or the word תֹהוּ parallels with any other descriptions of an earthquake. However, the judgment of an earthquake upon a land *is* used in other judgment themed oracles;[122] thus, it is most likely another motif of these types of oracles rather than a further description of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ. However, the contextual description of the land of Judah as devoid of normal habitation in verses 4:25-26 matches the contextual description of the land of Edom in Isaiah 34:10a-15, which again suggests that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in both passages helps to describe the אֶרֶץ as a desolation or emptiness rather than as a chaos contrary to creation.

Tsumura argues that the context of Jeremiah 4:23-26 must also relate to 4:27-28 where God's speech concerning the land, אֶרֶץ, and the heavens, שָׁמַיִם, closely parallels what the prophet describes in 4:23-26. He states,

> From a structural analysis of vv. 23-28 as a whole, it is noteworthy that the word pair "the earth" (*hâʾâreṣ*) and "the heavens" (*haššâmayim*) appears in this order both in the beginning (v. 23) and at the end (v. 28) of this section, thus functioning as an inclusio or a "frame" for the section. In other words, "(the earth is) *tôhû wabôhû*" // "(the heavens) are without light" in v. 23 corresponding to "(the earth) will dry up" (*ʾbl) // "(the heavens) will be dark" (*qdr) in v. 28. Here the phrase *tôhû wabôhû* corresponds to the verbal phrase "to dry up" and suggests the "aridness or unproductiveness" of the earth. This is in keeping with v. 27, which mentions that the "whole

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Destruction, 28–30.

[122]Isa 13:13; 24:1, 18-20; Jer 49:21; 50:46; 51:29; Ezek 27:28.

earth will become a desolation" (*šĕmâmâ tihyeh kol-hââreṣ*).[123]

Thus, the continued, contextual description of the אֶרֶץ in 4:27-28 is that of a desolation, שְׁמָמָה (4:27), devoid or empty of its typical inhabitants. This contextual description of the אֶרֶץ in this judgment-themed oracle also fits perfectly with the desolation motif.

A thematic analysis of Jeremiah 4:23-28. The use of the desolation motif in Jeremiah in 4:23, 25-27 also parallels the use of the motif in other judgment-themed oracles. For instance, in the oracles against Judah in Isaiah 5, Babylon in Isaiah 13, and Egypt in Ezekiel 32, the motif is depicted in the following manner:

Isaiah 5:6, 9

וַאֲשִׁיתֶהָ בָתָה לֹא יִזָּמֵר וְלֹא יֵעָדֵר וְעָלָה שָׁמִיר וָשָׁיִת
וְעַל הֶעָבִים אֲצַוֶּה מֵהַמְטִיר עָלָיו מָטָר׃

I shall set it as a destruction, it will not be pruned and it will not be hoed, but thorns and thorn bushes will come up, and I will keep the clouds over it from raining a rain upon it.

בְּאָזְנָי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אִם־לֹא בָּתִּים רַבִּים לְשַׁמָּה יִהְיוּ
גְּדֹלִים וְטוֹבִים מֵאֵין יוֹשֵׁב׃

In my ears the LORD of hosts *swears*, "Surely many houses will become desolate, great and good *houses* without inhabitant.

Isaiah 13:9, 20-22

הִנֵּה יוֹם־יְהוָה בָּא אַכְזָרִי וְעֶבְרָה וַחֲרוֹן אָף
לָשׂוּם הָאָרֶץ לְשַׁמָּה וְחַטָּאֶיהָ יַשְׁמִיד מִמֶּנָּה׃

Behold the day of the LORD comes as cruel, furious, and angry
to make the land a desolation, and he will exterminate its sinners from it.

[20]לֹא־תֵשֵׁב לָנֶצַח וְלֹא תִשָּׁכֵן עַד־דֹּור וָדֹור וְלֹא־יַהֵל שָׁם עֲרָבִי וְרֹעִים לֹא־יַרְבִּצוּ שָׁם׃
[21]וְרָבְצוּ־שָׁם צִיִּים וּמָלְאוּ בָתֵּיהֶם אֹחִים וְשָׁכְנוּ שָׁם בְּנוֹת יַעֲנָה וּשְׂעִירִים יְרַקְּדוּ־שָׁם׃
[22]וְעָנָה אִיִּים בְּאַלְמְנוֹתָיו וְתַנִּים בְּהֵיכְלֵי עֹנֶג

[20]It[, Babylon,] will not be inhabited forever nor will it be settled from generation to generation. The Arab will not pitch his tent there, nor will shepherd lie down *flocks*

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[123]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 31.

there.
[21]But the wild beasts will lie down there, and the owls will fill their houses, and ostriches will dwell there, and goats will leap there.
[22]Hyenas will howl in its citadels and jackals in the exquisite temples.

Ezekiel 32:15

בְּתִתִּי אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁמָמָה
וְנִשַּׁמָּה אֶרֶץ מְמִלֹּאָהּ
בְּהַכּוֹתִי אֶת־כָּל־יוֹשְׁבֵי בָהּ

When I make the land of Egypt a desolation
and make the land desolate of its fullness
when I smite all the inhabitants in it.

The parallel use of the desolation motif in these judgment-themed oracles, however, is not the only similarity between them and Jeremiah 4.

The judgment-themed oracles of Isaiah 5, 13, and Ezekiel 32 also use two other parallel motifs. The first is that of the earthquake upon the land, used in Jeremiah 4:24, which has already been discussed, and the second is that of the darkening of the heavens, used in Jeremiah 4:23, 28. The judgment oracle against Judah in Isaiah 5 uses the judgment motifs of the earthquake upon the land (5:25) and the darkening of the heavens (5:30). The judgment oracle against Babylon in Isaiah 13 also uses the motifs of the earthquake (13:13) and the darkening of the heavens (13:10).[124] Finally, the oracle against Egypt in Ezekiel 32 also uses the motif of the darkening of the heavens (32:7-8), but not the motif of the earthquake. These parallels demonstrate that there are a variety of motifs the Israelite prophets used in other judgment-themed oracles, but it is the desolation motif that closely fits the use of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ in both Jeremiah 4:26 and Isaiah 34:11.

Is Jeremiah 4:23 a chaos contrary to creation? How then do summary-statement proponents come to the conclusion that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ describes a chaos

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[124]Cf. also Joel 2:10, 30-31; Amos 8:9.

contrary to creation in Jeremiah 4:23? Most seem to come to this conclusion based upon the literary parallels between Jeremiah 4:23-28 and Genesis 1. Görg states,

> This idea [that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ stands in opposition to the created world] takes on cosmic dimensions in the vision in Jer 4:23: "I see the earth: behold—*tōhû wāḇōhû*." This statement parallels a vision of the heavens devoid of lights. Thus for the word pair *tōhû wāḇōhû* we can claim the negative elements that are central to *tōhû* by itself, the perilous, menacing phenomena of tracklessness and instability. . . . It is therefore still legitimate to assume that the word pair *tōhû wāḇōhû* is ground semantically in the characteristic of menacing reality that can be represented by the term "chaos," albeit with reservations. In Jer. 4:23 we may note a cosmic orientation of the expression, which envisions a "chaotic" state of the "earth" like the primordial state described in Gen. 1:2. Although the two occurrences and their contexts are literarily independent, common allusions are recognizable.[125]

Waltke states,

> Whether the vision is intended as a metaphor of Judah's return to her precreative state, or an apocalyptic portrayal of cosmic destruction at the end time, need not be decided for our purposes. The point is that the judgment to come on the land [in Jer 4:23-26] takes the form of dismantling or undoing creation. But it obviously does not follow that the precreative state [of Genesis 1:2] itself is the result of God's fury. . . . Here, however, we should pause and note the meaning of תהו ובהו as clarified by these two passages [(Isa 34:11 and Jer 4:23)]. We may deduce that the compound rhyming expression indicates a state of material prior to creation. The Septuagint renders the compound in Jeremiah 4:23 appropriately by οὐθέν, "nothing." Indeed this appears to be essentially its meaning; not in the sense that material does not exist, but rather in the sense that an orderly arrangement, a creating, a cosmos, has not yet taken place.[126]

Finally, Konkel states,

> The other two occurrences of *tōhû wābōhû* are a description of the pre-creation chaos (Gen 1:2; Jer 4:23). It is not certain that the same cosmic type of judgment is meant in the case of Edom [in Isaiah 34:11]. It is clear, though, that Jeremiah depicts an universal and cosmic catastrophe. Jeremiah uses creation language to describe the judgment on the fruitful garden of creation as a reversal to pre-creation chaos.[127]

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[125]Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:571.

[126]Waltke, "Creation Account, Part II," 141. Again, even though Waltke is arguing against the views of the gap theory, he refers back to this argument in another article as proof that the word pair describes a chaos contrary to creation. He states, "Then to it has been demonstrated from Jeremiah 4:23 and Isaiah 34:11 that תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ denotes the antithesis of creation. To take Genesis 1:2, therefore as a circumstantial clause presents the contradiction: He created. . . and the earth was uncreated." Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 220.

[127]Konkel, "בֹּהוּ," 1:607.

Like the arguments of the word pair's use in Isaiah 34:11, the common argument of all of these scholars is that the passage of Jeremiah 4:23-28 describes the dismantling of the אֶרֶץ of Judah back to a state similar to that of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2: the state of תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ.[128] It is a reversal of creation.[129] How do these scholars, however, come to the conclusion that the resulting state of this reversal is a pre-creation chaos without first assuming that such is the state of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2? There is nothing in the passage of Jeremiah 4:23-28 that suggests that the אֶרֶץ of Judah has returned to a state of both pre-creation and chaos. Again, a proponent of the traditional interpretation could just as easily counter that Jeremiah 4:23-28 describes the dismantling of the אֶרֶץ of Judah back to an "initial-creative" state rather than a "precreative" state. Furthermore, the preceding contextual and thematic analyses suggest that the state of the אֶרֶץ of Judah in Jeremiah 4:23-28 is that of a desolation rather than a chaos contrary to creation.[130] Again, just because the passage may describe the dismantling of the אֶרֶץ of Judah back to a state similar to that of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2, it is not proof that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ describes a chaos contrary to creation. Such argumentation is a *non sequitur*. However, since both Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:23 use the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ and the desolation motif as a descriptor of the אֶרֶץ of Edom and אֶרֶץ of Judah, a brief analysis of the

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[128]Görg does refer to other, singular uses of תֹּהוּ to argue that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ describes the אֶרֶץ as a chaos contrary to creation in Jeremiah 4:23. However, the following sections of this chapter demonstrate that singular uses of תֹּהוּ do not have this meaning either.

[129]The preceding thematic analysis suggests that the language of Jeremiah 4:23-28 is more parallel to other judgment-themed oracles than to a reversal of the creation account in Genesis 1.

[130]Ouro states, "In brief, the expression *tōhû wābōhû* refers to a 'desert-uninhabited' (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23) and 'arid or unproductive' (Jer 4:23) state. Neither text gives any linguistic or exegetical evidence to support the existence of a situation of mythic chaos." Ouro, "Abiotic or Chaotic, I," 275. Matthews also states, "Rather than a primordial 'chaos,' however, Jeremiah used the similar imagery of creation so as to announce that the 'land' (*ʾereṣ*) of Judah will become a 'desolate' place as was the 'earth' (*ʾereṣ*) before its creation, that is, a land lifeless without the blessing of God." Matthews, *Genesis*, 132. Finally, Tsumura states, "Thus, the Jeremiah passage refers to a destruction brought about by lack of water, not by the flood water. This is in keeping with my explanation, which takes *tōhû wābōhû* as signifying 'aridness or unproductiveness' of the earth." Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 31.

desolation motif can offer a more detailed understanding of the word pair's meaning.

The Desolation Motif

The desolation motif is very common in many judgment-themed oracles against specific lands or city-states.[131] It is used in the judgment oracles against Ammon in Jeremiah 49; Assyria in Zephaniah 2; Babylon in Isaiah 13, 14, 50, and 51; Damascus in Amos 1; Edom in Jeremiah 49 and Ezekiel 25; Egypt in Jeremiah 46 and Ezekiel 29, 30, and 32; Gaza in Amos 1; Hazor in Jeremiah 49; Moab in Jeremiah 48 and Zephaniah 2; Nineveh in Nahum 2; Philistia in Zephaniah 2 and Zechariah 9; Syria in Isaiah 17; and against Tyre in Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 26.

Within these judgment-themed oracles, the desolation motif exhibits five common characteristics. First, it is always applied to a specific land or city-state. In other words, it is always a pronouncement against a specific geographical location. It is certainly true that the judgment oracle is against specific people groups, but the desolation motif is always applied to their land or city. Second, the desolation motif always communicates the understanding that the land or city will be emptied of its typical inhabitants.

Jeremiah 50:3 (against Babylon)

כִּי עָלָה עָלֶיהָ גּוֹי מִצָּפוֹן הוּא־יָשִׂית אֶת־אַרְצָהּ לְשַׁמָּה וְלֹא־יִהְיֶה יוֹשֵׁב בָּהּ מֵאָדָם
וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה נָדוּ הָלָכוּ׃

For from the north a nation has come upon her, and it will make her land a desolation, and there will be no inhabitant in her, and from man unto beast they will flee.

Jeremiah 51:2 (against Babylon)

וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי לְבָבֶל זָרִים וְזֵרוּהָ וּבוֹקְקוּ אֶת־אַרְצָהּ כִּי־הָיוּ עָלֶיהָ מִסָּבִיב בְּיוֹם רָעָה׃

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[131] Although Tsumura does not unpack the significance of the desolation motif for understanding the meaning of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ and the word תֹּהוּ, he does recognize its usage in certain passages such as Isa 34:11. See Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 32.

And I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they will winnow her and empty her land, for they will be upon her from all around on the day of evil.

Jeremiah 51:62 (against Babylon)

וְאָמַרְתָּ יְהוָה אַתָּה דִּבַּרְתָּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה לְהַכְרִיתוֹ לְבִלְתִּי הֱיוֹת־בּוֹ
יוֹשֵׁב לְמֵאָדָם וְעַד־בְּהֵמָה כִּי־שִׁמְמוֹת עוֹלָם תִּהְיֶה׃

And say, "Lord, you yourself have said to this place that you will cut it off to be without an inhabitant in it, from man unto beast, for it will be a desolation forever.

Ezekiel 29:11 (against Egypt)

לֹא תַעֲבָר־בָּהּ רֶגֶל אָדָם וְרֶגֶל בְּהֵמָה לֹא תַעֲבָר־בָּהּ וְלֹא תֵשֵׁב אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה׃

The foot of a man will not pass over it, nor will the hoof of a beast pass over it, and it will not be inhabited for forty years.

Ezekiel 32:15 (against Egypt)

בְּתִתִּי אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שְׁמָמָה וּנְשַׁמָּה אֶרֶץ מְמִלֹּאָהּ בְּהַכּוֹתִי אֶת־כָּל־יוֹשְׁבֵי
בָהּ וְיָדְעוּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה׃

When I make the land of Egypt a desolation, the land will be desolate of its fullness, when I strike all the inhabitants in it, and they will know that I am the LORD.

Third, in the desolation motif, the words שַׁמָּה, שְׁמָמָה, or similar words with the root שמם are most commonly used as a descriptors of the desolation.[132]

Isaiah 13:9 (against Babylon)

הִנֵּה יוֹם־יְהוָה בָּא אַכְזָרִי וְעֶבְרָה וַחֲרוֹן אַף לָשׂוּם הָאָרֶץ **לְשַׁמָּה** וְחַטָּאֶיהָ
יַשְׁמִיד מִמֶּנָּה׃

Behold, the day of the LORD comes with cruelty, fury, and burning anger to make the land a desolation, and he will exterminate its sinners from it.

Jeremiah 46:19 (against Egypt)

כְּלִי גוֹלָה עֲשִׂי לָךְ יוֹשֶׁבֶת בַּת־מִצְרָיִם כִּי־נֹף **לְשַׁמָּה** תִּהְיֶה וְנִצְּתָה מֵאֵין יוֹשֵׁב׃

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[132]Cf. also Isa 17:9; Jer 48:9; 49:2, 13, 33; 50:3, 13; 51:29, 37, 62; Ezek 29:9, 12; 30:7; 32:15; Zeph 2:4, 9. Even Görg, who argues that Gen 1:2 describes a chaos, states, "The term semantically closest to [תֹּהוּ] is probably [שַׁמָּה] in [Isa 24:12a] (cf. also Jer 4:27)." Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:569. Tsumura also recognizes a semantic parallel between שַׁמָּה and תֹּהוּ. See Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 25.

Make for yourselves vessels of exile, oh Daughter of Egypt, for Memphis will become a desolation, and it will be ruined without an inhabitant.

Jeremiah 51:43 (against Babylon)

הָיוּ עָרֶיהָ **לְשַׁמָּה** אֶרֶץ צִיָּה וַעֲרָבָה אֶרֶץ לֹא־יֵשֵׁב בָּהֵן כָּל־אִישׁ וְלֹא־יַעֲבֹר
בָּהֶן בֶּן־אָדָם׃

Its cities have become a desolation, a dry, desert land, a land in which not any man will live in them and no son of man will pass through them.

Ezekiel 29:10 (against Egypt)

לָכֵן הִנְנִי אֵלֶיךָ וְאֶל־יְאֹרֶיךָ וְנָתַתִּי אֶת־אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לְחָרְבוֹת חֹרֶב
שְׁמָמָה מִמִּגְדֹּל סְוֵנֵה וְעַד־גְּבוּל כּוּשׁ׃

Therefore, behold! I am against you and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt a total waste and desolation from the tower of Syene unto the border of Cush.

Zephaniah 2:13 (against Assyria)

וְיֵט יָדוֹ עַל־צָפוֹן וְיֹאבֵד אֶת־אַשּׁוּר וְיָשֵׂם אֶת־נִינְוֵה **לְשַׁמָּה** צִיָּה כַּמִּדְבָּר׃

And he will stretch his hand against the north and he will cause Assyria to perish, and he will make Nineveh a desolation, dry as the wilderness.

Fourth, the desolation motif frequently uses a form of the verb יָשַׁב as an antonymic description.[133]

Jeremiah 48:9 (against Moab)

תְּנוּ־צִיץ לְמוֹאָב כִּי נָצֹא תֵּצֵא וְעָרֶיהָ לְשַׁמָּה תִּהְיֶינָה מֵאֵין **יוֹשֵׁב** בָּהֶן׃

Give wings to Moab, for she will surely fly away, and her cities will become desolate without an inhabitant in them.

Jeremiah 49:18 (against Edom)

כְּמַהְפֵּכַת סְדֹם וַעֲמֹרָה וּשְׁכֵנֶיהָ אָמַר יְהוָה לֹא־**יֵשֵׁב** שָׁם אִישׁ וְלֹא־יָגוּר בָּהּ בֶּן־אָדָם׃

"Like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and her inhabitants," says the Lord, "A man will not dwell there, and the son of a man will not sojourn in it."

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[133]Cf. also Isa 13:20 (שׁכן); Jer 46:19; 49:33; 50:3; 51:29, 43, 62; Ezek 26:19, 20; 29:11; Zech 9:5.

Jeremiah 50:13a (against Babylon)

מִקֶּצֶף יְהוָה לֹא **תֵשֵׁב** וְהָיְתָה שְׁמָמָה כֻּלָּהּ

Because of the wrath of the LORD, she will not be inhabited, and she will become a complete desolation.

Jeremiah 51:37 (against Babylon)

וְהָיְתָה בָבֶל לְגַלִּים מְעוֹן־תַּנִּים שַׁמָּה וּשְׁרֵקָה מֵאֵין **יוֹשֵׁב**:

And Babylon will be a heap, a refuge of jackals, a desolation, and a hissing, without an inhabitant.

Zephaniah 2:5 (against Philistia)

הוֹי יֹשְׁבֵי חֶבֶל הַיָּם גּוֹי כְּרֵתִים דְּבַר־יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם כְּנַעַן אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים
וְהַאֲבַדְתִּיךְ מֵאֵין **יוֹשֵׁב**:

Woe, oh inhabitants of the seacoast, nation of the Kerethites, the word of the LORD is against you, Canaan, land of the Philistines, for I will cause you to perish and be without an inhabitant.

Last, the desolation motif, in which a land or city-state is desolate of its normal inhabitants, is described in multiple ways: as a place empty of its typical inhabitants, as a place overrun with wild animals, as a place overgrown with wild vegetation,[134] or as a place that is like a desert.[135] In Isaiah 34:11 and Jeremiah 4:26, the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ, used in the desolation motif of these judgment-themed oracles, exhibits many of these same characteristics.

This understanding of the word pair is also reflected in the ancient translational paraphrases of the targumim. Consider again the treatment of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹהוּ in Genesis 1:2 of *Tgs. Neofiti* and *Onqelos*:

Tg. Neof.

וארעא הוות תהיא ובהיא וצדי מן בר נש ומן בעיר וריקנא מן כל פלחן
צמחין ומן אילנין וחשוכא פריס על אפי תהומא ורוח דרחמין מן קדם ה הוה

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[134]For references, see the previous contextual discussion on Isaiah 34:10b-15.

[135]Cf. Jer 50:12, 51:43; Zeph 2:13.

מנשבא על אפי מיא:[136]

> And the earth was waste and unformed, desolate of man and beast, empty of plant cultivation and of trees, and darkness was spread over the surface of the waters. And the spirit of mercy from before God was blowing over the face of the waters.[137]

Tg. Onq.

וארעא הות צדיא וריקניא וחשוכא פריש על אפי תהומא ורוחא מן קדם יי מנשבא על אפי מיא:[138]

> And the earth was desolate and empty, and darkness was on the face of the deep; and a wind from before the Lord was blowing on the face of the water.[139]

Clearly, these early Jewish translators understood the word pair in the same manner. Thus, both contextually and thematically the word pair seems to describe a container desolate of its typical contents rather than a chaos contrary to creation. By itself the word תֹּהוּ also exhibits these same characteristics.

The Literal Sense of the Word תֹּהוּ

According to both BDB and *HALOT*, the word תֹּהוּ seems to be used with two major senses.[140] The first major sense is more literal in nature. This use of the word describes the conditions of a physical location. This is also the sense of the word when it is used with בֹּהוּ in Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 34:11, and Jeremiah 4:26. The following section analyzes the other occurrences of the word תֹּהוּ in this more literal sense. The second major sense in which the word is used is more figurative in nature. The figurative use of

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[136]Bernard Grossfeld, "A Commentary on the Text of a New Palestinian Targum (Codex Neofiti I) on Genesis I-XXV." (Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1969), 10,14.

[137]Martin McNamara, trans., *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis*, The Aramaic Bible, vol. 1A (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 55.

[138]Moses Aberback and Bernard Grossfeld, trans., *Targum Onkelos to Genesis* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., Center for Judaic Studies University of Denver, 1982), 20.

[139]Ibid.

[140]BDB and *HALOT*, s.v. "תֹּהוּ."

the word תֹּהוּ will be analyzed in the next section.

Deuteronomy 32:10. Deuteronomy 32:10 uses the word תֹּהוּ in a way that is consistent with the characteristics exhibited by the desolation motif. The verse states,

יִמְצָאֵהוּ בְּאֶרֶץ מִדְבָּר וּבְתֹהוּ יְלֵל יְשִׁמֹן

He found him *(Jacob/Israel)* in a land of desert, in a howling *tōhû* of wilderness.

In this passage, the noun יְשִׁימוֹן, which is a descriptor of תֹּהוּ, describes a desert-like location. In fact, as this verse indicates, the word is a synonym of מִדְבָּר,[141] which most often refers to the desert or wilderness. The word יְשִׁימוֹן is also used in other passages to describe a land that is both uninhabited and overrun by wild animals, which as the previous section demonstrates is also characteristic of the desolation motif. Consider these passages:

Psalm 107:4

תָּעוּ בַמִּדְבָּר **בִּישִׁימֹן** דֶּרֶךְ עִיר מוֹשָׁב לֹא מָצָאוּ׃

They wandered in a desert, in a wilderness on the journey, *but* they found no habitable city.

Isaiah 43:20

תְּכַבְּדֵנִי חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה תַּנִּים וּבְנוֹת יַעֲנָה כִּי־נָתַתִּי בַמִּדְבָּר מַיִם נְהָרוֹת **בִּישִׁימֹן** לְהַשְׁקוֹת עַמִּי בְחִירִי׃

The beast of the field, the jackals and the offspring of the ostrich, will glorify me, for waters in the desert, rivers in the wilderness to give water to my chosen people.

Again, the imagery of the word יְשִׁימוֹן is very similar to the descriptions of lands and city-states in the desolation motif. Thus, it is not surprising that the word modifies תֹּהוּ in Deuteronomy 32:10.

Isaiah 24:10. This passage occurs in a judgment-themed oracle against the whole earth. The passage as a whole has many of the previously mentioned motifs that

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[141]Cf. Pss 78:40; 106:14; 107:4; Isa 43:19-20.

are common in judgment-themed oracles. It uses the motif of the earthquake (24:1b, 18b-20) and possibly the motif of the darkening of the heavens (24:23). Most importantly, however, it uses the desolation motif (24:1a, 3, 6b, 10-13). Isaiah 24:10 occurs in the desolation motif. The verse states,

נִשְׁבְּרָה קִרְיַת־תֹּהוּ סָגַר כָּל־בַּיִת מִבּוֹא׃

The city of *tōhû* is broken, all the houses are closed up from entering.

The verse by itself offers minimal evidence concerning its meaning, but the context of the passage and the theme offer more clarification.

Within the context and theme of the passage the word תֹּהוּ is used to describe a city that is empty of its typical inhabitants; it is a desolation. Verses 12 and 13 clearly describe the city in this way. They state,

[12]נְשְׁאַר בָּעִיר **שַׁמָּה** וּשְׁאִיָּה יֻכַּת־שָׁעַר׃
[13]כִּי כֹה יִהְיֶה בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ בְּתוֹךְ הָעַמִּים כְּנַקֵּף זַיִת כְּעוֹלֵלֹת אִם־כָּלָה בָצִיר׃

[12]Desolation is left in the city, and the gates are crushed and a ruin
[13]For thus it will be in the heart of the earth, in the midst of the people, like the shaking of an olive tree, like the gleaning when the grape harvest is complete.

The incomplete similes in this passage are clear. As a tree is bare of olives after it has been shaken, and a vineyard is bare of grapes after it has been harvested, so too is a city empty of its inhabitants after it has been desolated. Since Isaiah 24:10 occurs in a judgment-themed oracle is it not surprising that the word תֹּהוּ is used as a part of the desolation motif. Again, a simple contextual and thematic analysis demonstrates that the word תֹּהוּ, by itself, is also used to describe a place that is desolate of its typical inhabitants.

Isaiah 45:18. Because Isaiah 45:18 is very similar to Genesis 1:2, in that both passages are used in creation contexts, it is extremely helpful in understanding the meaning of the word תֹּהוּ in Genesis 1:2. The passage states,

כִּי כֹה אָמַר־יְהוָה
בּוֹרֵא הַשָּׁמַיִם הוּא הָאֱלֹהִים

יֹצֵר הָאָרֶץ וְעֹשָׂהּ הוּא כוֹנְנָהּ
לֹא־תֹהוּ בְרָאָהּ
לָשֶׁבֶת יְצָרָהּ
אֲנִי יְהוָה וְאֵין עוֹד׃

For thus says the LORD,

"The one who created the Heavens, He is God
The one who formed the earth and made it, He established it
He did not create it *to be tōhû*[142]
He formed it to be inhabited
I am the LORD, and there is no other.

Within the passage itself it is clear that the word תֹּהוּ is antonymically paired with לָשֶׁבֶת,[143] and both are a description of a physical location: the אֶרֶץ.

Again, considering the use of תֹּהוּ in the desolation motif in the passages of Isaiah 34:11; Jeremiah 4:23; and Isaiah 24:10, it is not surprising that in the only instance in which the word תֹּהוּ occurs with an antonym, the antonym is a form of the verb יָשַׁב. Again, the previous discussion demonstrates that the desolation motif frequently uses this

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[142]Waltke counters this translation by saying, "[T]he double accusative after verbs of making does not normally have this sense." Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 220. He argues that the normal sense of the third colon in Isa 45:18 should be "He did not create it a formless mass." Ibid. However, in the parallel bicola of the passage תֹּהוּ is paired with the infinitive form (לָשֶׁבֶת) of יָשַׁב, which implies purpose and does not function as a double accusative in the bicola. If תֹּהוּ were functioning as a double accusative, it is more likely that it would be paired with the participial form (נוֹשָׁבֶת) of יָשַׁב which would then function as a double accusative in the bicola as well (cf. Exod 16:35). Thus, the rendering of תֹּהוּ as "*to be tōhû*" seems to be implicit in the parallelism and grammatical context of the bicola. Tsumura also states, "It should be noted that *lō'-tōhû* here is a resultative object, referring to the purpose of God's creative action. In other words, this verse explains that God did not create the earth so that it might stay desert-like, but to be inhabited. So this verse does not contradict Gen 1:2, where God created the earth to be productive and inhabited, though it 'was' still *tōhû wābōhû* in the initial state." Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 26.

[143]Interestingly, Westermann and Waltke argue that the word תֹּהוּ is this passage is the "direct opposite of creation" and "an antonym to 'create.'" Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 103; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181 n. 16. It is difficult to understand how Westermann and Waltke can come to this conclusion when the parallel structure of the passage clearly demonstrates that תֹּהוּ is antithetically paired with לָשֶׁבֶת, while בְּרָאָהּ, "he created it," is synonymously paired with יְצָרָהּ, "he formed it." There is nothing in the structure or the context of the passages that suggests that תֹּהוּ is antithetically parallel to בְּרָאָהּ. Even Görg, another proponent of treating תֹּהוּ as a reference to chaos in Gen 1:2, recognizes the correct parallelism. See Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:569.

verb as an antonymic description of the desolation.[144] Tsumura states,

> However, *tōhû* here is contrasted with *lāšebet* in the parallelism and seems to refer rather to a place that has no habitation, like the term *šĕmāmâ* "desolation" (cf. Jer 4:27; Isa 24:12), *ḥārēb* "waste, desolate," and *ʿăzûbâ* "deserted." There is nothing in this passage that would suggest a chaotic state of the earth "which is opposed to and precedes creation." Thus, the term *tōhû* here too signifies "a desert-like place" and refers to "an uninhabited place."[145]

Thus, the creation passage of Isaiah 45:18 is one of the strongest evidences supporting the argument that the word תֹּהוּ, rather than describing a state of chaos, describes a state of desolation, empty of inhabitants. In other words the lexical data of Isaiah 45:18 suggests that whatever is inhabited is in a state of A and whatever is תֹּהוּ, or desolate, is in a state of non-A. Thus, if a cosmological container like the אֶרֶץ is described as תֹּהוּ, it is uninhabited not chaotic. It is not a logical contradiction to argue that such a state could be created.

Other Evidences. There are three other passages that use the word תֹּהוּ in a way that is similar to the desolation motif. They describe a desert land that is devoid of habitation. Consider the following verses:

Job 6:18

יִלָּפְתוּ אָרְחוֹת דַּרְכָּם יַעֲלוּ בַתֹּהוּ וְיֹאבֵדוּ׃

> They turn themselves from the paths of their way; they go up into the *tōhû*, and they perish.

Job 12:24

מֵסִיר לֵב רָאשֵׁי עַם־הָאָרֶץ וַיַּתְעֵם בְּתֹהוּ לֹא־דָרֶךְ׃

> He who takes away the understanding of the rulers of the people of the land, and causes them to wander in the *tōhû* where there is no road.

Psalm 107:40

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[144]Again, cf. Isa 13:20 (שׁכן); Jer 46:19; 48:9; 49:18, 33; 50:3, 13; 51:29, 37, 43, 62; Ezek 26:19, 20; 29:11; Zeph 2:5; Zech 9:5.

[145]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 25.

שֹׁפֵךְ בּוּז עַל־נְדִיבִים וַיַּתְעֵם בְּתֹהוּ לֹא־דָרֶךְ׃

> He who pours contempt upon the nobles, and causes them to wander in the *tōhû* where there is no road.

In these passages the word תֹּהוּ is not used to describe a land or a city, nor is it coupled with any other words that might describe a desert land or wilderness, nor is it used in any judgment-themed oracle against a land or a city. However, the phrase לֹא־דָרֶךְ in Job 12:24 and Psalm 107:40 and the description of wandering from the דֶּרֶךְ suggest that the word is descriptive of a wilderness in which no one travels. This meaning is consistent with the other literal uses of the word when it describes a desolation.

Most scholars who argue that תֹּהוּ describes a chaos in Genesis 1:2 agree that its use in the preceding verses refers to some kind of desert wasteland.[146] Görg, however, disagrees stating,

> Clearly these words refer not to literal exile in a wasteland but to the disorientated bewilderment of those stripped of understanding by God. The prepositional compound appears with the article in Job 6:18, where a caravan that turns aside from its course (v. 18a) is described as wandering *battōhû* — again, the text does not refer to the wilderness simply as a geological phenomenon; this straying leads to death.[147]

The problem with this analysis is that the literal sense of the word is being used to denote an abstract thought. This does not mean that the abstract thought of disoriented bewilderment should not be applied to the passage using the word תֹּהוּ, but it is the literal meaning that defines the figurative idea expressed in these passages, not vice versa. Again, the most basic, literal meaning of the word תֹּהוּ is that of a desolate place devoid of habitation. This fits its meaning in all of the passages in which it is used as a substantive and as a modifier describing certain geographical locations.

The Figurative Sense of the Word תֹּהוּ

Again, the second major sense in which the word תֹּהוּ is used is more figurative

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[146]BDB, s.v., "תֹּהוּ;" Youngblood, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*) *confusion*," 2:964; Westermann, *Genesis 1–*

in nature. In such passages as 1 Samuel 12:21; Job 26:7; Isaiah 29:21; 40:17, 23; 41:29; 44:9; 45:19; 49:4; and 59:4, the word תֹּהוּ has a meaning of "emptiness" or "nothingness"[148] and is synonymously parallel with such terms as בְּלִי־מָה (nothing), אֶפֶס (nothing), הֶבֶל (vanity), and רִיק (emptiness) in Job 26:7 and Isaiah 40:17 and 49:4.[149] Delitzsch uses the more figurative definition of the word תֹּהוּ to argue that it describes a chaos in Genesis 1:2. He states,

> The chaos, as which the developing earth existed, embraced also the heaven which was developing with and for it. The substance of the תהו ובהו is left undefined; תהו is the synonym of אַיִן, אֶפֶס, בְּלִימָה, הֶבֶל, and the like, and is therefore a purely negative notion.[150]

The figurative uses of תֹּהוּ can certainly portray a negative picture that may reach such an abstract level that it could be a description of a "chaos." However, there is little, if any, evidence to suggest that the figurative meaning of the word תֹּהוּ should be applied to its usage in Genesis 1:2. The uses of the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ in Genesis 1:2, Isaiah 34:11; and Jeremiah 4:23 describe a physical, geographical location much like the word תֹּהוּ does in its more literal uses. There is no evidence to suggest that the word pair in Genesis 1:2 should take on the figurative meaning of תֹּהוּ.

Furthermore, even though the figurative meaning of תֹּהוּ creates a negative abstraction, as Delitzsch observes, there is no reason to assume that such an abstract meaning carries over into the literal meaning. It is much more likely that the literal meaning of תֹּהוּ, describing a desolation without inhabitants, influences its figurative meaning, describing what is empty, vain, or worthless, since the literal meaning is drawn

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11, 102; Konkel, "בֹּהוּ," 1:607; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181 n. 16.

[147]Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:568.

[148]*HALOT*, s.v., "תֹּהוּ."

[149]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 103; Görg, "תֹּהוּ (*tōhû*)," 15:569.

[150]Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 78. Driver also seems to use the figurative sense of תֹּהוּ to argue for a meaning of chaos in Gen 1:2. See Driver, *Genesis*, 3–4.

from personal experience.[151] Consider also the adjective רִיק, a cognate of רִיק which occurs in parallel with one of the figurative uses of תֹּהוּ. Like תֹּהוּ, the word רִיק also has both a literal meaning, describing what is empty, and a figurative meaning, describing what is worthless or vain.[152] No one would argue that the literal use of the word רִיק in Genesis 37:24 is descriptive of a terrible, menacing pit, בּוֹר, on account of the figurative sense of the word רִיק in Judges 9:4; 2 Samuel 6:20; and Proverbs 12:11. The same should also apply to תֹּהוּ. There is no good reason to assume that the figurative meaning of תֹּהוּ influences its literal meaning in Genesis 1:2 or any other passage in which it is used literally.

Other Arguments

Because of the interpretive and theological implications involved in defining the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ as a chaos contrary to creation, many proponents of the traditional interpretation legitimately argue that the word pair describes the אֶרֶץ as being in a more neutral state.[153] Even some proponents of the summary-statement interpretation are not convinced that the word pair in Genesis 1:2 describes the אֶרֶץ as a chaos contrary to creation. Young, for instance, states, "It would probably be wise to abandon the term 'chaos' as a designation of the conditions set forth in verse two. The three-fold statement of circumstances in itself seems to imply order."[154] Tsumura also states,

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[151]Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 103.

[152]BDB, s.v., "רִיק."

[153]John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 24–25; Mark F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1–3: Creation or Re-Creation? Part 1," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149 (1992): 320–22; Matthews, *Genesis*, 143–44; Ouro, "Abiotic or Chaotic, I," 276.

[154]Edward J. Young, "The Relation of the First Verse of Genesis One to Verses Two and Three," *Westminster Theological Journal* 21 (1958): 145. Young's position is somewhat nuanced, but he does argue that Genesis 1:1 is a summary and not the first act of creation. See Young, "Relation of the First Verse of Genesis," 141–43; Young, "Interpretation of Genesis 1:2," 166–67. (N.b. especially his footnotes.) He also states, "It is true that the second verse of Genesis does not represent a continuation of

> In conclusion, the phrase *tōhû wābōhû* in Gen 1:2, which is traditionally translated into English "without form and void" (RSV) or the like, simply means "emptiness" and refers to the earth, which was a desolate and empty place, "an unproductive and uninhabited place." As Westermann notes, "creation and the world are to be understood always from the viewpoint of or in the context of human experience." In other words, to communicate the subject of creation meaningfully to human beings, one must use the language and literary forms known to them. In order to give the background information to the audience in this verse, the author uses experiential language explaining the initial situation of the earth as "not yet."[155]

Finally, Walton states,

> Based on the above assessment of the beginning state as it is presented in Genesis, we are now in a position to compare it to what we find in the ancient world. In the ancient Near East the precosmic condition is neither an abstraction ("Chaos") nor a personified adversary.[156]

Waltke, however, argues that word תֹּהוּ is frequently used in a negative sense, which should be considered in the case of Genesis 1:2. He states,

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the narrative of verse one, but, as it were, a new beginning. Grammatically it is not to be construed with the preceding, but with what follows." Young, "Interpretation of Genesis 1:2," 166–67.

[155]Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction*, 35. Unlike Young, Tsumura is much more nuanced. He expresses many views that are shared by summary-statement proponents. First, he seems to argue that the creation of light in Gen 1:3 was the first creative act. He states, "According to the discourse analysis of Gen 1:1-3, the first two verses constitute the SETTING for the EVENT that begins in v. 3, since the *wayqtl* (*waw* consecutive + imperf.), the narrative 'tense,' first appears in the phrase 'and God said' (*wayyô²mer ²ĕlôhîm*)." Ibid., 33-34. He also states, "Therefore, v. 2 is, as Perry notes, a 'prelude' to v. 3, where the first of God's creative actions begins with his utterantce 'let there be light!'" Ibid., 35. Second, he seems to argue that Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement. See ibid., 34. Third, he argues that the word pair אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם is a merism for the "universe." See ibid., 75. However, he also expresses views that are shared by proponents of the traditional interpretation. First, in arguing that the phrase *lô²-tôhû* in Isa 45:18 is a resultative object, he seems to argue that the earth in Gen 1:2 was created. He states, "In other words, this verse explains that God did not create the earth so that it might stay desert-like, but to be inhabited. So this verse does not contradict Gen 1:2, where God created the earth to be productive and inhabited, though it 'was' still *tôhû wâbôhû* in the initial state." Ibid., 26. Second, he seems to argue that there is a semantic link between Gen 1:1 and 1:2. He states, "It is not necessary to posit that *hâ²âreṣ* has different meanings in v. 1 and v. 2. . . . However, a shift in focus from the totality of the universe ('heaven and earth') in v. 1 to the 'earth' in v. 2 does not necessarily result in a change of meaning for the term *hâ²âreṣ*." Ibid., 69 n. 44. However, even though he may be quite nuanced, Tsumura's default position seems to be that of the summary-statement interpretation. He writes, "After the *summary statement* [emphasis mine] 'in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' (v.1), in v.2a the author focuses not on the 'heavens' but on the 'earth' where the audience stands, and, in preparation for what is to come, presents the 'earth' as 'still' not being the earth that they all are familiar with." Ibid., 34. Tsumura never explicitly states that Gen 1:1 is the first act of creation, but he does explicitly state that it is a summary.

[156]John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 51–52 See also ibid., 45-46, where Walton states his support for the summary-statement interpretation.

> David Toshio Tsumura says, "The phrase [*tōhû wāḇōhû*] in Gen 1:2 has nothing to do with chaos and simply means 'emptiness,'" which he defines as "an unproductive and uninhabited place." But he fails to note adequately that *tōhû* always connotes something terrible, eerie. Even in Job 26:7 it connotes a state that effects awe. To capture both the negative denotation and connotation of *tōhû*, "chaos" is more apt than emptiness."[157]

Thus, according to Waltke's argument, it seems that the problem for those who do not recognize Genesis 1:2 to be a description of chaos is that they do not perceive just how negative a description תֹּהוּ, *tōhû*, can be. The problem with this argument, however, is that it injects more subjectivity into the debate than objectivity. Since scholars of either position argue that תֹּהוּ either does or does not describe a chaos from the same passages, it seems odd to argue that one side does not view תֹּהוּ negatively enough. Should not the context of each passage determine how negative the term should be viewed? While it is a possibility that the literal use of תֹּהוּ describes something negative in Genesis 1:2 and other passages, there is *nothing* in the previous analysis of the evidence suggesting that תֹּהוּ is *so* negative that it describes a chaos contrary to creation. The bridge between what is negative and what is a chaos contrary to creation is simply not there. Furthermore, there is nothing in the previous analysis suggesting that God could not create the אֶרֶץ in this manner. Such an interpretation is neither a logical nor theological contradiction. A plain and simple reading of the contextual and thematic evidences clearly demonstrates that the word pair בֹּהוּ/תֹּהוּ in Genesis 1:2 describes the אֶרֶץ as being in a state of desolation, empty of inhabitants.

Lexical Conclusion

Based upon the preceding analysis, summary-statement proponents cannot argue that it is logically contradictory for the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 to correspond to the אֶרֶץ of 1:1 in state simply because it is described as being תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ. There is no evidence to suggest that the word pair describes a chaos contrary to creation. In fact the contextual

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[157]Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 181 n. 16.

and thematic evidences clearly demonstrate that the word pair describes a desolation empty of inhabitants. Again, the close proximity of the two identical words strongly suggests that they *do* correspond to one another in state. Thus, as previously suggested, in order for the summary-statement interpretation to be sustainable and more probable than the traditional interpretation, the two words must not be able to correspond to one another. Nevertheless, the previous discussion demonstrates that there is no reason they should not, which again, suggests that Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 semantically correspond to one another.

If Genesis 1:1 narrates the creation of only the cosmological containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ, then the description of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 as תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ substantiates such an interpretation. The word pair describes the cosmological container of the אֶרֶץ as a desolation, empty of inhabitants.[158] Such a description of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 perfectly fits the traditional interpretation as well as the context of the passage and the larger narrative, which describes the shaping and filling of these larger cosmological containers. Again, the traditional interpretation is the plainest and simplest reading of the text, working with the proximal correspondence of the two occurrences of אֶרֶץ, not against it. However, not only does the proximal correspondence of the two identical words suggest a semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, the syntax does as well.

The Syntactical Level

If the proximal correspondence of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 to the אֶרֶץ of 1:2 is the strongest bit of evidence favoring the traditional interpretation, then the syntactical relationship between the two verses is next. The syntactical structure of Genesis 1:2, in

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[158]N.b. again the interpretation of the nineteenth-century Jewish scholar Samuel David Luzzatto who states, "Just as the desert is called *shemamah* and *yeshimon* ('wilderness'), so it is called *tohu va-vohu*. The meaning is that on the earth there were neither plants nor animals." Luzzatto, *Genesis*, 5.

which the word אֶרֶץ precedes the main verb, almost demands that the word looks back to and describes the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. Again, such a syntactical structure strongly suggests that the two verses correspond to one another and share a semantic continuity. This is the plainest and simplest reading of the text. However, the debate over the interpretation of Genesis 1:1 rarely touches the syntactical level. As the previous sections demonstrate, much of the focus is at the lexical level. Any syntactical discussion concerning the relationships between the sentences and clauses of Genesis 1:1-3 focuses primarily on translation, not interpretation; nevertheless, some proponents of the summary-statement interpretation do address the syntactical issues related to their position.

Again, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation argue that Genesis 1:1 is a title or summary statement, with Genesis 1:2 being an introductory description of the world *before* the first act of creation in Genesis 1:3. Furthermore, they argue that Genesis 1:2 temporally precedes the time frame of Genesis 1:1.[159] Thus, in the summary-statement interpretation, Genesis 1:2 must be syntactically related to Genesis 1:3 because there is neither semantic nor temporal continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. However, since the syntactical structure of Genesis 1:2 favors semantic continuity between it and 1:1, summary-statement proponents only argue that the syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3 is at the least possible; they do not argue that the relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 is not possible on syntactical grounds.[160]

The Manners in Which Genesis 1:2 May Relate to 1:3

The sentence structure at the beginning of Genesis 1:2 is *waw* + subject + verb,

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[159]Again, see Waltke, *Genesis*, 60; Barr, "Was Everything That God Created," 58.

[160]Even though the focus of this chapter is on the interpretation of Genesis 1:1, much of the following discussion concerns the syntactical relationships of Genesis 1:2. They also play a decisive role in the interpretation of 1:1.

which is both semantically and syntactically significant considering that in Hebrew narrative, normal sentence structure is *waw* + verb + subject.[161] Because of this structure, many summary-statement proponents argue that Genesis 1:2 is a circumstantial clause related not to Genesis 1:1, but to 1:3.[162] Young states,

> [Genesis 1:2] contains three circumstantial clauses, thus describing a three-fold set of circumstances or conditions which were in existence at a particular time. The particular time in which this three-fold condition was present is to be determined by the finite verb, with which these three clauses are to be construed.[163]
>
> It is true that the second verse of Genesis does not represent a continuation of the narrative of verse one, but, as it were, a new beginning. Grammatically it is not to be construed with the preceding, but with what follows.[164]

Waltke also states,

> The other view that also sees the chaotic state described in verse 2 as existing before the creation spoken of in the Bible, understands verse 1 as an independent clause and verse 2 as a circumstantial clause connected with verse 3. According to this view, verse 1 is a summary statement, or formal introduction, which is epexegeted in the rest of the narrative. It appears to this author that this is the only viewpoint that completely satisfies the demands of Hebrew grammar.[165]
>
> As discussed earlier, on lexical and logical grounds verse 2 cannot be construed as a circumstantial clause with verse 1.[166]

Thus, according to the summary-statement interpretation, Genesis 1:1 is syntactically and

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[161]The sentence of Genesis 1:2 is comprised of three distinct clauses. The last two clauses are circumstantial to the first, but the syntactical relationship of the verse as a whole to Genesis 1:1 or 1:3 only concerns the first clause. Thus, the following syntactical analysis only focuses on the first clause even though the discussion involves the verse as a whole.

[162]Wenham and Ross also recognize Gen 1:2 as a circumstantial clause, but they do not specifically argue that it syntactically relates to Gen 1:3. Rather, they label Gen 1:2 as a circumstantial clause in order to argue against the syntactical possibility of the dependent-clause translation. See Wenham, *Genesis*, 12; Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of the Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 719.

[163]Young, "Relation of the First Verse of Genesis," 140.

[164]Young, "Interpretation of Genesis 1:2," 166–67.

[165]Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 225–26.

[166]Ibid., 226. Waltke's lexical and logical grounds for arguing that Gen 1:2 cannot be construed with 1:1 are dealt with in the preceding lexical sections of this chapter.

semantically cut off from Genesis 1:2. If such is the case, however, in what manner then does the circumstantial clause of Genesis 1:2 relate to Genesis 1:3?

According to Andersen's detailed analysis of circumstantial clauses,[167] there are two possible ways in which Genesis 1:2 could relate to 1:3. First, Genesis 1:2 could be an episode-initial circumstantial clause. Andersen explains this type of circumstantial clause in the following manner:

> The body of an episode in narrative prose is likely to consist of a string of [*wayyiqtol*] clauses. (Predictive discourse correspondingly is built on chains of [*weqatal*] clauses.) Such a string is likely to be preceded by some marginal material, such as a time reference realized as adverb, noun phrase, prepositional phrase, infinitive phrase, or clause. Another way of opening an episode is to state a preliminary circumstance, and the usual way of doing this is by means of a *circumstantial clause* [(emphasis mine)].[168]

According to Andersen's explanation, this type of circumstantial clause has a more macro-syntactical function. It and its counterpart, the episode-final circumstantial clause, are frequently discussed as boundary markers of narrative episodes in studies focusing on discourse grammar.[169] These clauses have a more independent nature than typical circumstantial clauses. Thus, if Genesis 1:2 is an episode-initial circumstantial clause, it could relate to Genesis 1:3 as the inaugural boundary marker of the following narrative episode.[170]

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[167]See Francis I. Andersen, *The Sentence in Biblical Hebrew*, Janua Linguarum Series Practica 231 (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), 77–91.

[168]Ibid., 79.

[169]See also Thomas Oden Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), § 132; Alviero Niccacci, *The Syntax of the Verb in Classical Hebrew Prose*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 86 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), § 27; Katsuomi Shimasaki, *Focus Structure in Biblical Hebrew: A Study of Word Order and Information Structure* (Bethesda, MD: CDL Press, 2002), § 4.1.1.3; Roy L. Heller, *Narrative Structure and Discourse Constellations: An Analysis of Clause Function in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, Harvard Semitic Studies 55 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 431ff. But see also Joüon § 159f; *IBHS* § 39.2.3c. Not all of these works, however, label such constructions as circumstantial clauses.

[170]Andersen does see Genesis 1:2 as a possible construction of this type; however, he doubts its probability. See Andersen, *Sentence*, 79.

Second, according to Andersen, Genesis 1:2 could be a circumstantial clause functioning at a more inter-clausal level.[171] This type of circumstantial clause, though it has the same construction as an episode-initial circumstantial clause, is typically subordinate to another clause.[172] Although the clause at the surface appears to be grammatically independent, it expresses what Driver calls a "subordinate thought."[173] Andersen also adds,

> The best-known circumstantial clauses are those which come alongside the main thread of discourse. They generally report some coetaneous event or state, hence the name 'circumstantial'. For the same reason they are sometimes described as subordinate or 'adverbial', and not always distinguished from parenthetical information placed in apposition.[174]

One of the main differences between this type of circumstantial clause and the episode-initial circumstantial clause is that the former "has a close relationship with adjacent clauses;"[175] whereas, the latter is more closely related to the "discourse structure" or narrative episode as a whole.[176] In the case of Genesis 1:2, the circumstantial clause could relate to Genesis 1:3 as a thought subordinate to the main verb אָמַר. Thus, Genesis 1:2 might possibly relate to Genesis 1:3 in one of these two manners. The following analysis, however, suggests that neither manner is probable.

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[171]Andersen, *Sentence*, 85.

[172]This is the typical classification of circumstantial clauses in most of the standard grammars. See GKC § 156; Joüon§ 159; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), § 5.2.11. See also Murphy who defines the circumstantial clause as "[a] subordinate clause that clarifies the context or describes the attendant circumstances of the main clause." Murphy, *Pocket Dictionary*, s.v. "Circumstantial Clause."

[173]S. R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions.*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), § 161.

[174]Andersen, *Sentence*, 82.

[175]Shimasaki, *Focus Structure*, 150.

[176]Ibid.

Genesis 1:2 as an episode-initial circumstantial clause. As previously discussed, Genesis 1:2 could be an episode-initial circumstantial clause, in which case it would be syntactically related to Genesis 1:3. Like Genesis 1:2, when such clauses introduce a narrative episode, they are frequently followed by the first *waw*-consecutive clause of the narrative chain. Consider the following examples:

Genesis 3:1a

וְהַנָּחָשׁ **הָיָה** עָרוּם מִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים **וַיֹּאמֶר** אֶל־הָאִשָּׁה

Now the snake was more crafty than all the beast of the field, which the LORD God had made, and he said to the woman,

Genesis 4:1a

וְהָאָדָם **יָדַע** אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ **וַתַּהַר** וַתֵּלֶד אֶת־קָיִן

Now Adam knew Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain.

Genesis 21:1

וַיהוָה **פָּקַד** אֶת־שָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר אָמָר **וַיַּעַשׂ** יְהוָה לְשָׂרָה כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֵּר׃

Now the LORD visited Sarah just as he had said, and the Lord did for her just as he had spoken

Genesis 39:1a

וְיוֹסֵף **הוּרַד** מִצְרַיְמָה **וַיִּקְנֵהוּ** פּוֹטִיפַר סְרִיס פַּרְעֹה

Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, bought him

Ruth 4:1a

וּבֹעַז **עָלָה** הַשַּׁעַר **וַיֵּשֶׁב** שָׁם

Now Boaz went up to the gate, and he sat there

1 Samuel 5:1

וּפְלִשְׁתִּים **לָקְחוּ** אֵת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים **וַיְבִאֵהוּ** מֵאֶבֶן הָעֵזֶר אַשְׁדּוֹדָה׃

Now the Philistines took the ark of God, and they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.

1 Chronicles 10:1a

וּפְלִשְׁתִּים נִלְחֲמוּ בְיִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּנָס אִישׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל מִפְּנֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים

Now the Philistines fought with Israel, and the men of Israel fled from before the Philistines.

Esther 4:1a

וּמָרְדֳּכַי יָדַע אֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר נַעֲשָׂה וַיִּקְרַע מָרְדֳּכַי אֶת־בְּגָדָיו

Now Mordecai knew all which had been done, and Mordecai tore his clothes

If Genesis 1:1 is a syntactically separate title or summary, then Genesis 1:2 does fit the syntactical structure and placement of these episode-initial circumstantial clauses, and summary-statement proponents such as Jongeling and Waltke do suggest that there are parallels between Genesis 1:2 and other such episode-initial clauses.[177]

An analysis of such circumstantial clauses marking the inception of a new episode at the head of a narrative chapter, however, suggests that such clauses display a certain characteristic that is missing from Genesis 1:2.[178] Because these clauses have the typical structure of *waw* + subject + verb, or at the least *waw* + noun + predicate, attention is shifted to the fronted subject because it plays an explicit role in the following narrative episode. Andersen refers to this as the introduction of a new *dramatis persona*.[179] Thus, the subject of the episode-initial circumstantial clause is almost always referenced again in the first *waw*-consecutive clause of the narrative chain and usually

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[177]See Bastiaan Jongeling, "Some Remarks on the Beginning of Genesis I, 2," *Folia Orientalia* 21 (1980): 29–31; Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 226–28. Waltke argues that Genesis 1:2 is parallel with the episode-initial circumstantial clause of Genesis 3:1. Waltke, however, is more focused on the literary parallels between the two verses than the syntactic parallels, so he may not even see Genesis 1:2 as a marker of a new narrative episode. (He does, however, seem to acknowledge some kind of functional parallel between Genesis 1:2; 2:5-6; and 3:1.)

[178]Not all narrative episodes start at the head of a chapter. However, distinguishing between changes in narrative episode can be subjective. Thus, for the purpose of objectivity, this section limits its analysis to the data pool of circumstantial clauses that occur at the head of narrative chapters.

[179]Andersen, *Sentence*, 79.

plays a significant role in the following narrative episode.[180] In most cases, the subject of the circumstantial clause is either named again (Gen 16:1; 21:1; 24:1; Exod 24:1; Judg 11:1; Ruth 2:1; 1 Sam 31:1; 1 Kgs 5:1; 7:1; 1 Chr 10:1; Est 4:1),[181] referenced again with a pronoun (Gen 32:2; 39:1; Josh 13:1; 1 Kgs 1:1; 11:1; 2 Kgs 4:1),[182] or is the subject of the main clause verb (Gen 3:1; Exod 3:1; Ruth 4:1; 1 Sam 5:1; 1 Kgs 10:1; 13:1; 20:1; 2 Kgs 3:1; 9:1; 11:1; 1 Chr 23:1; 2 Chr 9:1; 15:1) in the consecutively occurring *waw*-consecutive clause. In other instances the subject is renamed with an entirely different substantive (Judg 21:1; 2 Sam 16:1; 2 Kgs 8:1).[183] Again, these are the characteristics of most episode-initial circumstantial clauses at the head of narrative chapters.[184] With respect to Genesis 1:2, however, the fronted subject, אֶרֶץ, is completely forgotten in the

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[180]Other types of episode-initial circumstantial clauses beginning a narrative chapter can be classified into three main groups: those that introduce genealogies or lists (Gen 10:1; 36:1; Exod 1:1; Num 3:1; Josh 12:1; 14:1; Judg 3:1; 2 Sam 23:1; 1 Chr 3:1; 5:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 12:1; 27:1; Ezra 2:1; Neh 12:1); those that are fronted with a time-frame reference rather than the subject (1 Kgs 15:1; 2 Chr 23:1; Ezra 1:1; 7:1; Neh 9:1; Esth 9:1; Dan 2:1; 12:1); and those that introduce a new set of laws or instructions, which are not really the head of a narrative episode (Exod 21:1:1; 26:1; 29:1; Num 29:1; Deut 4:1; 6:1). Since Gen 1:2 does not fit any of these types, they are not valid parallels and need no further analysis. (Some of these types may not even be circumstantial clauses at all. Andersen refers to those clauses found in genealogical lists as pseudo-circumstantial clauses. Andersen, *Sentence*, 88.)

[181]In Ruth 2:1 the fronted element of the circumstantial clause is not the subject, but it is referenced again in the following *waw*-consecutive clause. The subject of the clause, however, is referenced in the discourse introduced by the *waw*-consecutive clause. In 1 Kgs 7:1 the fronted element is also not the subject; however, both the subject and the fronted element are named again in the following *waw*-consecutive clause.

[182]Modern English translations make Gen 32:2 the first verse of chapter 32, which makes the verse a circumstantial marker of a new narrative episode at the head of a narrative chapter.

[183]In the circumstantial clause of Judg 21:1 the fronted element, אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל, is renamed הָעָם in the following *waw*-consecutive clause of the narrative sequence. (Judg 21:6-7 seems to confirm that the two substantives refer to one another.) In the circumstantial clause of 2 Sam 16:1 the fronted element, דָּוִד, is renamed הַמֶּלֶךְ in the following *waw*-consecutive clause. Lastly, in the circumstantial clause of 2 Kgs 8:1 the fronted element, אֱלִישָׁע, is renamed אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים in the following clause.

[184]Exod 24:1 and 39:1 are two anomolous cases. In both verses the fronted element is not the subject. The subject of both circumstantial clauses is not even named, which seems exceptional for these kinds of constructions. However, in Exod 24:1 the fronted element is named again in the following *waw*-consecutive clause, while in Exod 39:1 the subject of the circumstantial clause is also the subject of the following *waw*-consecutive clause.

following *waw*-consecutive clause. In fact, it is almost forgotten in the rest of the narrative episode, which suggests that in all probability Genesis 1:2 is not this type of circumstantial clause.[185]

There are, however, exceptions to this norm. Some episode-initial circumstantial clauses do not have the previously described characteristic. With respect to Genesis 4:1; 43:1; Numbers 32:1; Joshua 6:1; Ruth 2:1; 1 Samuel 3:1; 2 Kings 5:1; 8:1; and 10:1, the subjects of these circumstantial clauses are not referenced again, in the following *waw*-consecutive clause of the narrative chain. However, in 1 Samuel 3:1;[186] 2 Kings 5:1; 8:1; and 10:1,[187] the subject is referenced in the next *waw*-consecutive clause, and in Numbers 32:1 and Joshua 6:1 the subject is referenced in the following non-*waw*-consecutive clause. These subjects are also referenced again at other points in the following narrative episode. Again, this is not the case with Genesis 1:2.

With respect to Genesis 4:1 and 43:1, however, the subject of the circumstantial clause, like Genesis 1:2, is not mentioned again in the following *waw*-consecutive clause, nor in the rest of the narrative episode.[188] The subjects of these two verses, however, are introduced in the preceding episodes, so the reader has already been

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[185]The later uses of אֶרֶץ refer to the smaller container of the dry land, יַבָּשָׁה, in contradistinction to the sea, יָם. Waltke also argues this point. See Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 180. The larger container of the אֶרֶץ in Gen 1:2, which is in contradistinction to the heavens, שָׁמַיִם, is only referenced again at the end of the narrative episode in Gen 2:1 and 2:4.

[186]The following *waw*-consecutive clause in the narrative of episode of 1 Sam 3:1 begins at 1 Sam 3:2 with the verb וַיְהִי. Most discourse-oriented grammars, however, do not recognize *waw*-consecutive clauses beginning with the verb הָיָה to be markers of mainline narrative commentary. According to this perspective then, the mainline *waw*-consecutive narrative would not begin until 1 Sam 3:4 with the verb וַיִּקְרָא, in which case the subject of the circumstantial clause of 1 Sam 3:1 would be referenced in the next *waw*-consecutive clause.

[187]In 2 Kgs 10:1 the fronted element is not the subject; however, it is named again in the second *waw*-consecutive clause. The subject of the circumstantial clause, however, seems to be implied in the same clause as the fronted element (cf. ESV, NASB).

[188]The subject of the circumstantial clause in Gen 4:1, אָדָם, is mentioned again in the narrative episode, but not until almost its conclusion at 4:25.

made aware of their existence before attention is shifted to them in the circumstantial construction. If Genesis 1:2 acts in a similar manner, then the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 would most likely refer back to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1, but again, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation argue that the two identical words cannot correspond to one another. However, even if they did correspond to one another, Genesis 1:2 would then most likely be syntactically related to 1:1, and 1:2 would no longer be an episode-initial circumstantial clause. In either instance, since the subject of Genesis 1:2 is not referenced again in the following *waw*-consecutive clause nor the following narrative, the evidence strongly suggests that 1:2 is not an episode-initial circumstantial clause. Thus, Genesis 1:2 does not syntactically relate to 1:3 in this manner.

Genesis 1:2 as an inter-clausal circumstantial clause. As previously discussed, Genesis 1:2 could be an inter-clausal circumstantial clause, in which case it may be syntactically related to Genesis 1:3 in a more dependent manner than the episode-initial circumstantial clause. Young seems to argue that it is possible for the two verses to syntactically relate to one another in this manner. He states,

> The second possibility is to construe the three circumstantial clauses [of Genesis 1:2] with the verb וַיֹּאמֶר of verse three. We may then paraphrase, "At the time when God said, 'Let there be light', a three-fold condition was in existence, namely, *etc.*". On this construction we are not told how long this three-fold condition had been in existence, whether for years or merely moments. Nor is the creation of the three-fold condition explicitly stated. But we are now in a position to understand the relationship of verse one to what follows.[189]

Young's argument makes the summary-statement interpretation syntactically possible, but the nature of this type of circumstantial clauses makes his argument doubtful.[190]

Circumstantial clauses at the inter-clausal level do not precede, but rather follow the clauses to which they are syntactically related. Joüon states,

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[189]Young, "Relation of the First Verse of Genesis," 141.

[190]Again, this is the typical circumstantial clause as defined by most standard grammars. See footnote 172.

> The circumstantial clause can be understood in a broader or narrower sense. Here we shall be content to give the main general types of circumstantial clause, since certain categories, notably the circumstantial clause of time, have to be treated separately. *Most circumstantial clauses follow their main clause* (but see § *f* below), *and the subject occupies the initial slot* [(emphasis mine)].[191]

Furthermore, considering that some circumstantial clauses can be syntactically related to their main clauses in a paratactic, rather than hypotactic, construction,[192] the *waw* of the inter-clausal circumstantial clause seems to purposefully link it to the preceding clause rather than the following.

Young, however, knows that this is the dominate characteristic of circumstantial clauses. Thus, he counters that it is also possible for some to precede their main clauses. He states,

> There are several examples in the Old Testament of circumstantial clauses which precede the verb with which they are to be construed, *e.g.*, Gen. 38:25; Num. 12:14; Josh. 2:18; 1 Sam. 9:11; 1 Kings 14:17; 2 Kings 2:23; 6:5, 26; 9:25; Job 1:16; Isa. 37:38.[193]

These examples cited by Young are indeed instances in which the preceding clause is dependent in thought upon a following main clause verb. However, in all of Young's examples, with the exception of Numbers 12:14,[194] they are a special construction whose specifically marked syntax is used to denote simultaneous action between the preceding clause and the verb of the main clause.[195] The typical pattern for such constructions is the following: [(*waw*) + subject + participle] + [*waw* + subject + perfect verb].[196] Consider

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[191]Joüon § 159a. Paragraph 159f, mentioned in this excerpt, describes a different type of clause and is discussed in the following section.

[192]GKC § 156a; Joüon § 159b-c.

[193]Young, "Relation of the First Verse of Genesis," 141 n. 15.

[194]Young's citation of Numbers 12:14 is confusing since it does not even seem to be a circumstantial clause.

[195]GKC § 116u-v.

[196]In Josh 2:18 the verb of the main clause is imperfect. The construction, however, is still grammatically marked to denote future instantaneous action between the two clauses. See Joüon § 166i. In Josh 2:18 and 2 Kgs 6:5, the direct object is fronted instead of the subject of the main clause.

Young's examples:

Genesis 38:25a

הִוא **מוּצֵאת** וְהִיא **שָׁלְחָה** אֶל־חָמִיהָ

While she was being brought out, she sent for her father-in-law

Joshua 2:18a

הִנֵּה אֲנַחְנוּ **בָאִים** בָּאָרֶץ אֶת־תִּקְוַת חוּט הַשָּׁנִי הַזֶּה **תִּקְשְׁרִי** בַּחַלּוֹן

Behold, when we come into the land, you will tie this scarlet cord of thread in the window

1 Samuel 9:11a

הֵמָּה **עֹלִים** בְּמַעֲלֵה הָעִיר וְהֵמָּה **מָצְאוּ** נְעָרוֹת יֹצְאוֹת לִשְׁאֹב מָיִם

While they were going up the ascent of the city, they found young women coming out to draw water

1 Kings 14:17b

הִיא **בָּאָה** בְסַף־הַבַּיִת וְהַנַּעַר **מֵת**׃

When she came into the threshold of the house, the child died

2 Kings 2:23a

וְהוּא **עֹלֶה** בַּדֶּרֶךְ וּנְעָרִים קְטַנִּים **יָצְאוּ** מִן־הָעִיר

Now while he was going on the way, small lads came out from the city

2 Kings 6:5a

וַיְהִי הָאֶחָד **מַפִּיל** הַקּוֹרָה וְאֶת־הַבַּרְזֶל **נָפַל** אֶל־הַמָּיִם

And it was that while one was felling the log, the iron *axe head* fell into the water

2 Kings 6:26a

וַיְהִי מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל **עֹבֵר** עַל־הַחֹמָה וְאִשָּׁה **צָעֲקָה** אֵלָיו

And it was while the king of Israel was passing by the wall, a woman cried out to him

2 Kings 9:25b

כִּי־זָכֹר אֲנִי וְאַתָּה אֵת **רֹכְבִים** צְמָדִים אַחֲרֵי אַחְאָב אָבִיו וַיהוָה **נָשָׂא**
עָלָיו אֶת־הַמַּשָּׂא הַזֶּה׃

For remember how while you and I were riding together behind Ahab, his father, the Lord lifted up against him this oracle

Job 1:16a

עוֹד זֶה **מְדַבֵּר** וְזֶה **בָּא**

While this one was speaking, another came

Isaiah 37:38a

וַיְהִי הוּא **מִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה** בֵּית נִסְרֹךְ אֱלֹהָיו וְאַדְרַמֶּלֶךְ וְשַׂרְאֶצֶר בָּנָיו **הִכֻּהוּ** בַּחָרֶב

And it was that while he was worshipping in the temple of Nisroch his god, Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, struck him with the sword

According to Joüon, in these special types of constructions, the action of the preceding clause is durative while the action of the main clause is instantaneous.[197] However, the relationship between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3 clearly does not fit this syntactical structure, nor does it denote instantaneous action between the two clauses. Thus, Genesis 1:2 cannot relate to Genesis 1:3 in the manner described by Young.[198]

There are thousands upon thousands of circumstantial clauses in the Hebrew Old Testament. Thus, even though Young's examples do not parallel the manner in which Genesis 1:2 might be syntactically related to Genesis 1:3, it seems likely that there should be at least some parallel examples of circumstantial clauses preceding their main clauses in the Hebrew Old Testament. However, the overwhelming syntactical feature of these circumstantial clauses is that they follow their main clauses, and even Young is hard

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[197]Joüon § 166f.

[198]Unfortunately, Waltke cites Young's examples as syntactical evidence that circumstantial clauses can precede their main clause. See Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 227. (Waltke's citation incorrectly notes page 15 of Young's work *Studies in Genesis One*; the correct page number is 9.)

pressed to find any proper examples. This dominant syntactical feature of the circumstantial clause strongly suggests that if Genesis 1:2 is this type of clause, it is syntactically related to Genesis 1:1, not 1:3. Furthermore, the close proximity of the word אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 to the identical word אֶרֶץ in 1:1, makes it even more likely that Genesis 1:2 is syntactically related to Genesis 1:1 instead of 1:3. There is, however, another possible way in which Genesis 1:2 could relate to 1:3.

Genesis 1:2 as a parenthetical construction. It is possible that Genesis 1:2, with its *waw* + subject + verb structure, is used in a parenthetical construction to supply background information relevant to the narrative.[199] However, whether or not such a parenthetical construction is another type of circumstantial clause is difficult to determine. On the one hand, Lambdin's grammar, *Introduction to Hebrew*, and Joüon distinguish between circumstantial clauses and parenthetical constructions—Lambdin admits that the distinction is not easy.[200] On the other hand Andersen categorizes such parenthetical constructions as circumstantial clauses.[201] The difficulty with determining whether such constructions are circumstantial or not is that they seem to be more independent in nature. Rather than expressing a thought that is subordinate to the action of a main verb, they seem to express an independent thought that may or may not be germane to the narrative at hand. Joüon states, "Sometimes it is not easy to see whether a

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[199]Many proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that Gen 1:2 is a parenthetical construction. See W. R. Lane, "The Initiation of Creation," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 70–71; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1964), 12; Harry Orlinsky, foreword to *Genesis: The N. J. V. Translation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Harper Torch Books; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, The Temple Library, 1966), xv; Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology*, 73. However, Orlinsky and Brown understand such clauses to be syntactically dependent.

[200]Joüon § 159f; Lambdin, *Introduction to Hebrew*, § 132b-c. Joüon does analyze these parenthetical constructions under the circumstantial heading, but it also makes a clear distinction between the two clause types.

[201]Andersen, *Sentence*, 82.

given clause (especially participial) is purely circumstantial; it can form a sort of more or less independent parenthesis, or it can even be totally independent."[202]

The function of the clause, however, is more important than its taxonomy. Such parenthetical constructions, whether they should be considered circumstantial or not, can supply background information that is relevant to the narrative that follows rather than the narrative that precedes. Joüon states,

> On the other hand, a nominal or verbal clause with Waw forms a sort of parenthesis and precedes the main clause, as in Gn 13.2 וְאַבְרָם כָּבֵד מְאֹד *now Abram was very rich* ..; 24.16 *now the young girl was very beautiful*..; Jn 3.3 *now Nineveh was an enormous city*; Gn 48.10 וְעֵינֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּבְדוּ מִזֹּקֶן *now the eyes of Israel were heavy because of old age*; Josh 4.10 "whilst the priests .. stood (עֹמְדִים) in the middle of the Jordan .. the people hurriedly crossed over (וַיְמַהֲרוּ וַיַּעֲבֹרוּ)." This same type of clause is also found used in an independent fashion: 1 Kg 1.1 (at the very beginning of a narrative) *now King David was old, advanced in age*; Gn 37.3 *now Israel loved Joseph more than any other son of his*; Ex 19.18 *now the mountain of Sinai was all smoking*.[203]

Some of these cited examples are debatable,[204] but others, such as Genesis 13:2; 37:3; and Jonah 3:3, do clearly supply background information relevant to the narrative that follows.[205] The relationship, however, between the parenthetical construction and the following narrative is more semantic than syntactic. Thus, if Genesis 1:2 functions in this manner, then it is extremely likely that the verse could semantically relate to Genesis 1:3 without being syntactically dependent upon it like a typical circumstantial clause.[206]

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[202]Joüon § 159a n. 1.

[203]Ibid., § 159f.

[204]Not all of these examples seem to supply background information that is relevant to the following narratives. Josh 4:10 seems to supply information that is relevant to the preceding narrative, so the translation offered in this excerpt seems to be incorrect (cf. ESV, NASB). Gen 24:16 and Exod 19:18 seem to supply background information, but neither seem to be relevant to the preceding or following narratives. 1 Kgs 1:1 is an episode-initial circumstantial clause, whose type has already been discussed.

[205]Lambdin also cites Gen 29:16 as a parenthetical construction. This verse also supplies background information that is relevant to the following narrative. See Lambdin, *Introduction to Hebrew*, § 132c.

[206]Jongeling does not distinguish between such parenthetical constructions and episode-initial circumstantial clauses; however, he does seem to argue that Genesis 1:2 does function in a more parenthetical manner in its relationship to Genesis 1:3. See Jongeling, "Remarks," 29–31.

It is doubtful, however, that if Genesis 1:2 relates to Genesis 1:3 in this manner, its subject, אֶרֶץ, would not still relate to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. In these types of parenthetical constructions the subject tends to be introduced in the preceding narrative before it is brought to the forefront of the parenthetical construction, and this is indeed the case with all of Joüon's cited examples. Driver also states,

> In consequence of the subject thus standing conspicuously in the foreground, the reader's attention is suddenly arrested, and directed pointedly to it: he is thus made aware that it is the writer's wish to lay special stress upon it as about to be contrasted, in respect of the predicate following, either with some *other* subject mentioned before, or else with the same subject under a *different* aspect (i.e. with a different predicate) previously mentioned or implied.[207]

Commenting on the construction of Genesis 1:2, Cassuto states,

> Whenever the subject comes before the predicate, as here [in Gen 1:2], the intention of the Bible is to give emphasis to the subject and to tell us something new about it; see for instance, iii 1: *Now the serpent was cunning*, etc. (the serpent had not previously been mentioned by name, but was merely implied in the general term *beast of the field* - ii 19, 20). But in most cases, including our own, the subject has already been mentioned earlier, and the verse comes to focus the reader's attention on it; e.g. [Gen] iv 1, 18 (four times); vii 16, 19; x 8, 9, 13, 15, 24, 26; xi 12, 14; xiii 14; xviii 17, 18; xx 4; xxi 1; xxii 23; etc., etc. It is as though Scripture said: 'As for this subject, I have to tell you that this is what happened, or what he did, or what befell him'. Here, too, the meaning is: 'As for the earth alluded to in the first verse, I must tell you that at the beginning of its creation, it was without form or life,' etc.[208]

Since the focus of the narrative shifts from the consecutive sequences of the main verbs to the subject of the parenthetical construction, the subject needs a prior introduction in order to aid the reader in knowing that further information is being communicated about the previously introduced subject. If the subject has yet to be introduced into the preceding narrative, then the use of the parenthetical construction seems almost out of place and irrelevant.[209] Thus, even though, Genesis 1:2 may relate to 1:3 in this manner,

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[207]Driver, *Tenses*, § 157.

[208]U. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah: A Commentary on Genesis I-VI 8*, vol. 1 of *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1961), 21.

[209]One such example is Gen 13:7. The subjects of the parenthetical construction are not mentioned in the preceding narrative. Thus, the construction almost seems out of place in the microcosm of

the fronted subject of Genesis 1:2, אֶרֶץ, needs a prior introduction to which it can point back. If Genesis 1:2 is this type of parenthetical construction, it is logical to assume that the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 points back to and corresponds to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. This is especially so considering the proximal correspondence of the two identical words.[210]

There are, however, exceptions to this norm. With respect to the parenthetical constructions in such verses as Genesis 13:7; Exodus 9:31-32; and Ruth 4:7, the fronted element is not introduced in the preceding narrative, and in the cases of Exodus 9:31-32 and Ruth 4:7, the parenthetical constructions do supply background information relevant to the narrative that follows. Thus, theoretically Genesis 1:2 could relate to Genesis 1:3 in this manner without the subject, אֶרֶץ, corresponding to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. This arrangement, however, would be extremely odd. Since the subject in parenthetical constructions is usually introduced in the preceding narrative, for reasons already explained, it would be confusing to the reader if the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 actually did *not* correspond to the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1.[211] If Genesis 1:2 is a parenthetical construction,

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the narrative. This is not to say that the construction actually is out of place. It only appears that way to a reader.

[210]Even Jongeling, a summary-statement proponent, recognizes the characteristic of the parenthetical construction to look back to the preceding narrative. He states, "There *is* a connection [of Gen 1:2] with verse 1, but the copula does not make plain that 'the earth' of verse 1 is 'the waste earth' of verse 2 as some exegetes assert. . . . In my opinion Gen. I, 1 is a concise statement about the whole of God's work of creation, in which the expression 'the heaven and the earth' designates the visible reality. Verse 2 is an introductory remark which may be paraphrased as follows: 'Now the reader must not think that this work [in Gen 1:1] was done in a trice; no, the earth was inhospitable and uninhabitable ...'" Jongeling, "Remarks," 31. Interestingly, however, he does not perceive that the subject of verse 2, אֶרֶץ, looks back to Genesis 1:1 even though earlier he recognizes that the subjects of other such constructions are generally mentioned in the preceding narratives.

[211]Waltke does use the literary parallels of Gen 2:5-6, Gen 3:1, and the introductory portion of *Enûma Elish* to demonstrate that the circumstantial clause of Gen 1:2 can relate to Gen 1:3. See Waltke, "Creation Account, Part III," 226–27. While these parallels seem to be more literary than syntactical, Gen 2:5-6 can certainly function as a syntactical parallel to Gen 1:2 if both 2:5-6 and 1:2 are treated as parenthetical clauses. (The literary comparison with Gen 3:1 is not a syntactical parallel since Gen 3:1 is an episode-initial circumstantial clause.) Like Gen 1:2, Gen 2:5-6 do begin with the construction of *waw* + noun + verb. However, the fronted noun phrases of Gen 2:5-6 (כֹּל שִׂיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה, וְכָל־עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה, and וְאֵד) are not referenced in the preceding narrative, which is possible for parenthetical clauses. Whereas, the fronted noun of Genesis 1:2, אֶרֶץ, does immediately occur in Gen 1:1, which again strongly suggests that the אֶרֶץ of Gen 1:2 *is* the same אֶרֶץ of Gen 1:1. Later in the same article Waltke uses the examples of Jon 3:3; Zech

then the nature of such constructions strongly suggests that the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 corresponds with the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1 even if 1:2 supplies background information relevant to the following narrative.[212] Again, both the syntax of the passage and the proximal correspondence of the two identical words bring Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 together into semantic and syntactic continuity.[213] To argue the contrary is to argue against the straightforward syntax of the text.

A Plainer Syntactical Reading of the Text

There is plainer and simpler reading of the syntactical relationships between the aggregate clauses of Genesis 1:1-3. Genesis 1:1 introduces a normal narrative clause in which the mainline action carries over both temporally and sequentially into Genesis 1:3. The nominal clause of Genesis 1:2[214] breaks into this narrative sequence in order to supply the reader with background information.[215] This is the traditional syntactical reading of the passage that has been the norm for centuries.

3:2-3; and Judg 8:11 to argue against rendering the הָיָה of Gen 1:2 in its active, pluperfect sense. See ibid., 227-28. These three examples also have the specific construction of waw + subject + perfect verb, and all three are parenthetical clauses. Since the fronted nouns in these examples are introduced in the preceding narrative, and since their syntactical construction is identical to Gen 1:2, they seem to be better syntactical parallels to the verse than Gen 2:5-6.

[212]If Gen 1:2 is a parenthetical construction, then it most likely supplies background information that is relevant to both the preceding and following narrative.

[213]Collins argues that Gen 1:2 is syntactically related to Gen 1:1. However, he argues that both verses are not on the main storyline. They rather describe events that precede the main storyline. John C. Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 51–55. In other words Gen 1:1 is the first act of creation, but it took place some time before the first day of creation. This view takes into consideration the narrative structure of the passage, and it is compatible with the traditional interpretation.

[214]Childs labels Gen 1:2 as a nominal clause with circumstantial force. See Childs, *Myth and Reality*, 32.

[215]According to this reading, one could identify Gen 1:2 as a parenthetical clause, as the previous section demonstrates. In this dissertation the only difference between treating Gen 1:2 as either a parenthetical clause or a nominal clause is for the most part a matter of nomenclature.

There are two reasons why this reading of the text is plainer and simpler than the summary-statement interpretation. First, there are a number of constructions that parallel the narrative structure and sequence that exists between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. In these parallel constructions, the introductory narrative clause begins with a temporal prepositional phrase that is followed by the mainline verb and then its subject. This introductory clause is then followed by a *waw*-consecutive clause that both sequentially and temporally continues the mainline action. Consider the following examples:

2 Kings 20:1a

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם חָלָה חִזְקִיָּהוּ לָמוּת וַיָּבֹא אֵלָיו יְשַׁעְיָהוּ בֶן־אָמוֹץ הַנָּבִיא

In those days Hezekiah began to die, and Isaiah, son of Amoz, the prophet, came to him

2 Kings 24:1

בְּיָמָיו עָלָה נְבֻכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ בָּבֶל וַיְהִי־לוֹ יְהוֹיָקִים עֶבֶד שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים
וַיָּשָׁב וַיִּמְרָד־בּוֹ׃

In his days, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon came up, and he made Jehoiakim his servant for three years, but he turned and rebelled against him.

2 Chronicles 32:24

בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם חָלָה יְחִזְקִיָּהוּ עַד־לָמוּת וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֶל־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ
וּמוֹפֵת נָתַן לוֹ׃

In those days Hezekiah began to die, and he prayed to the LORD, and He answered him with a sign which He gave to him.

Esther 9:11-12a

[11]בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא מִסְפַּר הַהֲרוּגִים בְּשׁוּשַׁן הַבִּירָה לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ׃
[12]וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה

[11]On that day the number of those killed in Susa came to the palace before the king.
[12]And the king said to Esther, the queen

Jeremiah 39:2-3a

[2]בְּעַשְׁתֵּי־עֶשְׂרֵה שָׁנָה לְצִדְקִיָּהוּ בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרְבִיעִי בְּתִשְׁעָה לַחֹדֶשׁ הָבְקְעָה הָעִיר׃

וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל שָׂרֵי מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל וַיֵּשְׁבוּ בְּשַׁעַר הַתָּוֶךְ[3]

[2]In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month on the ninth of the month, the city was breached.
[3]And all the officials of the king of Babylon came, and they sat in the middle gate

Daniel 1:1

בִּשְׁנַת שָׁלוֹשׁ לְמַלְכוּת יְהוֹיָקִים מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה בָּא נְבוּכַדְנֶאצַּר מֶלֶךְ־בָּבֶל
יְרוּשָׁלַם וַיָּצַר עָלֶיהָ׃

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem, and he besieged it.

In these examples, there is no interruption in the narrative sequence like there is in Genesis 1:1-3; nevertheless, they demonstrate the plain and simple syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3.

The second reason for this simpler reading of Genesis 1:1-3 is that the nominal clause of Genesis 1:2 interjects a natural disruption into the narrative sequence between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3.[216] Like other nominal clauses, the natural purpose of Genesis 1:2 is to break into the narrative sequence, arrest the reader's attention, and focus it on the fronted subject, the אֶרֶץ. This interruption in the narrative is a signal to the reader that background information relevant to the narrative is being communicated. Furthermore, like most fronted subjects in a nominal clause, the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 looks back to a previously introduced referent: the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. Again, the nominal clause of Genesis 1:2 naturally interrupts the naturally structured narrative sequence between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. This is the plainest and simplest reading of the text.

A close parallel to the aggregate syntactical relationships of Genesis 1:1-3 is

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[216]This author uses the term "nominal clause" in the same manner as the Arab grammarians. According to Arab grammarians, a nominal clause is any clause in which the subject occupies the first position even if a verb is present in the predicate. Cf. GKC § 140f and Joüon § 153 n. 2. Thus, not all nominal clauses are verbless. Niccacci states, "The following definition [of the nominal/noun clause], which follows the model of Arabic grammarians, is better suited to Hebrew syntax than the generally accepted definition: a verbal clause tells us *what the subject does*, in other words, what the action is; a noun clause tells us *who the subject is*." Niccacci, *Syntax of the Verb*, § 6.

Esther 8:1-2. The passage states,

[1]בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא נָתַן הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחַשְׁוֵרוֹשׁ לְאֶסְתֵּר הַמַּלְכָּה אֶת־בֵּית הָמָן צֹרֵר
הַיְּהוּדִיִּם וּמָרְדֳּכַי בָּא לִפְנֵי הַמֶּלֶךְ כִּי־הִגִּידָה אֶסְתֵּר מַה הוּא־לָהּ:
[2]וַיָּסַר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶת־טַבַּעְתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱבִיר מֵהָמָן וַיִּתְּנָהּ לְמָרְדֳּכָי
וַתָּשֶׂם אֶסְתֵּר אֶת־מָרְדֳּכַי עַל־בֵּית הָמָן:

> [1]On that day King Ahasuerus gave to Esther, the queen, the house of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. Now Mordecai came before the King because Esther had declared what he was to her.
> [2]And the king took his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and he gave it to Mordecai, and Esther placed Mordecai over the house of Haman.

In this parallel example, Esther 8:1a introduces a narrative clause in which the mainline action carries over both temporally and sequentially into Esther 8:2. The nominal clause of Esther 8:1b breaks into this narrative sequence in order to supply the reader with background information. Like Genesis 1:1, Esther 8:1a begins with a temporal prepositional phrase that is followed by the mainline perfect verb and then its subject. Like Genesis 1:2, Esther 8:1b interjects a nominal clause that disrupts the mainline action sequence. This interruption also shifts attention to the fronted subject, מָרְדֳּכַי, of the nominal clause. Although the fronted subject is not named in the immediately preceding clause of Esther 8:1a, it is a main participant in the preceding narrative.[217] Thus, in this sense, the fronted subject also looks back to a prior introduction in the narrative. Like Genesis 1:3, Esther 8:2 begins with a *waw*-consecutive clause and resumes the narrative sequence. This plain and simple syntactical reading of the text makes Genesis 1:1 the first mainline action of the narrative. With respect to the interpretation, it makes Genesis 1:1 the first act of creation.

Syntactical Conclusion

The syntactical evidence suggests that Genesis 1:2 is best understood as a

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[217]The fronted subject of the nominal clause, מָרְדֳּכַי, is actually named in the preceding verse: Esth 7:10.

nominal clause that interrupts the narrative sequence between Genesis 1:1 and 1:3. This syntactical relationship is mostly attributed to the structure of Genesis 1:2 in which the fronted subject אֶרֶץ looks back to the previously introduced אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1. Since the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 is in such close proximity to the preceding אֶרֶץ of 1:1, there is no syntactical reason to assume that it does not correspond in meaning and state to the אֶרֶץ of 1:1. Rather than pulling the two verses apart, the syntactical evidence clearly brings them together. Thus, as previously suggested, in order for the summary-statement interpretation to be more probable than the traditional interpretation, Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 cannot syntactically relate to one another. Proponents of the summary-statement interpretation argue against semantic continuity between the two verses at the lexical level, but at the syntactical level, summary-statement proponents must argue in spite of the syntactical evidence. Again, the traditional interpretation is the plainer and simpler reading of the text, working with the syntactical evidence, not against it.

Conclusion

The following discussion demonstrates that with respect to the text of Genesis 1:1-3, the summary-statement interpretation is a more difficult reading of the text while the traditional interpretation is plainer and simpler. With respect to the lexical data, the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 and the consecutively occurring אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 seem to naturally correspond to one another, but summary-statement proponents argue that they cannot because they have differing meanings and states. This chapter has shown, however, that the two words can correspond to one another in meaning even if the former occurs in the compound phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ in Genesis 1:1. This chapter has also shown that the two words can correspond to one another in state even if the latter is described as being in a state of תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ in Genesis 1:2. If the two words can correspond to one another in meaning and state, then the plainer and simpler reading of the text, the traditional interpretation, treats them in this manner.

With respect to the syntactical data, the structure of Genesis 1:2 strongly suggests that it is syntactically related to Genesis 1:1, but summary-statement proponents argue that Genesis 1:2 is syntactically related to Genesis 1:3. This chapter has demonstrated, however, that such a syntactical relationship between Genesis 1:2 and 1:3 is difficult and contrary to the natural syntax of the passage. If the natural syntax of the passage suggests that Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 relate to one another, then the plainer and simpler reading of the text, the traditional interpretation, treats it in this manner. Overall the proximal correspondence of the two occurrences of אֶרֶץ and the syntactical construction of Genesis 1:2 bring it and Genesis 1:1 together into semantic continuity. Thus, the traditional interpretation is more faithful to the lexical and syntactical evidences in particular and more faithful to the principles of Classical-Hebrew linguistics in general.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The Theological Implications

As noted in the first two chapters of this dissertation, the majority of scholars from both the Christian and Jewish traditions have long appraised the traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 as the truest reading of the text. According to this understanding of the passage, Genesis 1:1 describes the first act of creation, without any mention of previously existing elements. Because of this interpretation, many of these same scholars have also long appraised the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as a logical and theological inference of the Genesis 1 narrative. However, as this dissertation has also noted, many more modern scholars identify Genesis 1:3 as the first act of creation, in which case there is no explanation for the origin of the elements of Genesis 1:2, which are present at and before the moment of first creation. Because of this interpretation, many of these same scholars do *not* recognize the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* as a logical and theological inference of the creation narrative, and rightly so. According to this understanding of the text, something is already present when God begins to create.

Such major doctrinal differences are clearly delineated by one's interpretation of Genesis 1:1, which determines whether God starts the act of creation in Genesis 1:1 or in Genesis 1:3. If God begins creating in Genesis 1:1, then nothing is described as being present at that initial creation, and therefore, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a logical and theological inference of the narrative. If God begins creating in Genesis 1:3, then the elements of Genesis 1:2 are described as being present at that initial creation, and

therefore, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is not communicated in the narrative.

Orlinsky, a proponent of the dependent-clause translation apply states,

> The implications of the new, correct rendering are clear. The Hebrew text tells us nothing about "creation out of nothing" (*creatio ex nihilo*), or about the beginning of time; it has nothing to say about the order of creation, so far as heaven, earth, darkness, deep, wind, or water are concerned. Indeed, the last four elements are not even described as having been created by God; the text merely asserts that these elements were present when God began to create the universe. What, then, constituted the first act of creation, if it wasn't any of heaven, earth, darkness, etc.? The text, once again gives us the answer directly, in verse 3: "(when God began to create the heaven and the earth . . .) God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." In other words, the first thing God did when he created the world was to create light. . . . Naturally, there are those who are upset by this old-new interpretation. "When did time begin?" they ask. "What existed in the beginning? Who created the darkness and the water and the deep? And is there no longer any beginning? And what happens to the theological concept of *creatio ex nihilo*?" And so on. Now every scholar or committee of scholars that assumes the responsibility of producing an authorized translation of the Bible for members of a religious group is aware of the difficulties that may arise as a consequence of the translation achieved for such "delicate" passages as Genesis 1.1-3. But the reply by the biblical scholar to such questions can only be: We know only what the Hebrew text of the Bible tells us. If the ancient Hebrew writer did not think about these things, or if he did, did not care to bother his readers with them, it is not for us to read into his text what he did not put into it; and anyone who does this is simply not being faithful to his biblical Hebraic source.[1]

Also Barr, a proponent of the summary-statement interpretation also states,

> "Creation by separation" is a good term to describe the major thrust of the passage. The main emphasis is not on a process from nothing to something, from nonexistence to existence, but on a process from confusion to distinction, from chaos to order. Some of the things created do appear to be absolutely created, as if out of nothing, like the light; others seem to "emerge naturally," like plants, which the earth "brings forth"; others again seem to have been there from the beginning and simply to have been demarcated, like the land and sea. And the chaos of 1:2 seems to have been not just a negation of existence but to have been a source from which certain elements in the created world were drawn. . . . Second, we come back to the theme of creation out of nothing. We have seen that this is not the main theme of Genesis 1, and perhaps of any canonical Old Testament passage. In Genesis, some things, like light, are created out of nothing; others, like land and water, seem to be there already. If so, we may say that creation out of nothing is not a central affirmation of the passage.[2]

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[1]Harry Orlinsky, foreword to *Genesis: The N. J. V. Translation* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Harper Torch Books; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, The Temple Library, 1966), xv.

[2]James Barr, "Was Everything That God Created Really Good?" in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggeman*, ed. Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 59–60, 65.

Thus, because of the doctrinal issues at stake in this debate, this dissertation has challenged the linguistic validity of both the dependent-clause translation and the summary-statement interpretation. The preceding investigation suggests that the simplest and most faithful reading of the text reckons Genesis 1:1 to be the first act of creation, while the more difficult and improbable interpretation reckons Genesis 1:3 to be the first act of creation. Consider again the conclusions of the linguistic data.

The Dependent-Clause Translation

Again, proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue that the first word in Genesis 1:1, בְּרֵאשִׁית, is in construct with the verb בָּרָא. This grammatical construction creates a dependent clause, which most proponents argue is subordinate to the main clause of Genesis 1:3, Genesis 1:2 being an intervening parenthetical comment. Genesis 1:1-3 is thus rendered in the NJPS as, "When God began to create heaven and earth—the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweeping over the water—God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." According to this translation, Genesis 1:1 is not the first act of creation; rather, it, along with Genesis 1:2, is a description of the context in which the first act of creation takes place, the creation of light in Genesis 1:3. There is no explanation of whence the elements in Genesis 1:2 came; the chapter does not state that God created them. Thus, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* cannot be a logical inference of the text with the dependent-clause translation.

As Chapter 3 has noted, the main reason proponents of the dependent-clause translation argue for this rendering is because the word רֵאשִׁית, anarthrous in the text of Genesis 1:1, has a relative meaning, which frequently makes it grammatically dependent upon another word. However, this explanation is contrary to the linguistic evidences as a whole. First, according to the evidence at the lexical level, even though the word רֵאשִׁית, as a relator noun, does have a relative meaning, the lexical evidence demonstrates that

such a meaning does not require it to be in construct with the verb בָּרָא. Relator nouns frequently occur in the absolute state. Second, according to evidence at the grammatical level, even though relator nouns like רֵאשִׁית almost always have a determinate meaning, they do not always take a definite article when they are grammatically absolute. Finally, according to evidence at the syntactical level, if רֵאשִׁית were in grammatical construct with בָּרָא, such a construction would not create a mere temporal clause, but a genitive clause. Genitive clauses, however, and the nouns that govern them are rarely separated from their main clauses by a clause-level *waw*, a *soph passuq*, or an entire verse like Genesis 1:2. The fact that Genesis 1:1 would be separated from Genesis 1:3 by all three suggests a syntactical impossibility.[3] Thus, the linguistic evidences as a whole demonstrate that Genesis 1:1 is an independent main clause. If the verse is an independent main clause, then the dependent-clause translation and its interpretation should be rejected.

The Summary-Statement Interpretation

Again, proponents of the summary-statement interpretation agree that Genesis 1:1 is an independent main clause; however, they argue that Genesis 1:1 is a title or summary of the Genesis 1 creation narrative. According to this interpretation then, Genesis 1:1 is also not the first act of creation nor the beginning of the narrative account. Rather, the narrative account begins at Genesis 1:2, and the first act of creation, the creation of light, occurs at Genesis 1:3. Thus, this interpretation creates a semantic discontinuity between Genesis 1:1, the summary of the narrative, and 1:2, the beginning of the narrative. Genesis 1:2 provides the context in which creation takes place, but again, there is no explanation in the narrative for whence the elements of Genesis 1:2 came. Thus, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* cannot be a logical inference of the text

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[3]Cf. NJPS.

with the summary-statement interpretation as well.

As Chapter 4 has noted, there are two main reasons why summary-statement proponents argue this interpretation. First, because the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 is used in the compound phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ, it cannot correspond in meaning to the word אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2. The compound phrase frequently refers to the organized universe, but Genesis 1:2 describes a universe that is incomplete and unorganized. Second, because the compound phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ describes the state of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2, it cannot correspond in state to the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1. The compound phrase describes the אֶרֶץ as being in a state that is the opposite of something created, the state of non-A; whereas, the state of the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1 is created, the state of A. Creating a semantic discontinuity between the Genesis 1:1 and 1:2 maintains these lexical distinctions between the two proximal occurrences of אֶרֶץ. However, these explanations are also contrary to the linguistic evidences as a whole. First, according to evidence at the lexical level, even though the compound phrase אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ frequently refers to the organized universe, it can also refer to only the cosmological containers of both the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:1. Second, there is also no lexical evidence to support the idea that the compound phrase תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ describes the word אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2 as being in a state contrary to creation. Rather, the phrase is used to describe the אֶרֶץ as being in a state of desolation, empty of inhabitants. Thus, the description of the אֶרֶץ as תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ actually substantiates the interpretation of Genesis 1:1 as the creation of only the containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ.

Finally, according to the evidence at the syntactical level, there is little warrant for arguing that Genesis 1:2 is syntactically related to Genesis 1:3. First, circumstantial clauses of the same type of construction as Genesis 1:2a are almost always syntactically related to preceding clauses rather than to clauses that follow. Second, in parenthetical constructions, the fronted nouns, like the אֶרֶץ in Genesis 1:2a, naturally look back to and

are identified by previously introduced nouns of the same referent.[4] This natural feature, along with the proximal correspondence between the אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:2 and the previously introduced אֶרֶץ of Genesis 1:1, strongly suggests Genesis 1:2 is related to Genesis 1:1 both syntactically and semantically. Thus, the linguistic evidences as a whole allow for and suggest a semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2. If there is semantic continuity between the two verses, then the summary-statement interpretation is unlikely.

The Traditional Translation and Interpretation

The traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 are more faithful to the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical evidences in particular and more faithful to Classical-Hebrew linguistics in general. According to this reading of the text, Genesis 1:1 describes the first act of creation, the creation of the larger cosmological containers of the שָׁמַיִם and the אֶרֶץ. Genesis 1:2 is then descriptive of that initial creation, explaining that the larger cosmological אֶרֶץ created in Genesis 1:1 was in a state of desolation, or תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ. Thus, the initial creation was still not yet in a complete state. This of course sets the tone for the rest of the narrative since the created world as a whole is never in a completed state until the end of the sixth day, hence the concluding statement of Genesis 2:1. Genesis 1:3 then describes the second act of creation, the creation of light. According to this translation and interpretation, the elements in Genesis 1:2 are then a part of the initial creation in Genesis 1:1. Everything in the text is explicitly described as being created by God, and there is nothing in the text that is in existence when God begins creating. Again, Tertullian, the early church father, apply writes,

> We, however, have but one God, and but one earth too, which in the beginning God made. The Scripture, which at its very outset proposes to run through the order thereof tells us as its first information that it was created; it next proceeds to set forth what sort of earth it was. In like manner with respect to the heaven, it informs

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[4]This dissertation identifies Gen 1:2a as a nominal clause. Though the nomenclature is different from a parenthetical clause, both are very similar in function.

> us first of its creation—"In the beginning God made the heaven:" it then goes on to introduce its arrangement; how that God both separated "the water which was below the firmament from that which was above the firmament," and called the firmament heaven,—the very thing He had created in the beginning. Similarly it (afterwards) treats of man: "And God created man, in the image of God made He him." It next reveals how He made him: "And (the Lord) God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Now this is undoubtedly the correct and fitting mode for the narrative. First comes a prefatory statement, then follow the details in full; first the subject is named, then it is described. How absurd is the other view of the account, when even before he had premised any mention of his subject, *i.e.* Matter, without even giving us its name, he all on a sudden promulged its form and condition, describing to us its quality before mentioning its existence [(Gen 1:2)],—pointing out the figure of the thing formed, *but* concealing its name! But how much more credible is our opinion, which holds that Scripture has only subjoined the arrangement of the subject after it has first duly described its formation and mentioned its name! Indeed, how full and complete is the meaning of these words: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; but the earth was without form, and void,"—the very same earth, no doubt, which God made, and of which the Scripture had been speaking at that very moment. For that very "*but*" [*autem*] inserted into the narrative like a clasp, (in its function) of a conjunctive particle, to connect the two sentences indissolubly together: "But the earth." This word carries back the mind to that earth of which mention had just been made, and binds the sense thereunto. Take away this "but," and the tie is loosened; so much so that the passage, "But the earth was without form, and void," may then seem to have been meant for any other earth.[5]

The traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 is the plainest and simplest reading of the passage, neatly fittingly the natural linguistics of the text. Because of this reading, the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is a logical and theological inference of the creation narrative. Traditional theologians are on a sure linguistic footing when arguing for it.

Amazingly, even though much has been written on the most important evidences of this singular text (the linguistic evidences), much more could be written concerning the literary, contextual, historical, and theological evidences as well. There is so much more that has been written on the subject of this singular verse. Commenting on his own investigation of Genesis 1:1, Augustine states,

> Behold, O Lord my God, I beseech you, how many things we have written concerning these few words, how many! What strength of ours, what tracts of time

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[5]Tertullian *Against Hermogenes* 26, trans. D. Holmes, ANF 3:491-2.

would suffice to treat all your books in this manner.[6]

Truer words cannot be uttered for such an important passage as the first verse of the Bible.

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[6]Augustine *The Confessions* 12.32.43, trans. John K. Ryan, (New York: Doubleday, Image Books, 1960), 333.

APPENDIX

GENITIVE CLAUSES

The Compilation of the Data

The following is a list of various references that in total contain 210 genitive clauses. This list is compiled from the examples found by this author and from those presented in GKC and Joüon. They are the following: Genesis 15:13; 24:22; 39:4; 43:3; 49:27; Exodus 4:13; 6:28; 9:4; 15:17; 18:20; Leviticus 7:9, 35; 14:16, 46; 25:48; Numbers 3:1; 7:13; 23:3; Deuteronomy 4:15; 32:11 (2x), 17, 35; Joshua 7:21; 14:10; Judges 8:1; 20:15; 1 Samuel 5:9; 6:9; 17:4; 25:15; 26:14; 2 Samuel 12:22; 20:21; 22:1, 44; 1 Kings 13:2, 12; 2 Kings 3:8; 8:6; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 12:23; 15:12; 17:13; 18:8; 29:1, 3; 2 Chronicles 1:4; 15:11; 16:9; 18:23; 20:22; 24:11; 28:9; 29:27; 30:17, 19; 31:19; Ezra 1:5; Nehemiah 8:10; 13:23; Job 1:1; 3:3 (2x), 15; 6:17; 7:2 (2x); 9:26; 11:16; 13:28 (2x); 15:3 (2x); 18:21; 21:27; 24:19; 28:1; 29:2, 12, 16; 30:13; 31:12 (2x); 38:19, 24, 26; Psalms 4:8; 7:16; 11:4; 16:3, 4; 18:1, 3, 44; 25:12; 32:2, 8; 33:12; 34:9; 38:14; 42:2; 49:13, 14, 21; 51:10; 56:4, 10; 58:5, 9; 59:17; 65:5; 68:31; 71:18; 74:3; 78:6; 81:6; 83:15 (2x); 90:5, 15 (2x); 102:3; 104:9; 119:136; 125:1; 138:3; 141:9; 148:6; Proverbs 8:32; 17:14; 22:11; 26:17; 30:17 (2x); Ecclesiastes 10:5; Isaiah 6:6; 15:1, 7; 28:16; 29:1, 14; 38:5; 40:20 (2x); 41:2, 10, 24; 42:1, 16 (3x); 44:1, 2 (2x); 48:17; 51:1 (2x), 2, 7, 12; 53:7; 54:1 (2x), 5; 55:13; 56:2; 61:10, 11; 62:1; 63:19; 64:2; 65:1; 66:1; Jeremiah 2:6, 8, 11; 5:21; 6:15; 13:20; 14:18; 15:14; 17:4; 20:8; 23:9, 29; 32:18; 36:2; 48:36; 49:8; 50:31, 46; 52:12; Lamentations 1:10, 14, 21; 3:1; Ezekiel 13:3; 22:24; 25:7; Hosea 1:2; 4:14; 6:3; Micah 5:2; Habakkuk 1:6; 2:14; Zephaniah 2:1, 12; Zechariah 6:12; Malachi 2:16.

The Sources of the Data

The data has been compiled from this author's own research and the grammars of GKC and Joüon.[1] The following information displays the source locations from which the data has been collected.

Personal Research

These examples were found using the search features of *BibleWorks 6*.[2] Leviticus 7:9; Job 24:19; Psalms 32:2; 38:14; 58:9; 74:3; 104:9; 148:6; Proverbs 17:14; Isaiah 15:1; 41:10; 44:1, 2; 51:2;[3] Jeremiah 5:21; 17:4; 20:8; 32:18; Lamentations 3:1; Ezekiel 22:24; Zephaniah 2:1, 12.

GKC

These examples are divided according to the sections in which they are cited. Some examples are cited more than once in GKC, but the multiple citations are only counted once in the total list of genitive clauses.

GKC §130d. Genesis 39:4; Exodus 4:13; 6:28; 9:4; Leviticus 14:46; 25:48; Numbers 3:1; 23:3; Deuteronomy 4:15; 1 Samuel 5:9; 25:15; 2 Samuel 22:1; Job 6:17; 18:21; 29:2, 16; Psalms 16:3; 18:1; 56:9; 59:16; 65:4; 81:5; 90:15; 102:2; 138:3; Proverbs 8:32; Isaiah 29:1; Jeremiah 6:15; 36:2; 48:36; 49:8; 50:31; Lamentations 1:14; Hosea 1:2.

GKC §155d. Genesis 39:4; Judges 8:1; 20:15; 1 Samuel 6:9; 1 Kings 13:12; 2 Kings 3:8; 1 Chronicles 9:22; 12:22; 29:1, 3; 2 Chronicles 15:11; 18:23; 30:17; 31:19;

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[1]The examples from *IBHS* are not cited because they are all referenced in GKC.

[2]To get these findings, I simply searched for all examples in the Hebrew Bible in which a noun was in construct with a finite verb. Many examples overlap with the examples from the grammars; thus, these are the leftovers that were not cited. The complications of this type of search is that not all nouns that may be in construct with a verb are necessarily tagged in the software as being a grammatical construct.

Ezra 1:5; Nehemiah 13:23; Jeremiah 52:12.

GKC §155e. Genesis 15:13; Deuteronomy 32:17; 2 Samuel 20:21; Job 1:1; 3:15; 38:26; Psalm 11:4; 49:13; Proverbs 22:11; 26:17; Habakkuk 1:6; Zechariah 6:12.

GKC §155f. Genesis 49:27; Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Samuel 6:9; 2 Chronicles 28:9; Job 3:3; 31:12; Psalm 16:4; 34:8; 68:30; 71:18; 78:6; Proverbs 30:17; Isaiah 28:16; 29:14; 38:5; 40:20; 51:12; 54:1; 55:13; 56:2; Lamentations 1:10; Ezekiel 25:7; Hosea 4:14.

GKC §155g. Deuteronomy 32:11; Job 7:2; 9:26; 11:16; Psalms 42:1; 49:12, 20; 58:4; 83:14; 90:5; 125:1; Isaiah 53:7; 61:10, 11; 62:1; Jeremiah 23:29; Hosea 6:3; Habakkuk 2:14.

GKC §155h. Exodus 15:17; Deuteronomy 32:17; Judges 8:1; Job 13:28; 28:1; Psalms 7:15; 25:12; 32:8; 33:12; 51:8; Ecclesiastes 10:5; Isaiah 6:6; 15:7; 42:16; 48:17; 64:3; Jeremiah 14:18; 23:9; 48:36; Lamentations 1:21.

GKC §155i. Exodus 18:20; Job 3:3; Psalms 18:2; 32:2; Isaiah 42:1; Jeremiah 2:6.

GKC §155k. Job 21:17; 38:19, 24; Isaiah 51:1.

GKC §155l. Leviticus 7:35; Deuteronomy 32:35; 2 Chronicles 20:22; 24:11; 29:27; Job 6:17; Psalms 4:8; 56:4, 10; Jeremiah 36:2; Micah 5:2.

GKC §155m. 1 Samuel 26:14; Isaiah 63:19.

Thus, this search is by no means exhaustive.

[3]No search criteria were used to find Isa 51:2; it was an unintended discovery.

GKC §155n. Genesis 39:4; Exodus 4:13; 9:4; 1 Chronicles 15:12; 29:3; 2 Chronicles 1:4; 16:9; 30:19; 31:19; Ezra 1:5; Nehemiah 8:10; Job 29:12, 16; 30:13; Psalms 65:5; 81:6; 119:136; 141:9; Proverbs 8:32; Isaiah 41:2, 24; 65:1; Jeremiah 2:8, 11; Lamentations 1:14; Ezekiel 13:3; Malachi 2:16.

Joüon

These examples are divided according to the sections in which they are cited. There is considerable overlap between the examples of this grammar and those of GKC, but the overlapping examples are only counted once in the total list of genitive clauses.

Joüon §129p. Genesis 1:1;[4] 43:3; Exodus 6:28; Leviticus 14:16; 25:48; Joshua 14:10; 1 Samuel 25:15; 2 Samuel 12:22; 2 Kings 8:6; Job 29:2; Psalms 56:4; 102:3; Isaiah 29:1; Jeremiah 6:15; 50:46; Hosea 1:2.

Joüon §129q. Genesis 39:4; Exodus 4:13; 9:4; 2 Chronicles 30:19; Job 18:21; 29:16; Psalms 81:6; Jeremiah 2:8.

Joüon §158a. Genesis 49:27; Deuteronomy 32:17; 1 Samuel 6:9; Job 3:3; 31:12; Psalms 16:4; 34:9; 71:18; 78:6; Proverbs 30:17; Isaiah 51:12; 55:13; 56:2; Jeremiah 13:20; 15:14; Lamentations 1:10.

Joüon §158b. Genesis 24:22; Numbers 7:13; Joshua 7:21; 1 Samuel 17:4; 2 Samuel 20:21; 1 Kings 13:2; Job 1:1; 3:15; Isaiah 51:7; 54:5; 66:1; Zechariah 6:12.

Joüon §158c. Exodus 15:17; Judges 8:1; 2 Samuel 22:44; Psalms 18:44; 33:12; 90:15; Isaiah 42:16; 51:1.

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[4]Joüon assumes that Genesis 1:1 is a genitive clause. However, since the verse is the focus of debate as to whether or not it is a genitive clause, it is not included in the final list of genitive clauses.

Joüon §158d. Genesis 39:4; 1 Chronicles 15:12; 17:13; 2 Chronicles 16:9; Nehemiah 8:10; Job 18:21; Proverbs 8:32; Isaiah 41:24; 54:1; 63:19; 65:1; Jeremiah 2:8, 11.

Joüon §158db. 1 Chronicles 18:8; Job 3:3; 15:3; Jeremiah 2:6; 23:9.

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ABSTRACT

A CASE FOR THE TRADITIONAL TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 1:1 BASED UPON A MULTI-LEVELED LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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This dissertation examines the linguistic issues related to the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1. Chapter 1 introduces the necessity for this study, explaining the theological implications that pertain to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Chapter 2 offers a history of the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1. It covers most of the major historical eras, beginning with the period of the Old Testament and ending with the period of the Reformation.

Chapter 3 analyzes the three linguistic levels related to the translation of Genesis 1:1: the lexical, grammatical, and syntactical levels. The central issue of this chapter is whether the word בְּרֵאשִׁית is in the absolute or construct state.

Chapter 4 analyzes the two linguistic levels related to the interpretation of Genesis 1:1: the lexical (אֶרֶץ/שָׁמַיִם and תֹּהוּ/בֹּהוּ) and syntactical levels. The central issue of this chapter is whether or not there is semantic continuity between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2.

Chapter 5 summarizes the linguistic data related to both the translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1, explaining again the implications for *creatio ex nihilo*.

This dissertation contends that the traditional translation and interpretation of Genesis 1:1 are the most faithful to the principles of Classical-Hebrew linguistics.

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