**UNTANGLING**

**GENESIS**

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**Chapter 1**

**Setting the Scene**

Just imagine that you’ve come across the Bible for the first time and opened it at the first page. When you read about God creating the Heavens and the Earth, you would almost certainly assume that it is a description of the making of the universe, the Earth and life on it. There’s no particular reason to suppose you would think otherwise. But as you keep on reading, you discover parts of the Bible that are clearly not literal, like the Song of Solomon or the Book of Revelation. Perhaps you might start wondering whether passages that you’d originally thought of as literal might be something else after all. That, in a few words, is my reason for producing this study. Over the years I’ve become more aware of the rich variety of writing in the Bible, and this has made me look at the creation records in the Book of Genesis in a different way.

I’ve read the Bible for many years and have come to the conclusion that it is what it says: it’s God’s message to mankind. Like many people, there are parts of the Bible that I have found difficult to understand, and I would definitely include the first few chapters of Genesis among them.

Many books that I’ve read on Genesis have been full of science-based arguments which attempt to show that the start of the Bible is an accurate, literal description of how God created life on Earth. This study is different, because I’ve concluded that the message contained in the first few chapters of Genesis is more wonderful than that. I now believe that the first chapter of Genesis isn’t just a description of the start of God’s purpose, but that it’s a summary of the whole of his plan for the Earth and mankind. In effect, it’s a precis of the rest of the Bible.

My view is that if you read the Bible carefully and allow it to explain itself, then you can understand the first few chapters of Genesis without the need to refer to scientific literature. So if you want to find out information about things like the age of the Earth or genetics, then you won’t find it here. What you will find is an attempt to understand the early chapters of Genesis by comparing them with the rest of the Bible.

**First impressions**

On first reading, the early chapters of Genesis seem to contain two descriptions of the creation of mankind, plants and animals. One of them also explains the origin of things like The Sun, Moon and stars, while the other describes how sin came into the world. Many people have noticed statements in the two creation records that seem to be contradictory, and some of the events can be difficult to accept literally.

In Genesis chapter 1 there is a description of God making the Heavens and the Earth, and then filling them with The Sun, Moon, stars, plants, animals and finally man. This takes six days and then God rests on the seventh day. The order of events in this description of creation is difficult to reconcile with what we know about the origins of the universe and life on Earth. For example, plants appear on the Earth before The Sun and The Moon are made, and yet plants need the light and warmth of The Sun to survive.

Immediately after the first creation account we have another one in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, and this also includes a description of the creation of man and woman, just like Genesis chapter 1. The problem is that this account seems to be different from the first one. For example, in the first creation account plants are created before man, but in the second one man is created before plants. The second creation account also contains things that many find difficult to accept literally, such as a talking serpent, or a tree that gives knowledge of good and evil.

Finally, in Genesis chapter 4 there is an account of what happens to Cain and Abel, the children of the man and woman in the second creation account. This chapter feels different to the first three, and seems more like a literal description of historic events.

**Two things before we get started …**

I’m now going to address a couple of points in a bit more detail, as these will affect how we approach the first few chapters of Genesis. The first one is whether we should treat the creation accounts as accurate, historic descriptions of God making the universe and life, and the second considers how scientific discovery relates to them.

1. **Are the events of Genesis chapters 1 – 4 meant to be understood as historically accurate?**

Before we look at the detail in the first few chapters in Genesis, we need to take a step back and think about the sort of writing that we have there.

As we read through the Bible we come across many different forms of writing. In fact if we flick through the first part of the book of Genesis it soon becomes clear that we have three different sorts of writing in the first four chapters, and it’s unlikely that all of them are literal recounts of historical events.

The first piece of writing is in Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 4. It consists of short descriptions of creative events followed by a regular refrain, “**And the evening and the morning were the ... day**.” Then from Genesis 2 v 5 to the end of chapter 3 we have an altogether different style of writing. It feels similar to some ancient myths, with references to talking serpents, a man made from dust, a woman made from the side of the man, trees that give knowledge and eternal life, and cherubim. Lastly in chapter 4 there is the sort of account which we might expect to see in a plain historical recount, with an attempt to set out a series of events relating to two brothers, Cain and Abel.

We may not know at this stage what sort of writing each passage is, but it is unlikely that all three of them are historical recounts.

If you feel uncomfortable with the possibility that Genesis chapters 1 – 3 might not contain historically accurate records of God’s creation, then just consider the large number of different types of writing we find in the Bible. Some of the writings in the Bible are history, some biography, some poetry, some drama, some legal documents ... and the list goes on. Many people assume that Genesis chapter 1 is meant to be a historically accurate account of God creating the universe, Earth and life upon it. However there is no reason why it has to be historically accurate, in fact when we start looking at it in more detail we will see that it is unlikely to be so.

God wants us to respect his word and take it seriously. We need to believe it is true, but that doesn’t mean that we need to believe that all of it is literally true. In fact, it would be inappropriate to understand all of it literally. For example, it would be foolish to understand the Book of Revelation literally, because we might end up thinking that dragons with seven heads and ten horns are roaming around our neighbourhoods.

If we think that a passage is literal, when it is figurative, then we could end up missing key messages from God’s word. And this is what I feel has happened with the early chapters of Genesis.

In order to demonstrate what I mean, take the statement in Genesis 1 v 3 which says, “**God said, let there be light, and there was light.**” If we take this literally, then we may end up being dragged into the realm of physics. But when these words were first written, were they really describing wavelengths, the electron shells surrounding atoms and quanta of energy? Surely what we have to do is to allow the Bible to interpret itself. If we look at other parts of scripture, we are introduced to the possibility that Genesis 1 v 3 contains the first mention of one of the great metaphors of the Bible (don’t worry if you’ve forgotten what a metaphor is, we’ll look at what they are shortly). The Bible tells us clearly that God is light, that his son is the light of the world, that we should be children of light and that his word gives light. This is nothing to do with the physical properties of matter, it is using light in a non-literal figurative way. As soon as we think of light in Genesis chapter 1 v 3 as a metaphor, then we might start seeing other things, like the making of the lights in the heavens on the fourth day, as metaphors as well. This is not being disrespectful to the Bible, instead it is allowing the Bible to interpret itself.

Why is Genesis chapter 1 seen by so many as a historically accurate account of creation? First of all, if you’re not familiar with the different types of writing in the Bible, you might be tempted to assume that all of it is meant to be taken literally. In fact, you might feel that it is disrespectful to see it in any other way. However, once you become aware of the rich variety of writing styles in the Bible, then it becomes clear that each passage needs to be considered separately and understood on its own merits. Secondly, in our present age with its vast quantities of fact based writing, we have become less aware of figurative methods of expression that we would find in genres like poetry. Our modern, literal way of looking at Genesis may well have been alien to ancient readers, who were more familiar with understanding writing in a figurative manner.

1. **How does scientific discovery relate to Genesis?**

I think that our perception of how science relates to the early chapters of Genesis has been affected by what I call a “Copernicus moment”. Let me explain further what I mean by this. In the sixteenth century, Nicolaus Copernicus suggested that the Solar System was heliocentric (that The Sun was at the centre of the Solar System), however he was so afraid of what the church would think of him that he only shared his ideas as he was about to die. When Galileo repeated Copernicus’s ideas at the start of the seventeenth century, he incurred the wrath of the Catholic Church, because their view was that the Solar System was geocentric (the Earth was at the centre of the Solar System). It was only as evidence increased for a heliocentric Solar System that the Church changed its long held view, and found that science and scripture could be harmonised after all.

Theologians made false scientific claims based on their understanding of the Bible, and that’s what I call “having a Copernicus moment.” And this is what I think happened in the middle of the nineteenth century. Evidence started emerging that the Earth was old, that species were related to each other and that life had existed on Earth for a very long time.

If you accept that Genesis chapter 1 is a historical description of God populating the Earth with life forms, and if you think that the six days of Genesis chapter 1 are literal days or perhaps short periods of time, then theories like evolution seem opposed to Bible teaching. About 160 years ago, when scientists like Charles Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace published their theories about evolution and the origins of man, they were seen as contrary to the teaching of the Bible by many Christians and condemned as false. And that has been the position of many Christians since that time, even though scientific discovery has increasingly supported the views of Darwin and Wallace.

The perception among some Christians that science is anti-God is not helpful. Science, generally speaking, is neither for nor against religion, it is simply trying to discover the truth about us and our universe. We need to recognise that the scientific method has produced many discoveries and inventions which have brought us significant benefits, so when those same methods generate evidence for the evolution of life or an old universe, it is unfair to dismiss them out of hand. If God produced the Bible and created the universe, then scientific discovery and the message of God’s word should be in harmony. If we do perceive potential differences between the two, then perhaps our traditional understanding of God’s word needs re-evaluating to see if we could be misunderstanding it.

By comparing the early chapters of Genesis with the rest of the Bible, I hope to show that the Bible isn’t in opposition with science. In fact what I want to demonstrate is that Genesis and scientific discovery don’t overlap much at all. This is because they answer different questions. Science is trying to find out about topics like the development of life forms, whereas the Bible is telling us what the purpose of life is.

**Aims**

Now that we’ve covered some general points, I feel able to set out my main aims for this investigation. They are:

1. To use the Bible to understand the creation records.
2. To ensure that the two creation records at the start of the Bible don’t contradict each other.
3. To reach conclusions about the meaning of the creation records that are in harmony with the rest of the Bible.

We’ll revisit these later on, to see if they have been achieved.

**Similes, metaphors, parables, allegories and figurative language**

Now might be a good time to define some of the terms that will be used in the rest of the study.

**Figurative language**

Figurative language uses words and phrases to create extra layers of meaning in pieces of writing. Similes, metaphors, parables and allegories are all examples of figurative language.

**Similes**

A simile says that something is like something else. So a simile would say that The Sun is like an orange football.

**Metaphors**

A metaphor is a bit like a simile. A simile would say that The Sun is like an orange football, whereas a metaphor would take things one step further and say that The Sun **is** an orange football.

**Parables**

A parable is a short story with a spiritual meaning. Some of Jesus’ parables are more complex than this and use allegorical language, for example the parable of the sower.

**Myths**

The term “myth” seems to have acquired the meaning of something that is false, for example an urban myth. I am not using “myth” in that sense. A myth is a style of writing, and can be used to convey truth in the same way that other genres can. I would define a myth as a traditional story, often describing the early history of a people or explaining natural events and behaviour, and can involve supernatural beings or events.

**Allegory and allegorical language**

An allegory is a piece of writing that has a meaning which is not obvious from a literal reading of it. The hidden meaning comes from understanding characters and objects in the writing as symbols or metaphors. Paul gives us an example of an allegory in Galatians chapter 4, when he speaks about the children that were born to Abraham’s two wives, Sarah and Hagar. In Galatians 4 v 24 – 26 he says, “**These things are allegorical** (my translation of the greek word **allegoreo**). **For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar, for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children – but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all (my translation)**.”

In this allegory Paul is saying that Abraham’s wives (Hagar and Sarah) represent two covenants. Hagar is the covenant made with Moses and Israel which brings bondage, whereas Sarah is the new covenant that brings about salvation through Jesus Christ.

Sarah and Hagar are metaphors that represent other things, and the story of them bearing Abraham children can be viewed as an allegory, which shows the difference between two covenants. We do need to remember, however, that this allegory also has a more obvious meaning: a struggle between two women who bore children to Abraham. So allegories can have two meanings, and we will need to bear this in mind if we conclude that any of the Genesis creation records are allegories.

**A preview of what’s to come**

Here is a quick summary of what I hope to show in the following sections:

Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 4 – The first creation record

The first creation account in the Bible is a piece of allegorical writing which can be understood on two levels, just like the allegory that Paul used in Galatians chapter 4. One meaning is fairly obvious and tells us that God was responsible for the physical creation of the stars, The Sun, the dry land and life. The other allegorical meaning of the passage, which is its main purpose, comes from understanding the metaphors in contains.

When we view it as an allegory it becomes a marvellous prophecy setting out how God is going to bring about his plan for the earth. Firstly it speaks about God creating the heavens and the earth (don’t jump to conclusions about what the heavens and the earth are – all will be revealed later on), and then it shows how he is going to fill the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are saved through his sacrifice. The man or Adam who is created on the sixth day represents those who are saved through God’s grace. Firstly, the man refers to Jesus, and secondly to those who are redeemed through faith in him. This passage is talking about what 1 Corinthians 15 v 45 calls “**the last Adam**.”

Genesis 2 v 5 – 3 v 24 - The second creation record

The second creation account is a description of how God first made himself known to mankind. It also shows the consequences of man disobeying God’s commands. Like the first creation record, it is a piece of allegorical writing. It has elements that are factual, like its geographical setting, but other parts are figurative or non-literal, like the serpent. It describes some important truths about man and his relationship with God, and is not a rehash of Genesis chapter 1. In style, it is similar to some of the myths that originated in the ancient world.

The man spoken about in Genesis chapter 2 is different to the man in Genesis chapter 1. The Adam of Genesis chapter 1 describes the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are saved through his sacrifice, whereas the Adam of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 refers to man at the time when God first revealed his purpose to mankind. If this sounds difficult to accept, then for the moment just bear in mind that Paul spoke about two Adams or two men in his epistles (Romans 5 v 12 – 21 and 1 Corinthians 15 v 45 – 47). We’ll look at these ideas in more detail a bit further on.

Genesis 4

This passage leaves behind the figurative language of chapters 2 and 3, with their talking serpents and incredible trees, and has much more of the feel of a piece of historical writing. It tells the story of two brothers, of murder and of exile.

There are clearly links between the three passages that we find at the start of Genesis. For example the second creation account describes God forming man (Hebrew **ha adam** – the man) and the third passage then speaks of him being the father of Cain and Abel. But just because there are similarities between the three passages, it doesn’t mean that they are a continuous narrative or that they should all be treated in the same way.

**Yes but …**

Perhaps you already have questions or objections about what’s been written so far. Maybe you’re thinking, “Doesn’t Moses say that the creation took seven literal days?”, or perhaps you have other questions based on what Jesus said about Adam and Eve. I hope to address a range of questions as we work through the creation accounts.

The scene is set, now let’s look at the creation narratives in more detail.

**Chapter 2**

**The First Creation Account**

**Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 4**

**Summary**

After looking at the first chapter of the Bible and the first few verses of chapter 2, I reached a conclusion which I found astonishing. I believe that Genesis chapter 1 is an allegory, and uses the things of the natural creation in a metaphorical way to create a description of God’s plan for mankind. It is, in effect, a summary of everything else that is to come in the Bible. It is not just an account of the start of God’s purpose, but a description of the whole of his plan for the human race. It is a truly remarkable piece of writing.

These are some conclusions which will arise from our consideration of this passage:

* It uses literal events, such as God making things like the seas, plants, animals and man, as its basis.
* Its main purpose is to use the things that God made in a metaphorical way, in order to create an allegory.
* The allegory describes God’s plan for mankind.
* The order of events in the passage was chosen to create the allegorical meaning of how God’s purpose for the Earth unfolds, and not to show the chronological order of how God made the universe.

There are a number of very obvious clues which indicate that Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 4 is not simply a literal description of God’s creation of the universe and life on Earth, and these have been noted by many over the centuries. They include these:

1. The creation of The Sun, Moon and stars occur on the fourth day. If Genesis chapter 1 was meant to be an accurate, historical description of the creation of the Universe and the Earth, then the obvious question is how did the previous three days happen without The Sun being there?
2. Light appears on the first day, and yet the sources of light are not made until the fourth day.
3. Although the first six days have an ending, there is no ending to the seventh day. The first six days end with, “**the evening and the morning were the ... day**”, whereas the seventh day has no such ending. The seventh day is deliberately described as stretching into the future.

However, the main evidence for seeing this passage as more than a historical description of God’s creation, comes from the use of its language in the rest of the Bible. The first chapter of Genesis can be thought of as God’s big bang of ideas, to use a science analogy. It is a source of themes that ripple through the rest of the Bible. When we look at how the ideas in Genesis are used elsewhere in scripture, its true beauty is revealed.

**Structure**

So how is the first piece of writing in the Bible organised? Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 appears to be an introduction which sets the scene for six acts of creation, and Genesis 2 v 1 – 4 signals its end.

In between there are six creation scenes, each ending with the words, “**And the evening and the morning were the ..... day**,” and the whole piece of writing is structured as a week. There are other Bible passages that also have repeating phrases, like Psalm 136 containing the expression, “**For his mercy is forever**”, or the letters to the churches in Revelation all starting with, “**And to the angel of the church of ... write**”.

We might be tempted to rush off in lots of directions, like many others have, and get side tracked by questions like whether God’s creation really took place during one literal week, or how there could be days and nights before The Sun was created, or ...

If we get bogged down with these sorts of questions at this stage, then we will have lost the opportunity to discover the purpose of the passage. The use of seven days and six creation acts is a way of giving the passage its structure. Asking questions about how the days happened before The Sun existed, or the length of the days in the first creation account is missing the point. It’s like reading the parable of the sower, and instead of discovering its meaning, getting stuck in a debate about the sort of weeds that grew up, or arguing over what sort of soil the good seed grew in.

The acts of creation in the first narrative are set out in this order:

The account starts with a world covered by water and darkness, and it exists before the acts of creation take place.

Light is created and separated from darkness. – Day 1

A firmament or heavens divides two sets of waters. – Day 2

The waters below the firmament are gathered to reveal dry land and to create seas. The dry land or earth brings forth vegetation. – Day 3

Lights appear in the firmament of the heavens which give light on the earth, and rule the day and the night. – Day 4

The seas bring forth creatures to live in the waters, and birds are brought forth that fly above the earth and upon the face of the firmament of the heavens. – Day 5

The earth brings forth living creatures. Man is made in the image and likeness of God. – Day 6

God rests from his labours. – Day 7

When we look at these a bit closer, we see that there are 2 groups of 3 statements. Each group focuses first on the light, then the waters and heavens, and finally the earth.

1. Light - Light is created and separated from darkness.
2. Waters and heavens - A firmament or heavens divides the two waters.
3. Earth - The waters below the firmament are gathered to reveal dry land and to create seas. The earth brings forth vegetation.
4. Light - Lights appear in the firmament of heavens, which give light on the earth and rule the day and the night.
5. Waters and heavens - The seas bring forth creatures to live in the waters, while birds are created that fly upon the face of the firmament of the heavens.
6. Earth - The earth brings forth living creatures. Man is made in the image and likeness of God.

The first three days seem to generate the backdrop to the creation scene, and the next three days fill it with things like animals and objects in the firmament of the heavens.

We’ve probably gone as far as we can with generalisations, and now it’s time to tackle the detail of the first creation account. We will look at Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 in order to set the scene. Then from verse 3 onwards we’ll consider it primarily as an allegory, and after that as a more obvious narrative, consisting of historical events.

**Genesis 1 v 1**

**“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”**

There are a number of ways of understanding this verse. First, it could be viewed as a statement which describes the things that God made before his creative acts in Genesis chapter 1. So God had created the heavens and the earth at some time in the past, and now he is going to change them in some way. Another possibility is that it is a heading: a summary of what is going to be described in the rest of the chapter. So the rest of the first creation passage would tell us how God created the heavens and the earth. Which is correct? We will return to this question after looking at a bit more of the first creation account.

Before we move on, it might be a good idea to make sure we understand how the Bible uses the idea of creation. We might be tempted to jump to the conclusion that creation only describes God making things which didn’t exist before the act of creation takes place. So, before God creates the earth, there is no earth. If we look at other uses of the idea of creation in the Bible we see that it can mean this, but it can also mean something else as well.

“To create” is a translation of the Hebrew word **bara**, and when we look at its other uses in the Bible we see that sometimes it is used to describe things being amended, as well as things being made for the first time. Isaiah 65 v 18 contains an example of God creating by amending something, when it says, “**For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy**.” Jerusalem is already there when she is “created” in this passage. The act of creation here involves changing her from one state to another. We may need to bear in mind the range of meanings of the Hebrew idea of creation as we explore the first few chapters of Genesis.

**The heavens and the earth**

When it says in Genesis 1 v 1 that God created the heavens and the earth, we need to picture more than just physical entities like planets and stars. When we read about the heavens and the earth in the Bible, we also need to think about those who live in them, and about their relationship with each other.

The heavens are used in the Bible to describe God’s dwelling place, whereas the earth is where man resides. The difference between the heavens and the earth is not so much one of physical location, but one of status. God is everywhere, he’s not literally located in some far flung corner of the universe, so when the Bible speaks about him being in the heavens it is showing his relationship to mankind, who is on the earth. This is explained by Isaiah 66 v 1, “**Thus says the Lord: ‘The heavens are my throne, and the earth is my footstool’** (My translation).” Psalm 115 v 16 is also useful when it adds, “**The heavens, heavens are the Lord’s, but the earth he has given to the children of men** (My translation).” Ecclesiastes 5 v 2 continues this idea of status when it says, “**For God is in the heavens, and you upon the earth, therefore let your words be few** (My translation).” In summary, the heavens and the earth are used to describe the dwelling place of God and mankind respectively, not in terms of physical location but in terms of the difference in status between them.

So at this stage, although we’ve explored some ideas about Genesis 1 v 1, we can’t be definite about its meaning. We have seen that creating the heavens and the earth could be to do with forming the relationship between God and man, as well as meaning physical acts of creating parts of the universe. We also can’t be sure if the creation of the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1 v 1 comes before the rest of Genesis chapter 1, or if it is a heading that describes what is to follow in the rest of chapter 1. When we’ve worked our way through more of the first creation account we’ll revisit Genesis 1 v 1, and hopefully its meaning will be clear.

**Genesis 1 v 2 – 2 v 3 as an allegory**

It is my view that the first creation record is an allegory. We remember that the story of Sarah and Hagar is an allegory because, as well as having an obvious, literal meaning, it has a hidden spiritual meaning that becomes clear when the characters in the story are viewed as metaphors.

I think we will quickly see that the things described in the first creation record can be regarded as metaphors, and this will become apparent when we compare the language of Genesis with the rest of scripture. The next part of the study concentrates on the first creation record as a piece of allegorical writing, and then after this we will consider it as a more obvious and literal account.

**Genesis 1 v 2**

**“The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.”**

This verse describes what existed before the first day of creation began, and we have an image of a world covered in watery depths. The first thing we’ll focus on in this passage is the expression “**without form and void**”.

The only place where it occurs again in the Bible is Jeremiah 4 v 23. This verse says, “**I beheld the earth, and indeed it was without form, and void; And the heavens, they had no light**.” The context of this verse is the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which happened around 600 BC. The previous verse says, “**For my people are foolish, they have not known me. They are silly children, and they have no understanding. They are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge**.” So the earth (which in this case refers to the land of Judah and its people), was without form and void because the word of God was not there, resulting in the children of Israel being taken into captivity. It was also a time of darkness in the heavens, which is the same as Genesis 1 v 2. This was not a physical darkness, but a spiritual one. It was a darkness that was caused by God not being visible to the people of Judah. Hold on to this thought, as it will come in useful when we think about Genesis 1 v 3 – 5. The use of the language of Genesis chapter 1 in Jeremiah’s prophecy is the first real hint that we have about the sort of writing that the first creation account consists of.

Apart from demonstrating that darkness can be spiritual and not just literal, Jeremiah chapter 4 is important because it shows us that the earth does not have to mean planet Earth, but could refer to something else, like the land of promise and its inhabitants.

*[Before we move on, it might be worth defining what I mean by “the land of promise”. In Genesis 15 v 18, Abraham (or Abram as he was called then) was told by God, “****Unto your seed have I given this land (Hebrew erets), from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates****.”*

*This is what I mean by “the land of promise”. Looking at a map of the Middle East today, this would include parts of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as modern day Israel. The closest that Israel ever came to possessing this quantity of land was in the days of Solomon.*

*Although Abraham and his descendants have never occupied all this land, the Bible often looks forward to a time when they shall.*

*The land of promise will be mentioned many times, so it’s worth making a note of what it refers to.]*

“**The deep**” in Genesis 1 v 2 is a translation of the Hebrew word **tehum**. As well as being a watery place, we can think of it as a place of death, so in Exodus 15 v 5 we are told that the depths (in Hebrew this is the plural of **tehum**) covered the Egyptians when they pursued the Israelites into the Red Sea. However, through God’s intervention, Israel were led through the deep (Isaiah 63 v 13) when he divided the sea. Also in Jonah 2 v 5, Jonah remembered, “**The waters surrounded me, even to my soul; the deep closed around me**”, when he was cast into the sea. Just like Israel in the days of the Exodus, Jonah was delivered from the deep by God’s mercy.

So in summary, the image that we have in Genesis 1 v 2 is of a place flooded with water and in darkness, a place without God. The earth, which we will see later refers to dry land, is not there at the start of this creation account, and that is the meaning of the term “**without form and void**.” The earth appears later on in the creation record. From Jeremiah chapter 4, we note that the earth does not have to be the world, but could be part of it, like the land of promise. We’ve also seen that the earth is the place where men dwell, a place that is beneath God’s dwelling place.

*[****The earth became without form and void***

*The suggestion has been made that the beginning of Genesis 1 v 2 should be rendered, “The earth* ***became*** *without form and void.” The advantage of this is that it assigns things like fossils to an age before the events described in Genesis chapter 1. It acknowledges that fossils and geological strata indicate that The Earth is old, while giving a more modern date to the events in the creation records. “The earth became without form and void” would indicate some sort of worldwide catastrophe which wiped out life forms that existed before the events in the creation records take place. But is there any evidence for translating Genesis 1 v 2 in this way? The Hebrew word which would be translated “became” is “****hayah****” and is the usual verb translated “to be” in the Old Testament. It is used widely in the first creation record and never has the sense of “becoming”. Although it might appear to be a way of resolving some of the problems associated with a more literal understanding of the creation records, there is no biblical evidence for adopting this approach in my view.]*

**Genesis 1 v 2**

**“And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.”**

Here we have God’s spirit, or feelings, in motion. But it isn’t just motion for the sake of it, it’s motion that shows care and concern. “**Hovering over**” is a translation of the Hebrew word **rachaph**. Apart from one use in Jeremiah (23 v 9), its other occurence is in Deuteronomy 32 v 11. Verses 11 and 12 say, “**As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers (hebrew rachaph) over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings. So the Lord alone led him (Jacob)**.”

It can be seen that hovering over is something that is done by a bird over its offspring, and shows protective love. We note in passing the context of the quote from Deuteronomy, that it is referring to God’s care for the nation of Israel.

**Genesis 1 v 3**

**“Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light.”**

As far as I’m concerned, this is when Genesis chapter 1 started to make sense to me. Genesis chapter 1 has been dragged into the domain of the origins of life and scientific reasoning, but this is wrong. Genesis chapter 1 is put at the start of the Bible, and the Bible should be given a chance to explain itself. We shouldn’t rush off and start grabbing science books, without giving the Bible the opportunity to interpret itself and explain what Genesis chapter 1 means. We’re going to let the Bible speak for itself.

In order to understand Genesis 1 v 3, it’s important to remind ourselves of the role of the Bible. It is here to tell us about God’s purpose. It would be totally inappropriate to start talking about the physics of light. To think of Genesis chapter 1 as nothing more than a description of how physical phenomena came about would be to miss the fantastic message it contains.

It is true of course that, as God created the universe, he also created the physical entity that we call light. So we could use Genesis 1 v 3 to demonstrate that fact. However, if we stop there then we miss its main significance. In the Bible light is widely used as a metaphor, and the statement in Genesis 1 v 3 about the creation of light uses it as a metaphor to describe the starting point of God’s purpose with man. (Remember – a metaphor is a bit like a simile. A simile would say that The Sun is like an orange, whereas a metaphor would say The Sun **is** an orange). “**God is light and in him is no darkness at all**,” says 1 John 1 v 5. This is not a statement about God’s physical properties, it’s not telling us that he is made of wavelengths, spectra and photons of light, but is a definition of what light represents in the Bible. Time and time again light is used in scripture to describe God, his word, his son and his children. Light is a metaphor for God and how he shows himself to mankind.

Here are a few statements that demonstrate this:

1 Timothy 6 v 16 – (God) **“... who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see**.”

John 8 v 12 - ”**Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, ‘I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.’** “

Psalm 119 v 105 - “**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path**.”

Ephesians 5 v 8 - “**For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.**”

It is important we recognise that Genesis 1 v 3 is describing something in a figurative manner, and it’s using language that echoes throughout the Bible. Light is spoken about on the first day because of its importance to God’s plan. The idea behind light is one of God sharing his nature with us through his son, and of us becoming like him. It is fundamental to his purpose.

Associating light with God ties in with what we saw from looking at the previous verse, that darkness describes his absence.

Genesis 1 v 3 is referred to in 2 Corinthians 4 v 6. It says, **“For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness , who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”**. From this passage we can’t demonstrate for certain whether Paul viewed Genesis 1 v 3 as being historical or figurative, but we do know that he used it to describe the metaphorical light that comes from understanding the gospel. Genesis 1 v 3 can be thought of as a source for the figurative language relating to darkness and light in the rest of scripture.

**Genesis 1 v 4**

**“And God saw the light, that it was good; and God divided the light from the darkness.”**

We might struggle here if we thought that we were dealing solely with physical light and darkness, because darkness is simply the absence of light. There’s nothing more to it than that. If you restrict light then you will end up with darkness. You can’t round up the darkness and separate it from light. However, if the verse is using light and darkness metaphorically, using light to describe God’s ways and darkness to describe other sorts of behaviour, then it can be understood as meaning that there is a clear distinction between God’s ways and those which are shown by most of mankind. In a spiritual sense, darkness isn’t just an absence of light, it has characteristics of its own. For example, Ephesians 5 v 3, 4 describes what spiritual darkness looks like. It talks of things like fornication, uncleanness, covetousness (greed), filthiness, foolish talking and coarse jesting, with verse 11 calling them the works of darkness.

**Genesis 1 v 5**

**“And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day (literally “day one”).”**

If light and dark are viewed as metaphors, then the same must be said of day and night. Many explanations have been offered about why there were days and nights before The Sun was created on the fourth day, but this problem disappears if we view the creation account in Genesis chapter 1 as being primarily allegorical. If we start talking about the physical rotation of The Earth to produce day and night, then we have missed the point. What we have so far is a piece of writing that uses metaphors, where physical phenomena like light and dark represent other things.

Once we come to the conclusion that light and dark are metaphors, then we are forced to consider the possibility that the rest of the first creation account is metaphorical too. Take for example, the lights that appear in the firmament of the heavens on the fourth day, which give light on the earth. If the light that God creates on the first day is a metaphor, then it is likely that the light which shines on the earth during the fourth day, as well as the sources of light, are metaphorical as well.

Genesis 1 v 5 tells us what day is: it is a period of light. On the other hand night is a period of darkness. As light and darkness have metaphorical meanings, day can be seen as a time when God’s purpose is visible, and night as a time when it is not.

In the Bible, there are examples of “day” being used to describe times which are longer than 24 hours. They are days because they are times of spiritual light, just like in Genesis 1 v 5. So in John 9 v 4 Jesus says, “**I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work**.” It doesn’t really need pointing out that Jesus’ ministry lasted longer than 24 hours. Also God’s kingdom is called “that day” (for example Joel 3 v 18) to show it is a time of spiritual light. Again, his kingdom will be considerably longer than 24 hours.

In Genesis chapter 1 each day comprises of time when God is creating, along with the evening and morning. Night, the absence of light, is not part of each day. Each of the days in the first creation record only comprise of periods of light. This accords with the statement in Genesis 1 v 5 that “**God called the light Day”.**  If we pursue a literal view of the first creation record, and argue that each day in the first creation record comprises of 24 hours, made up of periods of light and dark, we go against this clear definition of what a day is defined as.

**Genesis 1 v 6 - 10**

**Then God said, “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.**

**Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.**

God made a firmament (Hebrew **raqia**) or “stretching out”, and this divided the waters that were above it and below it. If we think of the waters as the seas and the clouds, then the firmament would be the atmosphere that separates the two.

*(There is a view that the firmament in Genesis chapter 1 should be understood as a solid layer, and it is claimed that some ancient peoples believed this was responsible for holding up the waters above it.*

*The Hebrew word* ***raqia*** *is related to the verb “****raqaa****”, and this has the meaning of stretching or spreading out. It is true that in scripture* ***raqaa*** *can be used to describe something solid being spread out, like a layer of beaten gold (Isaiah 40 v 19). However, in Genesis chapter 1,* ***raqia*** *is clearly identified as “heavens” (Genesis 1 v 6), and in the first creation record heavens includes what we would call the atmosphere, for example Genesis 1 v 26, 28 speaks about “****the birds of the heavens*** *(my translation)”. Genesis chapter 1 does not support the idea that the* ***raqia*** *or firmament in the first creation record was understood by its writer as a solid layer.)*

Genesis 1 v 20 does raise questions when it says, “**Let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens**.” This suggests that the birds of the heavens were excluded from the firmament of the heavens in some way, because they don’t fly in it, but across it. This presents the possibility that there might be a difference between the heavens and the firmament of the heavens. This will be considered later on.

Based on what we have found out so far, we would expect the heavens and two sorts of waters to be understood as metaphors (i.e. they represent other things), as well as literal things. If we view verses 6 - 10 in this way, as we did with light and darkness, then what do the two sets of waters, the firmament or heavens and the term “earth” describe?

Concentrating on the waters below the firmament for a moment, the following passages indicate what their meaning is:

Isaiah 8 v 7 says, “**Now therefore, behold, the Lord brings up over them the waters of the River, strong and mighty - The king of Assyria, and all his glory; He will go up over all his channels and go over all his banks.**” (This is a prophecy against Syria, and the invading nation, Assyria, is likened to an overflowing river.)

Isaiah 17 v 12 says, “**Woe to the multitude of many people who make a noise like the roar of the seas.**” (This is a prophecy against the nations that threatened Israel.)

Isaiah 57 v 20 says, “**But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt**.”

Jeremiah 6 v 23 describes the Babylonian attackers of Jerusalem like this, “**Their voice roars like the sea.**” Then in turn, when Babylon is attacked, it says this about their enemies, “**Their voice shall roar like the sea** (Jeremiah 50 v 42).”

In addition, the Book of Daniel describes four beasts or foreign empires that would rule over the land of promise, and these come out of the great sea. So Daniel 7 verses 2 - 3 say, “**The four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other.**” This prophecy describes the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman Empires that would arise and conquer the land of promise.

Finally in his prophecy from the Mount of Olives, Jesus says, “**And there will be signs in The Sun, in The Moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring** (Luke 21 v 25).” The crashing of the sea is linked to the noise generated by anxious and agitated nations.

We know that the sea is literally a place of danger which sends waves on to the land. From the figurative uses of the sea in the Bible, we can understand it in Genesis chapter 1 as a metaphor for the ungodly nations that pound upon God’s land, like the Babylonians that flowed over it, or the other empires that Daniel saw. The sound of the waters resembles a multitude of people and it doesn’t seem to be something that brings any benefits to the land.

In Genesis chapter 1, God called the gathering together of the waters “seas” (v 10), but when they are next referred to they are spoken of as “the seas” (v 22). We will see this same pattern with “earth” and “heavens” as well. The first time that they are mentioned they are referred to as “earth” and “heavens”, but after that they are spoken of as “the earth” and “the heavens.” This is an important observation, as later on it will help to show the relationship between the first and second creation records.

If the waters under the firmament represent the nations surrounding something called earth or dry land, what do the waters above the firmament represent? On one level, these waters can fall on the land and bring benefits of abundant crops and fruitfulness. However, they can also bring destruction and hardship through things like hail and snow. What we find is that the waters above the firmament are used in scripture to describe the way that God influences people. Have a look at these passages:

Psalm 72 v 6 speaks about the king that God will appoint to reign over his people. It says that he “**shall come down like rain upon the grass before mowing, like showers that water the earth**.”

Isaiah 55 v 10, 11 adds, “**For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it**.”

In this passage, we have a simile. God’s word is like the rain or the snow, and it achieves his purpose.

In Deuteronomy chapter 32 Moses addresses Israel and speaks about their God. In verse 2 he says, “**Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew, as raindrops on the tender herb, and as the showers on the grass**.” This is a similar idea to Isaiah 55. God’s word, or teaching about him, is like rain that falls on the earth and produces fruit in those who hear it.

Hosea 10 v 12 uses these ideas in the same sort of way when it states, “I**t is time to seek the Lord, till he comes and rains righteousness on you.**”

Last of all, the start of Hosea chapter 6 has a lovely passage that describes the blessings brought by the Lord Jesus Christ and his resurrection. Verse 2 says, “**After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live in his sight**.” Verse 3 then adds that God’s “**going forth is established as the morning; he will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth**.”

These passages lead to the conclusion that the waters above the firmament can be thought of as a metaphor for God’s spirit or purpose that influences the people who live on the earth. These waters can be contrasted with the waters below the firmament, which represent the nations surrounding the earth or dry land, and which also try to influence it by flowing over it and invading it.

**Heavens and earth**

The firmament that separates the two sorts of waters is called “heavens.” Later on, when God gathers the waters under the firmament together, the dry land appears, and this is called “earth”. It’s already been noted that in the first creation record it initially speaks about “seas”, “heavens” and “earth” being created, but after this they are referred to as “the seas”, “the heavens” and “the earth” respectively.

Now we have noticed this, we can return to Genesis 1 v 1, and the words “**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth**.” When we read this initially, it wasn’t clear whether it was saying that the heavens and the earth were created before the events of the first creation record occurred, or whether it was a heading that summarised what was going to follow.

We now have good grounds for thinking that Genesis 1 v 1 is a precis of what was going to be described in the first creation account. The heavens and the earth that it speaks about are those that emerge on the second and third days, and which are filled on the fourth and sixth days. The statement in Genesis 1 v 2 about the “**earth being without form and void**”, can be seen as a way of saying that the earth was not in existence at the start of the creation process. The earth or dry land emerges as the waters are gathered together into seas. On the other hand, the heavens are generated in order to separate the two sorts of waters. The heavens and the earth are in existence by the end of day 3, and days 4 – 6 are then used to fill them. The heavens and earth are not fully created until they have been filled, hence it is only at the end of the sixth day that it can be said, “**Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished** (Genesis 2 v 1).”

**The heavens**

We can regard the heavens as somewhere that is inhabited by the rulers of the earth. We already know that God dwells there, but the Bible tells us that men can be there as well.

Isaiah chapter 1 provides evidence for this with verse 2 saying, “**Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!**” Verse 10 explains what heavens and earth are because it also speaks about hearing and giving ear, but this time it doesn’t mention heavens and earth, instead it talks about other things. It says, “**Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah.**” If we compare the two passages, we see that rulers are the equivalent of “heavens” and people are the equivalent of “earth”. It calls them Sodom and Gomorrah in this passage because verse 9 likens the nation of Judah to the wicked people who lived in those places during the days of Abraham and Lot.

Isaiah chapter 14 also indicates that men can dwell in the heavens and describes what they are. Isaiah 14 v 13 quotes the words of the king of Babylon (v 4), “**For you have said in your heart: I will ascend into the heavens** (my translation), **I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north**.” We get similar language at the start of Psalm 48 and see that it is describing places like Mount Zion (which is also described as being “**on the sides of the north**” in Psalm 48 v 2). If the king of Babylon succeeded in ascending into the heavens, it would mean that he was ruling over the land of promise and its people.

The use of “heavens and earth” to describe rulers and subjects is also employed when the Bible describes the order of things that will exist when Jesus returns. Isaiah 65 v 17 says, “**For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth**,” and these are described further in passages like 2 Peter 3 v 13 and Revelation 21 v 1.

**Dry land**

Let’s remind ourselves of Genesis 1 v 9, 10 again.

**“Then God said, “Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear”; and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.”**

The Hebrew word translated dry land (**yabbashah**) occurs 14 times in the Bible, and 7 of these either refer to Israel’s journey out of Egypt into the land of promise, or to Jonah’s deliverance from the sea.

One passage that describes the Exodus and speaks about the sea and dry land is Exodus 14 v 16. Before Israel crossed the Red Sea, Moses was commanded, “**But lift up your rod and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground** (Hebrew **yabbashah**) **through the midst of the sea**.“

The sea was a place of death, as we discover later in Exodus when Pharaoh and his chariots were swept away by it (Exodus 14 v 28). By comparison, the dry land was a place of safety that led eventually to the land of promise.

The dry land that appeared was called “earth” (Genesis 1 v 10). Let’s summarise what we know about it.

1. It is associated with salvation, as we saw with Israel crossing the Red Sea, and with the deliverance of Jonah.
2. We know that the earth is where man dwells, as opposed to the heavens, which is where God dwells (Psalm 115 v 16).
3. It is used to describe people who are subject to the rulers that are in the heavens (Isaiah chapter 1).
4. It is separate from the seas.

So far, we have had several opposites or antonyms in the first chapter of Genesis. First we had light and darkness, then we had day and night and after that the waters above and below the firmament. In each case, we have something that represents God and something that does not. In the case of

the seas and the dry land or earth, we seem to have something similar. God is not present in the seas, but he is on the dry land. One is a place of death, the other is one of salvation. Historically, we could view the earth as the land of promise, however after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, the place where the knowledge of God’s salvation was visible became less specific, with the gospel spreading around the world. In effect, the earth became less geographical, and more a status that was shared by disciples of Christ, wherever they were.

So summarising this section, heavens, earth, dry land, waters above the firmament and sea can be thought of as metaphors for the following:

The waters above the firmament – this is a metaphor for the way that God influences events on the earth. This can include sending blessings and judgements.

The heavens – the kingdoms and powers that rule over the people who live where God’s salvation is visible. These rulers can be godly or ungodly. As far as Genesis chapter 1 is concerned, we’ll be able to be a bit more specific once we’ve considered the fourth day.

The earth or dry land – this is where God’s word can be discovered and where people can find his salvation. It is often used to describe the land of promise.

The sea or the waters under the firmament – these are the peoples who do not know God. They are outside the land of promise, however they do overflow it on occasions and conquer it.

**2 Peter 3**

The use of the heavens and the earth in 2 Peter chapter 3 gives an insight into how they can be understood in Genesis chapter 1. In this passage Peter is countering the opinion that Jesus will not return to the earth. People held this view because they argued that, as things have not changed in any significant manner since the beginning of creation (v 4), something as dramatic as the return of the Son of God was unlikely. To counter this view, Peter reminds his audience of the flood that occurred in Noah’s time.

In verses 5, 6 he says, **“For this they wilfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water, by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water.”**

Peter’s reference to Genesis chapter 1 is clearly literal. The earth is a description of the land that is above sea level. Peter then uses the heavens and earth on three more occasions in the chapter, but on each of these occasions they are figurative, and there is no prior indication that he has made the switch from literal to figurative.

Verse 7 says, **“The heavens and earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgement and perdition of ungodly men”.** The day of judgement that he is speaking about is the day when the Lord Jesus will return (v 10). This day is described as being when “**the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up”** ( v 10). Then finally in verse 13 he says, **“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells”.**

(The meaning of heavens and earth in the sense that Peter uses them also occurs in passages like Isaiah 34 v 4, Isaiah 51 v 6, Isaiah 65 v 17, Zepheniah 3 v 8.)

So first of all, in 2 Peter chapter 3 we have heavens and earth used in a literal manner to describe the background to the flood. Then we have the heavens and earth used to describe rulers and subjects at the time when Jesus returns, and finally the new heavens and the earth represent rulers and subjects during the time of the Kingdom of God. No notification is given of the switch from literal heavens and earth to figurative ones. It is as if Peter expected his audience to comprehend that the heavens and earth could be understood in both ways.

**Genesis 1 v 11 - 13**

**Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth (Hebrew dasha) grass (Hebrew deshe), the herb (Hebrew eseb) that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth”; and it was so. And the Earth brought forth grass (Hebrew deshe), the herb (Hebrew eseb) that yields seed according to its kind, and the tree that yields fruit, whose seed is in itself according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the third day.**

This passage focuses on grass, herbs and fruit trees, and emphasises the fact that the herbs and trees bring forth seed according to their kinds, whereas the grass does not. If we look beyond the literal, we note that they come from the earth, so we should expect them to be something to do with God’s saving purpose. At this point you might be thinking along these lines, “Trees? Aren’t there trees in Genesis 2 and 3? I wonder if they’re related to the trees mentioned here?” If you’ve had that thought, then keep hold of it. We will revisit trees when we think about the creation of man and woman a bit further on in Genesis chapter 1, and when we consider what they are given to eat (v 29). Suffice it to say, plants and the seed they produce are important themes which will help us to grasp the significance of the early chapters of Genesis.

It is worth emphasising that the statements in verses 11 – 13 are not meant to be seen as covering all the genera of plants. It is purely focused on three sorts of plants that come from the earth and, like the other things in Genesis chapter 1, they can be understood as being metaphors. To start discussing whether these verses include fungi or seaweed is missing the point.

For the time being, we’ll look at some Bible passages which use plants in a metaphorical sense. We’ll discover the figurative meaning of the plants in the Genesis records when we consider their role as food for man and animals a bit later on.

In the Bible, grass and herbs are used to demonstrate a response to God’s word, which in turn is described as being like rain. We have already come across Deuteronomy 32 v 2 where Moses says, “**Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distil as the dew; as raindrops on the tender grass** (Hebrew **deshe**), **and as showers on the herb** (hebrew **eseb**)” (My translation - I’ve turned grass and herb around in my translation, when compared to versions like the Authorised Version, so it is consistent with how the Hebrew words are translated in Genesis chapter 1).

In Genesis chapter 1 we saw that rain or water above the firmament represents God’s spirit or purpose that comes down to influence the earth. So we can view grass and herbs as things that are produced by God’s purpose in some way.

Psalm 72 v 6 contains similar ideas to Deuteronomy 32 when it speaks about the blessings brought by the Messiah on the land, using the similes of rain and grass. It says, “**He shall come down like rain upon the (cut) grass (Hebrew gez) before mowing, like showers that water the earth**.”

Grass that appears after rain is also used to represent righteous rulers, like David. So 2 Samuel 23 v 4 says, “**And he shall be like the light of the morning when The Sun rises, a morning without clouds, like the tender grass** (Hebrew **deshe**) **springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain.**“ This extends the ideas in the two previous examples, as it describes righteous people as things which develop and come forth in response to the rain from heaven.

So far, we have a picture of plants springing up in response to God’s word, and righteous kings being likened to them. However, grass is used in a different way in Psalm 37 v 2. Verses 1 – 2 say

“**Do not fret because of evil doers, nor be envious of the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass** (Hebrew **chatsir**), **and wither as the green grass** (Hebrew **deshe** – my translation).” In this passage grass is used as a simile for the ungodly, because it is temporary and not because it grows after rain.

The qualities of the plants in Genesis 1 v 11 – 13 are used in the New Testament. The idea of things being according to their kind, and trees producing only one sort of seed is used in passages like Matthew 7 v 15 – 20. Jesus says that false prophets can be recognised by their fruit, because they will not generate good things. There is a similar idea in the epistle of James, with chapter 3 v 17 – 18 providing a description of those who are full of heavenly wisdom. They produce good fruits, as opposed to those described in verses 14 – 16 who follow earthly wisdom and generate things like envy and strife. Preceding these ideas, in verses 11 – 12, is the statement that trees can only produce one sort of fruit, and fountains only one sort of water.

2 Samuel chapter 23’s statement about a righteous king being like the “**tender grass springing out of the earth, by clear shining after rain**“, can be thought of as a source for the ideas in the parable of the sower, and the teaching of Galatians chapter 5. In the parable of the sower, God’s word is sown, and when it is received by someone who hears it and understands it, it grows into a plant and produces fruit. Galatians chapter 5 provides a description of the fruit that appears when God’s word is received into good ground and healthy plants are produced. It is called the fruit of the spirit and includes qualities like love, joy and peace (Galatians 5 v 22, 23).

God’s word shows his spirit or intentions to mankind, and when it enters a receptive heart it produces things that are described in the Bible as fruit.

At present, we can say that metaphorical plants come forth as part of God’s purpose, and that fruit seems to be a good thing. We’re now going to leave the subject of plants until we consider Genesis 1 v 29, where their figurative meaning in the early chapters of the Bible will become clearer.

At the risk of being repetitious, the plants and trees in Genesis 1 v 11 – 13 can be regarded as being metaphors. However, we’ve already seen that an allegorical piece of writing can have two meanings, one figurative and another which is more literal. Later on, we will think about the first creation record as a literal piece of writing, but the appearance of plants on the third day suggests that there will be difficulties in regarding it as a strictly literal historical recount of the creation of life on Earth. Plants need light and heat to thrive, and yet The Sun, which provdes these things, is not made in the first creation record until the day after plants appear. God created literal plants and trees, however the timing of their appearance in the first creation record seems to be related to the passage’s figurative meaning.

**What do we have so far?**

We’ve already noted that the days of creation seem to be divided into two groups of three. The first three days are to do with making the backdrop or scenery of creation, and involve dividing and separating.

First God distinguishes between good (light) and evil (darkness). He also separates the waters or sea from the dry land or “earth”. The earth seems to represent the place where God’s salvation is visible. It is bordered by seas, which represents ungodly nations. Above this earth are the heavens. This is where those who govern the dry land or “earth” dwell. The difference between the heavens and the earth is not so much one of location but of status. The waters above these “heavens” represent how God influences the dry land. Finally the earth has plants growing in it. These provide food for the man and woman who are to be created on the sixth day. They also give sustenance to the other creatures that are to fill the backdrop of creation.

We are now ready for days 4 to 6, where this framework of creation is filled in. Also at this point, it is worth asking whether the six days are a chronological sequence, so does day one precede day two, and so on? As there seem to be two groups of three days, we can say that day one precedes day four, day two precedes day five and day three precedes day six. However can we say, for example, that day six has to follow after all the events of day four? We’ll return to this question once we have looked at the meaning of the next three days.

**Genesis 1 v 14 - 19**

**Then God said, “Let there be lights (Hebrew maor) in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs (Hebrew oth) , and seasons (Hebrew moed), and for days and years; and let them be for lights (Hebrew maor) in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth”, and it was so. Then God made two great lights (Hebrew maor): the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night. He made the stars also. God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light on the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night and to divide the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. So the evening and the morning were the fourth day.**

On one level, this passage does indicate that God created The Sun, Moon and stars. However,

if we attempt to understand Genesis chapter 1 as solely a historical description of the creation of the universe, then we are likely to have difficulties with the fourth day. Questions arise like, “Why are there days before The Sun is made?” or, “What were the sources of light before The Sun was made?” or, “How can plants grow if there is no sun?” We will think about these sorts of questions again once we have considered the meaning of the first creation record as an allegory.

If instead we see Genesis chapter 1 as a piece of writing that employs metaphors, then we can start to see the logical beauty behind its order of events.

First of all, where are these lights? Well obviously in the firmament of the heavens, but what does this signify? Is this different to the firmament or heavens that were made on day two of the creation?

It could be argued that, as the heavens which appear on the second day are a firmament, then they could be termed the firmament of the heavens. However, there are two main reasons for considering them as referring to something else.

1. The firmament that is created on the second day separates the two waters. This is not where the Sun, Moon and stars are, they are above the atmosphere of the Earth. Ancient peoples would have been as aware of this as we are.
2. The description of birds in Genesis chapter 1 indicates that they inhabit a different place to the firmament of the heavens. In Genesis 1 v 26 man is given dominion over “**the birds of the heavens (my translation)”**. However, when birds were created on the fifth day, it says that they would “**fly upon the earth upon the face of the firmament of the heavens (Genesis 1 v 20 - my translation**).” The Hebrew expression that I’ve translated “**upon the earth**” also occurs in Genesis 1 v 11, 29 (plants grow on the earth), 1 v 15, 17 (the lights in the firmament of the heavens give light on the earth) and 1 v 26, 28 (animals move and live on the earth). Genesis 1 v 20 adds that birds fly upon the face of the firmament of the heavens (1 v 20). This use of “upon the face” is similar to its use when there was darkness upon the face of the waters or when the spirit of God hovered upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1 v 2). They fly upon the face of the firmament of the heavens, but they don’t go in it. Birds are of the “heavens” but do not enter the firmament of the heavens.

The firmament of the heavens is likely to be what the Bible calls “the heavens of heavens”. So when Nehemiah 9 v 6 says, **“You have made the heavens, the heavens of heavens with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them (my translation)”**, it is making a distinction between the heavens, where birds fly, and “the heavens of the heavens” or firmament of the heavens, which is where the Sun, Moon and stars are.

The first job given to the lights that were created on the fourth day is to divide between the day and between the night. This is the same as what happened on the first day, when God divided the light from the darkness, and it was then that God called the light day and the darkness night. If light and dark were used as metaphors on the first day, then it is reasonable to assume that they would be used in the same way here as well. The lights which are created do include The Sun and Moon, although they are not named explicitly. The reason for this will be considered in a while. The function of The Sun, Moon and stars in this passage is to give spiritual light on the earth, and to divide spiritual light and darkness.

The identity of The Sun and Moon as metaphors can be found from considering a number of passages in the Bible.

The Sun in scripture is likened to a bridegroom (Psalm 19 v 5) in a passage which says that the firmament shows the work of God’s hands (v 1). Malachi 4 v 2 looks forward to a time when the Messiah, “**The Sun of righteousness**”, shall arise with healing in his wings. Once we know that The Sun can be compared to a righteous bridegroom, then we are led to the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom in passages like Matthew 8 v 15 and 25 v 1, and he’s the one who has brought about our righteousness (see for example Romans 3 v 22, 5 v 17). These passages suggest that The Sun in the first creation record represents the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous bridegroom, the light of the world.

Also, when Jesus was transfigured, it says that his face “**shone as The Sun**”, and in Revelation 1 v 16 it describes Jesus’ countenance as like “**The Sun shining in its strength**”. Finally, in Acts chapter 2, Peter quotes the prophet Joel, “**The Sun shall be turned into darkness**,” and explains it by saying that Jesus had been crucified and slain. When Jesus died, The Sun ceased shining for a while.

So from these passages we see that Jesus can be thought of as the greater light that would shine during the day time. Jesus refers to himself using similar language in John chapter 9, “**I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; the night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world** (verses 4 – 5).”

By contrast, the night is the time when The Sun isn’t there. During the times when Jesus has been absent from the earth there have been other sources of light. The law that was given to the nation of Israel was one of them. Proverbs 6 v 23 says, “**For the commandment is a lamp, and the law a light**.” Psalm 119 v 105 adds, “**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path**,” and v 130, “**The entrance of your words gives light; It gives understanding to the simple**.” The law is a source of light, but it is not of the same magnitude as the Lord Jesus Christ. It could not bring about salvation from sin and death, instead it was a shadow or an outline of the true way of salvation, which is through faith in Jesus. The law, with its temple rituals, was a reflection of God’s purpose, a bit like The Moon reflects the light of The Sun, so we can think of The Moon as including the covenant made with Israel in the wilderness and the law that they followed.

The Lord Jesus is not here at present, and it is night. However we are not ruled by the law, but instead are governed by God’s grace, which was revealed to us through the Lord Jesus Christ and the gospel. The gospel, which contains our hope, is also a light shining in the darkness. This is shown from the following two quotations:

2 Corinthians 4 v 4 – 6 speaks about those “**whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them … For it is God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**.”

2 Timothy 1 v 10 adds this, “**… our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.**”

The darkness has been lit up by the gospel. The writings of the Old Testament, including the law of Moses, provided some light and pointed forwards to the way of salvation through Jesus Christ, but the night in which we live has been illuminated by our understanding of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world, and the salvation he has achieved for us. The gospel can also be considered to be the Moon, as it reflects the glory of Christ and shines in the darkness.

The almost throw away comment in Genesis 1 v 16, “**he made the stars also**”, has been regarded by some as the author of the first creation record displaying his ignorance. It is argued that the writer of Genesis didn’t understand that The Sun was merely the closest of billions of stars that inhabit the universe. However, if we move away from the literal and think about the metaphorical meaning of stars, then their relationship to The Sun becomes clear, and we see them in their true perspective.

In scripture, people who follow the God of Israel are called stars. This idea comes firstly from the way that God described Abraham’s descendants. In Genesis 15 v 5 God says to Abraham (or Abram as he was called then), “**Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.**” **And he (God) said to him, “So shall your descendants be**.”

Then in the days of the Judges, the prophetess Deborah describes the battle that Barak and Israel fought against Sisera and the armies of Canaan. She says of Israel, “**They fought from the heavens: The stars from their courses fought against Sisera** (Judges 5 v 20).”

Finally, when God’s people are oppressed, it describes them as being like stars cast to the ground. Daniel chapter 8 is an example of this and says that one of Israel’s persecutors, “**Cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground, and trampled them** (v 10).” This sort of language is used again in the Olivet prophecy and has a similar meaning. Matthew 24 v 29 speaks of a time when, “**The Sun will be darkened, and The Moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken**.”

In summary, the lights in the firmament of the heavens show mankind who God is. He is revealed through his word, through those who believe in him and most importantly through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the light of the world and The Sun of righteousness.

Now we’ve identified the lights in the firmament of the heavens, we can conclude that it is where God, his son and the righteous belong. Remember it is not so much a place, but refers to God’s status in relation to his creation.

So as a metaphor, the firmament of the heavens can be regarded as representing those who ultimately rule over the earth and give spiritual light to it, including the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are redeemed by him. This firmament sits over waters, which in turn are above the other firmament that was made on the second day. This lower firmament represents those who rule over the earth at the present time. These can be godly or ungodly rulers. (Verse 7 of Revelation chapter 12 describes this heavens and a power struggle between good and evil when it says, **“And war broke out in Heaven: Michael and the angels fought with the dragon”**.)

|  |
| --- |
| “The firmament of the heavens” or “The heaven of heavens”. This is where the sun, moon and stars are. |
| The waters above the firmament. This is where rain and snow come from. |
| The firmament, called the heavens. |
| The earth, known as land. |
| The waters below the firmament, known as seas. |

**The order of the heavens, water and earth in Genesis chapter 1.**

Before we leave the lights in the firmament of the heavens, we’ll consider another question which has caused a lot of discussion, and that is why The Sun and Moon are called lights, and not simply given their names. The most obvious reason is that by calling them lights (Hebrew **maor**), it shows that they are related to the light (hebrew **or**) that God made on the first day. The Hebrew words **or** and **maor** are related, one meaning light in a general sense and the other a source of light. Another suggestion is that the lights in the firmament of the heavens are not referred to as The Sun and The Moon because they were worshipped as idols in ancient times. We will see that there is more evidence for this point of view from the way that the fifth day is described in verses 20 – 23.

Whatever the reason for referring to these sources of light as great lights, they are clearly referring to The Sun and The Moon, as we see from passages like Psalm 104 v 19 and Psalm 136 v 7 – 9.

Psalm 104 v 19 says, “**He appointed The Moon for seasons**”. Here The Moon is assigned one of the roles of the great lights in Genesis chapter 1.

Psalm 136 v 7 – 9 says, “**To Him who made great lights, for His mercy endures forever. The Sun to rule by day,  for His mercy endures forever;The Moon and stars to rule by night, for His mercy endures forever**.” Again, The Sun, Moon and stars are described using the language of the lights in Genesis chapter 1.

**Genesis 1 v 20 - 23**

**Then God said, “Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly upon the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens. So God created the great sea creatures and every living thing that moves, with which the waters abounded according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas and let birds multiply on the earth.” So the evening and the morning were the fifth day (Genesis 1 v 20 – 23).”**

We have the appearance of two groups of animals on the fifth day: creatures from the waters and birds which fly upon the earth. Among the living creatures that appear in the waters, great sea creatures are highlighted in the creation record.

Although this passage shows that God created literal birds and sea creatures, the emphasis it places on great sea creatures highlights the metaphorical importance of the first creation record. The Hebrew word translated sea creatures, which perhaps means something like predators, is **tanninim**, and is the plural form of the word **tannin**. However in my opinion, even translating it as predator doesn’t really do it justice.

Let’s explore its meaning. There are two almost identical words in Hebrew that seem to have the same meaning, namely **tannin** and **tannim**. We aren’t helped by the fact that there is another animal that is called **tan** in the Hebrew bible, and the plural of this word is also **tannim**. It is likely that the animal called **tan** is something like a jackal or wild dog, and so when in Micah 1 v 8 the prophet says, “**I will make a wailing like** **tannim** (my translation)”, it is referring to wild dogs and not some creature that lives in water.

If we get rid of the jackals, then we are left with Ezekiel 29 v 3 and 32 v 2 that speak of a **tannim**, which is some sort of creature that lives in the waters. We also have 14 other places where the Bible refers to a **tannin**.

Clues to the identity of the creature called **tannim** or **tannin** are given by Ezekiel 29 v 3 and Isaiah 51 v 9. These speak about the kingdom of Egypt and refer to it as being like the great **tannim** that lies in the midst of his rivers (Ezekiel 29 v 3). This is likely to be a reference to the Nile crocodile. Then in Exodus 7 v 9 – 12 we have the episode of Moses’ rod becoming a “**tannin**”, and eating the **tanninim** or creatures that the Egyptian magicians conjured up. This gives an indication that it could be used to describe a type of large snake as well (or perhaps Moses’ rod became a crocodile!).

We can add to these ideas the words of Ezekiel 32 v 2, which also describes Pharaoh, but says, “**You are like a young lion among the nations, and you are like a monster (Hebrew tannim) in the seas**.” We still have an aggressive water dwelling creature, but this time in the seas. This could be another reference to a crocodile, or perhaps to an aquatic predator like a shark. Or it could be that the seas in this passage are being used in a metaphorical sense, and refer to the nations that surround the land of promise. It could simply mean that Pharaoh was a mighty, aggressive creature in the sea of the nations.

The Bible gives us further help in identifying the metaphorical significance of **tannim** or **tannin**, because it speaks elsewhere of vicious, mighty creatures arising out of the sea and ruling over the land of promise. Daniel 7 v 3 – 7 describes four terrible creatures coming out of the sea, and these are related to the dragon and the beast which are spoken about in the Book of Revelation. (In passing, the second of these creatures in Daniel chapter 7 is like a bear, but is called “**tinyannah**” in the Chaldee language (v 5). This is translated as “a second” in the New King James Version, but could it be that this creature is being linked to the dreadful **tannin** predators the Bible speaks about?)

Even if we cannot be precise about the sort of animal that is meant by the Hebrew words **tannin** and **tannim**, we can see that they refer to predatory creatures. In Genesis chapter 1 they are aquatic, as they come from the waters. As a metaphor, they describe the aggressive rulers of kingdoms that arise from the ungodly nations of the world.

This is an important conclusion because the implication is that other animals listed in Genesis 1 could be metaphors for groups of people as well.

Notice that fish aren’t specifically mentioned in this part of Genesis chapter 1, they are simply included under the general heading “**an abundance of living creatures**.” It was seen earlier that The Sun and Moon weren’t mentioned specifically in the first creation record either, but were instead referred to as “great lights.” One possible reason why they weren’t mentioned by name was because they were worshipped as idols, and the same could be said of fish as well. Deuteronomy 4 v 15 – 19 supports this view when it says,

“**Take careful heed to yourselves … lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure … the likeness of any fish … and take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see The Sun, The Moon and the stars … you feel driven to worship them**.”

It is likely that fish are included in the “**abundance of living creatures**” mentioned in Genesis 1 v 20, and their metaphorical meaning can be seen from Ezekiel 29 v 4, which is a prophecy against Egypt and Pharaoh, who is described as a “**tannim**” or sea creature in verse 3. Verse 4 says to him , “**I will put hooks in your jaws, and cause the fish of your rivers to stick to your scales; I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, and all the fish in your rivers will stick to your scales. I will leave you in the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers; you shall fall on the open field; you shall not be picked up or gathered**.”

Fish, and the abundance of living creatures in the seas, can be thought of as metaphors for people who serve the great powers who rule in the sea of the nations.

The birds, that were also created on the fifth day, fly upon the earth and upon the face of the firmament of the heavens, and multiply in the earth. What do these signify? We’ll look for clues in scripture and see if we can come to any conclusions based on our findings.

* 1. Birds are not known for their wisdom. So in Job 35 v 11, Elihu says, “**(God) teaches us more than the beasts of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven**.” To this can be added Hosea 7 v 11, which compares Ephraim to a dove. It says “**Ephraim also is like a silly dove, without sense – they call to Egypt, They go to Assyria**.”
  2. They are portrayed as timid creatures, who are likely to flee away from danger. In Jeremiah 4 v 25, which is only two verses after the reference to the earth being without form and void, and the heavens not having light, it says, “**All the birds of the heavens have fled (hebrew** **nadad**).” A similar idea occurs in Hosea chapter 7, which we have seen likens Ephraim to a silly dove. Hosea 7 v 13 continues with, “**Woe to them, for they have fled (Hebrew nadad) from me!**” Hosea 9 v 11 extends this theme when it says, “**As for Ephraim, their glory shall fly away like a bird.**”

1. Birds are described as eating the dead: they feast on carrion. Passages like Psalm 79 v 2 and Ezekiel 32 v 4 describe this, and sometimes this is a role they share with the beasts of the earth. This characteristic gives us a link between the fowls of the heavens and the sea predators of Genesis 1 v 21, and it comes from Ezekiel chapter 29. We’ve already seen that Pharaoh is described as a great dragon (Hebrew **tannim**) who ends up stranded in the wilderness. Verse 5 says that he is given “**as food to the beasts of the field (or earth) and to the birds of the heavens**.” Although birds are timid, they are not adverse to attacking kingdoms once they have lost their power and strength.
   1. In one of his parables, Jesus likens the kingdom of Heaven to a mustard seed which grows into a tree, and says that the birds of the air lodged in its branches (Matthew 13 v 32). These ideas are drawn from Ezekiel 31, which describes the Assyrian empire as a cedar tree, and says the birds of heaven make their nests in its boughs. Similarly in Daniel chapter 4, the Babylonian kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar is referred to in the same way. Large trees are used as metaphors to describe kingdoms, including the Assyrian kingdom and the kingdom of Heaven. Birds seem to be a metaphor for people who dwell within these kingdoms. Although birds are described as being “**of the heavens**” (my translation) in Genesis 1 v 26, their characteristics indicate that they are not rulers. Perhaps they represent the ruling classes, who tend to ingratiate themselves with powerful monarchs.
   2. Birds are of the earth, in that they “**fly upon the earth upon the face of the firmament of the heavens (Genesis 1 v 20 - my translation**).” The Hebrew expression that I’ve translated “**upon the earth**” also occurs in Genesis 1 v 11, 29 (plants grow on the earth), 1 v 15, 17 (the lights in the firmament of the heavens give light on the earth) and 1 v 26, 28 (animals move and live on the earth). Genesis 1 v 20 also says that birds fly upon the face of the firmament of the heavens (1 v 20). This use of “upon the face” is similar to its use when there was darkness upon the face of the waters or when the spirit of God hovered upon the face of the waters (Genesis 1 v 2). They fly upon the face of the firmament of the heavens, but they don’t go in it. The firmament of the heavens is the domain of rulers who provide spiritual light on the earth, so birds cannot be considered to be godly.

So how can we summarise the creation acts of the fifth day? As well as teaching that animals were part of God’s purpose, it shows that he filled his creation with groups of people. The great sea creatures are a metaphor for the rulers of ungodly kingdoms that arise and have dominion over mankind. The other living creatures in the sea and the birds who fly upon the earth seem to represent the majority of mankind, whether in places where God’s salvation is visible or not. They are not rulers, but are subject to the powerful nations around them. The birds could be thought of as the people in the land of promise who are subjects in first one kingdom and then another. They might perhaps represent the ruling classes in kingdoms, as Genesis 1 v 26 describes them as being “**of the heavens**”.

The animals that appear on the sixth day add detail to the peoples who live in the land where God’s salvation is visible.

**Living creatures**

In Genesis 1 v 20 we have the first use of the Hebrew word “**chay**” or living. It is used 20 times in total in the first three chapters of Genesis and represents an important theme. It is most commonly used in the expression “living creature”, and this occurs in Genesis 1 v 20, 21, 24, 25, 28, Genesis 2 v 7, 19, 20, 3 v 1, 14. We will return to the meaning of living creatures when we consider the creation of man later on in Genesis chapter 1.

**Genesis 1 v 24 - 25**

**Then God said, “Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind”; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.**

The focus of this passage is the earth, as opposed to the sea. In this passage we have three sorts of living creatures (hebrew **nephesh chayyah**) that are brought forth. First cattle (Hebrew **behemah**), then creeping or moving things (Hebrew **remesh**) and finally living things (Hebrew **chayyah**) of the earth. They are all living creatures or living souls, but are grouped into three categories.

We’ve already concluded that the earth and the sea are antonyms or opposites. One is where God’s salvation is visible, and the other is in spiritual darkness. The earth took on physical dimensions when Abraham was promised a land, after he had believed God (Genesis 12 v 1 – 7) and left Ur of the Chaldees (Genesis 11 v 31). Let’s recap on the size of the land or earth that Abraham and his descendants were promised. It is bigger than the land that Israel occupied when they came out of Egypt, and is described in Genesis 15 v 18, where Abraham is told,

“**Unto your seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates**.”

As was mentioned earlier, this would today include parts of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as modern day Israel. The closest that Israel ever came to possessing this quantity of land was in the days of Solomon.

2 Chronicles 9 v 26 says that he “**reigned over all the kings from the River (Euphrates) to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt**.”

Even when the nation of Israel was at its strongest, there were still enemies in the land, like the Syrians and Philistines. This thought will help us when we identify the metaphorical significance of the three sorts of animals that God made to inhabit the earth.

Let’s start with the Hebrew word **behemah**, which we could translate as beast or perhaps cattle.

At this point, if I asked you to think of another of the great Bible metaphors, like light or darkness, you might come up with God or Jesus being called a shepherd, and Israel or Christ’s disciples being called sheep or a flock. This is perhaps the clearest example of people being likened to animals in scripture, but we might also think of other metaphors like people being compared to wolves (for example Matthew 7 v 15).

The group of people described as cattle or beasts in Genesis 1 v 24, 5 can be thought of as the nation of Israel who inhabited the land of promise. The reason for this conclusion stems from uses of the Hebrew word **behemah**, which often describes agricultural animals. Mostly it is used for cattle, but it is also employed as a general term for other animals, including sheep. This is shown by the following two examples.

Genesis 47 v 17 describes what happened when people brought their animals to Egypt in order to exchange them for bread in the days of Joseph. It says, “**And they brought their livestock (Hebrew behemah) to Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the cattle of the herds, and for the donkeys.**” So the Hebrew word **behemah** can cover a range of domesticated animals like horses, sheep, cattle and donkeys.

We also have these words at the start of the Book of Leviticus, “**Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them, “When any one of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the livestock (hebew behemah) - of the herd and of the flock** (Leviticus 1 v 2).”

So if we wanted to identify a group of people that could be represented by the Hebrew word **behemah**, we can think of Israel and their description as a flock (see for example Psalm 77 v 20, Ezekiel 34 v 2 – 8).

If we now move on to creeping things, the second category of animals mentioned in Genesis 1 v 24, 5, we can get some indication of the sort of people they represent, even if we can’t specifically tie them to a particular nation. Remember that in Genesis 1 v 24, the word translated creeping thing is the Hebrew **remesh**, and this is related to the verb **ramash**.

Leviticus chapter 11 speaks about creeping things that creep on the earth, including things like snakes that go on their bellies (v 42). Verses 41 – 44 list these kind of creatures, which are termed an abomination to the Lord. However during this section the expression “creeping thing” is a translation of the Hebrew word **sherets** and the verb “to creep” is the associated word **sharats**. (We’ve already come across these words in Genesis chapter 1, as in Genesis 1 v 20, 21 they were used to describe an abundance (Hebrew **sherets**) of living things that abound (Hebrew **sharats**) in the waters.) Leviticus 11 v 44 says, “**For I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy. Neither shall you defile yourself with any creeping thing (Hebrew sherets) that creeps (Hebrew ramash) on the earth**.”

So Leviticus 11 v 41 – 44 shows that, under the law of Moses, things that creep (represented by the Hebrew words **ramash** and **sharats**) on the earth were an abomination and considered to be unclean. Also the creeping things described in Leviticus chapter 11 included creatures that went on their bellies. This way of moving was part of the punishment given to the serpent in the second creation account (Genesis 3 v 14).

We get some more information about creeping things from these two passages:

Psalm 104 v 20 says, “**You make darkness and it is night, wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth (Hebrew ramash)**.”

Habakkuk 1 v 14 says, “**And (you) make men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things (Hebrew remesh) that have no ruler over them**.”

Putting all these things together, we can see this from the various descriptions of creeping things:

1. Under the law of Moses, they were considered unclean and an abomination.
2. They can be associated with darkness and night.
3. They do not seem to have anyone ruling them.
4. They are associated with the serpent, which deceived Eve in the second creation account.

If creeping animals are a metaphor for a group of people in the land of promise, then it is likely that they would be godless and that the Israelites were to have no contact with them. They might also be nomadic, without clear rulers.

The last group of animals described in Genesis 1 v 24, 25 are “**beasts (literally living things) of the earth**.” Apart from the early chapters of Genesis, there are only a few references to the beasts or living things of the earth in the rest of scripture, but they do give the impression that we are dealing with carnivorous animals. (There are other references to living things or beasts of the field, but they’ve been excluded so that only verses with exactly the same language as Genesis chapter 1 are considered).

In Psalm 79 v 2, it says that the dead bodies of God’s servants shall lie in Jerusalem and shall be “**given as** **food for the birds of the heavens, the flesh of your saints to the beasts (living things) of the earth**.” (We already came across this passage when we thought about the birds of Genesis 1 v 20, 21.) Similarly, in Ezekiel 32 v 4 it speaks about the punishment that will come upon the nation of Egypt. It says that God will cause all the birds of the heavens to settle upon Pharaoh and the Egyptians, and will fill the beasts of the whole earth with them. Finally in Ezekiel 34 v 28 it looks forward to a time when Israel shall be safe in their land. We are told, “**And they shall no longer be a prey for the nations, nor shall the living thing of the earth devour them; but they shall dwell safely, and no one shall make them afraid (My translation)**”.

These three references indicate that the expression “living thing (or beast) of the earth” describes carnivorous creatures, and two of them refer to them eating the people of Israel. If we were to think of “the living things of the earth” as a metaphor for groups of people, we could see them as nations who lived in the land of promise (the place where God’s salvation was visible) with the Israelites and who showed continuing hostility to them, for example Syria or the Philistines.

In summary, the three sorts of animals listed in Genesis 1 v 24 – 5 can be thought of as metaphors for the inhabitants of the land of promise. One represents the people of Israel, and the others describe ungodly people and nations that lived in the land while Israel was there. These are different to foreign invaders like the Babylonians, Greeks and Romans who came from outside the land and conquered it.

The identification of the animals of Genesis chapter 1 in this way may help to explain one of the enigmatic verses we find in the prophecy of Hosea. Hosea 2 v 18 speaks of the time when Israel will be re-gathered to their land. It says, “**In that day I will make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, with the birds of the air, and with the creeping things of the ground. Bow and sword of battle I will shatter from the earth, to make them lie down safely**.”

Understanding the animals of Genesis chapter 1 as metaphors helps us to understand this passage. It is the metaphorical beasts, birds and creeping things that wield the bow and the battle sword, and God will give Israel peace from them.

**Genesis 1 v 26 – 8**

**Then God said, “Let us make man (Hebrew adam) in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth”. So God created man (Hebrew ha adam) in his own image; in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves (or creeps) on the earth.”**

Although this passage indicates that God made man, its use in the rest of scripture shows that its main focus is on the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam.

The meaning of these three verses comes about as a consequence of our understanding of what the fish, birds, cattle and creeping things are. If we identify them as groups of people, then “man” in these verses describes someone who rules over them. Once we have taken this step, then the meaning of “man” is very clear – it is the Lord Jesus Christ, but it isn’t just him as an individual, it is Christ and all those who are saved through his sacrifice. The description of the man in this passage gives clues to his identity.

1. The man is in the image of God (Genesis 1 v 26). It is Jesus who is described as being in the image of God in scripture (2 Corinthians 4 v 4, Colossians 1 v 15).
2. The man in Genesis 1 v 26 – 28 is not just the son of God, but is also made up of those who find salvation through him. In scripture, Jesus and his followers are described as a single man. Jesus is the head, and those who believe in him are his body (Romans 12 v 4; Ephesians 1 v 23; Ephesians 4 v 15 – 6) and his bride (Ephesians 5 v 22 – 33; 2 Corinthians 11 v 2; Revelation 21 v 2, 9). Christ is not just a man or him, but he is “them”, he is “male and female” (Genesis 1 v 27).
3. This part of Genesis is referred to in Psalm 8, which in turn links to the Lord Jesus Christ. Genesis 1 v 26 says that the man would have dominion over groups of animals, and in verses 6 – 8 of the psalm it says something similar about man and the son of man, “**You have made him to have dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen – Even the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas**.”

Notice that the psalmist explains that the son of man having dominion is the same as putting all things under his feet. When the idea of putting things under feet is used in the New Testament, it refers to Jesus having dominion (see 1 Corinthians 15 v 27, Ephesians 1 v 22, Hebrews 2 v 8). We can add the words of Romans 16 v 20, which extends this idea to disciples of Christ as well. Paul tells his audience, “**And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen**.”

This idea of Jesus having things put under his feet helps to identify him as the “man” and the “son of man” in Psalm 8. When we add to this the similarities between Psalm 8 and Genesis chapter 1 (the men in both passages are given dominion over animals), we have another indication that Genesis 1 v 26 – 8 is a description of Jesus Christ, who Paul calls “the last Adam”. This is different to “the first man Adam” (1 Corinthians 15 v 45), which we will find is the Adam mentioned in the second creation record in Genesis chapters 2 and 3.

*(You also find a contrast between the first and last Adams in Romans chapter 5. In verse 12 Paul says this about the first man, “****Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin: and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned****.” But in verse 15 he talks about another man who accomplished something different. He says, “****And the gift by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many****.” One man brings sin, and the other man brings grace. As well as Romans chapter 5 pointing towards the Lord Jesus Christ, it also refers back to man’s first dealings with God, and we will explore this in more detail when we look at the second creation record in Genesis chapters 2 and 3.)*

The letter to the Hebrews also provides more evidence for equating the “son of man” in Psalm 8 with Jesus, by quoting verses 4 – 6 of the psalm in Hebrews 2 v 6 – 8.

We have seen that there is evidence for regarding the Lord Jesus Christ as the man made in God’s image, but is he also the man made in God’s likeness?

Jesus is in the image of God, but when he is described as a likeness, it is as the likeness of man (Philippians 2 v 7, Hebrews 2 v 17). We have seen that mankind is not described as being in the image of God, but he is described as being in his likeness. James 3 v 9 states, **“With it (the tongue) we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the similitude (or likeness) of God**”. So the Lord Jesus Christ is in God’s image, and mankind are in God’s likeness.

If we use that distinction to understand v 26, then the first part of **“Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness”**, refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the second part to mankind. Support for this view comes from the following verse, which is divided in the same way. Verse 27 says, **“In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them”**. The first part of the verse refers to someone who is created in God’s image (the Lord Jesus Christ), and the second part to “them”.

The likeness that man shares with God is not referring to physical similarities, but something else, and two passages in the New Testament explain this.

Romans 6 v 5 describes baptism into Christ in this way, **“For if we have been united together in the likeness of his (Jesus’) death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection.”**

1 John 3 v 2 speaks of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ in this way, **“We know that when he is revealed, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”**

The likeness that the faithful will have with the Lord Jesus Christ is that of immortality at his return to earth.

This will also be a likeness that they share with angels, as Jesus teaches in Luke 20 v 36 (**“they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection”**) and Mark 12 v 25.

It will be seen shortly that it is likely to be angels who are the “us” of Genesis 1 v 26, who make man in their image and likeness, and the Bible indicates that those who are redeemed through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ will acquire their likeness at the resurrection.

**Adam or “the man”?**

In the Hebrew text in Genesis 1 - 3, it nearly always speaks about “the adam” or “the man” (Hebrew **ha adam**), there are only two occasions where it speaks about Adam without the definite article. These are Genesis 1 v 26 and Genesis 2 v 5, and the last reference should probably be translated “a man” (“**there was not a man to serve the ground** (my translation)”).

This means that Genesis 1 v 26 is different to all the other uses of Adam in the early part of Genesis, because it uses the term “Adam” when describing the people God created.

It says, “**And God said, Let us make Adam in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion …**”

Verse 27 then refers to “the adam” or the man when describing the same people. “**So God created the Adam in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female he created them (my translation)**.”

So the first time it speaks about man in the creation records it is “Adam”, and after that it is “the Adam”. This is a similar pattern to what we saw with the firmament, earth, seas and heavens. The first time they are mentioned in Genesis chapter 1 they are referred to as “firmament”, “earth”, “seas” and “heavens”, but after that they are described as “the firmament”, “the earth”, “the seas” and “the heavens”.

(We will see that “heavens” and “earth”, as opposed to “the heavens” and “the earth” are used at the start of the second creation record, and that this provides a link between the two accounts that helps to tie them together.)

Apart from Genesis 2 v 5, the next time that Adam (as opposed to the Adam) is mentioned is at the start of Genesis chapter 5. We have moved past the first children of the man and woman in the second creation record (Cain and Abel), and are now going to follow the ancestral line that will lead through Seth to the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 1 and 2 say,

“**This is the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created Adam, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created** (My translation – which aligns more closely with the Authorised Version).”

As the Adam at the start of Genesis chapter 5 is made in God’s likeness, we would expect this name to describe people who are redeemed through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the man who is made in God’s image and likeness. Genesis chapter 5 describes “Adam’s” genealogy, which passes from the man in the second creation record, through his son Seth, and leads to Noah. We need to note that Adam’s genealogy is not talking about mankind in general, it does not include Cain and his offspring, but is focusing on one line of descendants which arose from the Adam or the man spoken about in Genesis 2 and 3.

**Not a living creature**

When thinking about Genesis 1 v 20 -23, we noted the expression “living creature”. It is used to describe creatures that live in the waters, creatures that live on the earth and birds. It is even used to describe the man in the second creation record (Genesis 2 v 7). But it is not used to describe Adam in Genesis 1 v 26 – 8. This is more evidence that the man created on the sixth day is different to the one in Genesis chapters 2 and 3. It brings to mind the words of 1 Corinthians 15 v 45, “**And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit**.” This last Adam is the one who said, “**The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world**,” (John 6 v 33) and, "**It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life** (John 6 v 63).” Adam in Genesis chapter 1 is more than someone who has life, it includes someone who gives eternal life. Adam is not a living creature, he is a life giver.

**Let us make man …**

Notice that in Genesis 1 v 26, God says, “**Let us make man (Adam), in our image, according to our likeness.**”

It’s not really within the scope of this study to explain in detail why God says, “**Let us make man**”, instead of something like “I will make man”, but it is worthwhile touching upon it. The Hebrew word translated God is “**Elohim**” and this is a plural word which is used widely in the Old Testament. Jesus commented on its meaning when he was conversing with an angry jewish audience in John chapter 10. They took exception to his statement that, “**I and my Father are one**,” and said to him, “**You being a Man, make yourself God.**”

In response, Jesus quoted from Psalm 82, “**Is it not written in your law, I said, “You are gods** (in Psalm 82 the Hebrew word for gods is **Elohim**, just like in Genesis 1 v 26)”? **If He called them gods, to whom the word of god came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God**’ (John 10 v 34 – 36)?”

Jesus’ definition of the Hebrew word Elohim is that it describes those to whom the word of God came. In Scripture we find that the term Elohim can apply to angels, but also to men like Moses. It can apply to anyone who shows the qualities of the God of Israel.

The Bible shows that angels have been heavily involved in bringing about God’s plan for salvation, for example it was angels who did the Father’s will by taking the message of God’s plan to Mary, and they watched over the Lord Jesus Christ during his time on Earth. So it seems reasonable that they are the “us” of Genesis 1 v 26, who are described as overseeing the creation of the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride. Colossians 1 v 15 says that the Lord Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, and it is this image that the angels have and that they share with Jesus. This is not a physical image (after all, God is invisible), but one made up of qualities.

**Being fruitful, multiplying, filling the earth, subduing it and having dominion**

In Genesis 1 v 26 - 28 there are two similar statements about Adam, first in verse 26, “**let them have dominion (Hebrew radah) over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth**,” then in verse 28, “**Be fruitful and multiply: fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth**.” Putting the two together, we see that Adam is to be fruitful, to multiply, to fill the earth, to subdue it and to have dominion.

As Adam in the first creation record has been identified as the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, we should expect to find these terms used in the Bible when describing them.

**Being fruitful and multiplying**

If we start with the ideas of being fruitful and multiplying, we discover they are used together to indicate prosperity. So when the descendants of Joseph were in Egypt, they “**were fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty, and the land was filled with them”** (Exodus 1 v 7). Being fruitful and multiplying are also used to describe the sons of Noah (Genesis chapter 9 v 1, 7), the descendants of Ishmael (Genesis 17 v 20), the descendants of Jacob (Genesis 28 v 3 and 35 v 11), Joseph (Genesis 48 v 4) and the children of Israel (for example Leviticus 26 v 9 and Jeremiah 23 v 3). Some of these verses are part of blessings given by fathers to their sons, or are dependant on people obeying God’s word. The blessing in Genesis chapter 35 is different, however, because it was given by God, and it refers to the line of descendants that would lead to the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 10 – 12 say, “**And God said to him (Jacob), “Your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. Also God said to him: “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body. The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants (or seed) after you I give this land”**.“

On one level, these words are speaking about Jacob’s physical descendants, who would become the nation of Israel, but they also refer to one specific descendant or seed, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is shown by looking at similar words that God spoke to Jacob’s grandfather, Abraham. He said, “**Blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants (or seed) as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants (or seed) shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice** (Genesis 22 v 17 – 18).”

The identity of the seed spoken about here is shown by Galatians chapter 3. Genesis 22 v 18 is quoted by the apostle Paul in Galatians 3 v 8, and a few verses later the seed it speaks about is identified as the Lord Jesus Christ (v 16). It is through his sacrifice and the salvation of those who believe in the gospel, that Abraham’s and Jacob’s descendants or seed are multiplied. As Paul says in Galatians 3 v 29, “**And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise**.”

Isaiah chapter 45 is of assistance in understanding how Adam was to be fruitful. Isaiah chapter 45 will be considered again in Appendix 2, but for now we will just look at verse 8, which has several similarities to the first creation record. It says, “**Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open , let them bring forth (hebew parah – to be fruitful) salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord, have created it**.” Appendix 2 will highlight several verses in Isaiah chapter 45 that use the first creation record in a figurative way, like the waters above the firmament pouring forth God’s purpose, but it will be sufficient for the time being to note that the fruit generated here is the end product of his plan for mankind, namely salvation and righteousness through Jesus Christ, the last Adam.

**Filling the earth and subduing it**

Moving on now to the meaning of filling the earth. When it is used in Genesis chapter 9 about Noah and his descendants, it carries the meaning of them increasing in number and settling over the Middle East and Europe. However, for the last Adam, the way the earth is filled is far more dramatic, and is described in Daniel chapter 2.

In this chapter, king Nebuchanezzar had a dream about a huge image, consisting of a head of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet made of a mixture of iron and clay. This represented great empires that ruled over the holy land, first Babylon (the gold head), then Medo-Persia (the silver chest and arms), after that Greece (the belly and thighs of bronze) and finally Rome (the legs of iron). In the dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone strike the image on the feet and break it to pieces. The stone then became a great mountain that “**filled the whole earth** (v 35)”. This stone represents the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 44 interprets the stone hitting the image in this way, “**The God of heaven will set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever**.”

It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the last Adam, who will subdue the earth and fill it, by setting up God’s kingdom when he returns.

**Having dominion**

Finally, the idea of Adam having dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1 v 28 ), has similarities to what we’ve read in Daniel chapter 2. The difference is that in Genesis it includes the sea and not just the earth. Earlier, the creatures in the sea, air and land were identified as groups of people and here we see that the Lord Jesus Christ, and those who are redeemed through him, will have dominion over all of them when God’s kingdom is established. In reality, it means that Christ’s dominion will be over nations and peoples who will not neccesarily welcome him. This is the message of Psalm 110, which also speaks about the Messiah having dominion. Verse 2 says this about his reign, “**The Lord shall send the rod of your strength out of Zion, have dominion in the midst of your enemies (my translation)**.”

In summary, Adam being fruitful and multiplying describes the work of the gospel in bringing salvation to those who have faith in Christ. Adam filling the earth, subduing it and having dominion looks forward to the kingdom of God, when the Lord Jesus Christ will reign over mankind.

**Moving from the earth to the heavens**

On the fourth day, lights appeared in the firmament of the heavens, and we identified these as the Lord Jesus Christ and those who shed God’s light on the earth. The sixth day can be thought of as describing the moment when Christ, and those who are redeemed by him, move from being “of the earth” to being “of the firmament of the heavens”. When they are given dominion over living things (which represent other groups of people in the world), they become rulers. This means that instead of being on the earth, they are in the firmament of the heavens, because that is where God’s rulers dwell. We will return to this theme when we consider the idea of the heavens and the earth being finished in Genesis 2 v 1.

**John chapter 1**

The words at the start of John’s gospel have similarities to the first creation record:

**“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him nothing was made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”** (John 1 v 1 – 5).

This passage will be considered here, because it does relate to the idea of Adam in Genesis chapter 1 being the Lord Jesus Christ, and his bride being the church.

Explanations for this passage tend to fall into two categories:

1. The beginning spoken about here refers to God’s physical creation, and the word refers to his spoken purpose. So, when in Genesis 1 v 3 it says, **“Then God said …”**, this is an example of God revealing his word or intentions, and him making or creating things.
2. The beginning refers to the start of God’s work through Jesus Christ, which would lead to his resurrection, and to salvation for mankind through faith in him. As such, it uses “beginning” in the same way as the gospels of Mark (Mark 1 v 1) and Luke (Luke 1 v 2). It is the beginning of what would become God’s new creation, as opposed to the physical creation of things like stars and animals. “The Word” in John 1 v 1 can still mean God’s purpose or intention, like in option a), but refers now to God’s purpose expressed through his son. Jesus is the word that became flesh and dwelt among us, as John 1 v 14 says.

If the Adam in Genesis chapter 1 refers to the Lord Jesus Christ, then approach a) would mean that “the beginning” in John chapter 1 could include the creation process from the first day onwards, whereas approach b) would point to it describing events on the sixth day when Jesus, the last Adam, appears.

The use of beginning in the rest of the gospel of John tends to point to the second of these options being correct. In John 6 v 64, 8 v 25, 15 v 27 and 16 v 4, Jesus uses beginning when speaking about the start of his ministry. Beginning is also used in the same way at the start of John’s first epistle (1 v 1).

The beginning in John 1 v 1 leads to another beginning: the beginning of a new creation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is referred to in Colossians 1 v 18, “**And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things he may have the preeminence**”. The beginning spoken about here is associated with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and this idea is expressed in the Book of Revelation as well.

Revelation 3 v 14 says that the Lord Jesus Christ is “**the beginning of the creation of God**.” Like John 1 v 1, this could initially be understood in more than one way. However, this statement occurs at the start of a letter to the church at Laodicea, one of seven letters to churches in chapters 2 and 3. Each letter begins with a reference to statements made about Jesus in chapter 1, and “**the beginning of the creation of God**” in Revelation 3 v 14 can be equated with Jesus being “**the firstborn from the dead**” in Revelation 1 v 5. Jesus started the new creation through his death and resurrection.

The consequence of Jesus being the firstborn from the dead, is that we can be part of this new creation. 2 Corinthians 5 v 17 – 18 says, “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away; behold all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ**.”

The idea of being new (represented in 2 Corinthians 5 by the Greek word **kainos**) does not have to mean new in the sense of being recent, but often has the meaning of ”just like new” or enduring. Things that are new are the opposite of those that are temporary or worn out, which is how the law of Moses is described (Hebrews 8 v 13).

We can regard the sixth day of the first creation record as the time when God’s purpose becomes new or enduring. It is through the work of Christ, the last Adam, that he made the creation new, in the sense that God’s purpose became permanent.

Before leaving John chapter 1, it would be worth commenting on the statement in John 1 v 3 that “**All things were made through him** (the Word)**, and without him nothing was made that was made.”** Based on our conclusions, we would expect this to be talking about what the Lord Jesus Christ achieved through his death and resurrection. We get support for this view from Colossians 1 v 15 – 16. In verse 15 there is the statement that Jesus is “**the firstborn of all creation**” (my translation). We have seen that this is referring to him being the firstborn from the dead. Because of this, he has brought about the new creation, which is described in verse 16, “**For in him all things were created that are in the heavens and that are on the earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones, or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through him and for him (my translation)**.” From previous conclusions in this study, we should view “the heavens and the earth” as a reference to the status between God and man, and we can understand this verse as saying that the Lord Jesus Christ has brought about a new age by reconciling God and man, and that he will be its ruler.

In turn, these ideas help us to understand some verses in the letter to the Hebrews. Hebrews 1 v 2 says this about the Lord Jesus Christ, “(God) **has appointed** (him) **heir of all things, through whom also he made the ages** (Greek **aionas**) (my translation)”. The way that Jesus made the ages is explained in Hebrews 9 v 26, “**but now, once at the end of the ages, he has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself**.” We are presented with the same ideas that we have already come across. The sacrifice, death and resurrection of Jesus have brought about the completion of God’s plan for mankind, resulting in a new creation. This is how Jesus made the ages, or how “**All things were made through him**” (John 1 v 3).

**Genesis 1 v 29 – 30**

**And God said, “See, I have given you every herb (Hebrew eseb) that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb (Hebrew yereq eseb) for food”; and it was so.**

At this point, it is worth pausing and thinking about the tangled web of strange questions that could arise if we were to think of Genesis chapter 1 as solely a historical description of the creation of life on earth. We might look at these verses and start discussing whether mankind should be vegetarian, or if birds were originally allowed to eat the fruit that came from trees. However, if we see Genesis chapter 1 as a piece of allegorical writing, we can put these questions to one side and focus on the spiritual power of the words.

First let’s consider the sort of food that the righteous eat. In Genesis 1 v 11 – 13 plants were identified as things that arose from the working of God’s spirit, which in turn was represented by waters falling on the earth. Now we see in Genesis 1 v 29 – 30 that the righteous feed on the plants that yield seed. The idea of the godly eating spiritual food takes us to John chapter 6 and Jesus identifying himself as the bread of life. In John 6 v 32, 33 he says, “**Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world**.”

When Jesus expanded his teaching and said that his audience had to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to get eternal life, they began drifting away, as they struggled to understand the significance of what he was saying. The crowd did not perceive that Jesus was speaking metaphorically. Jesus then explained to his disciples that, “**The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life** (v 63)”. As was so often the case, it is Peter who showed an understanding of the master’s words and demonstrated that he grasped what it was to eat the bread of life, when he said to the Lord, “**You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that you are the Christ, the son of the living God** (v 68 - 9).”

God’s spirit brings about things which we feed on: things like God’s word and the hope of salvation that we have through Jesus Christ.

In the first creation record, the important thing about the herbs and trees that man (literally “the Adam”) eats is that they yield seed. We are helped in understanding what the seed signifies by returning to a verse in Isaiah chapter 55.

Verse 10 starts by saying that the rain comes down from heaven, and this can be understood as God revealing his purpose to mankind. It then continues by saying that it makes “**the earth to bring forth and bud”**, so that it will “**give seed to the sower and bread to the eater**.” So God’s spirit produces seed and bread.

The idea of giving seed to the sower leads us to a parable that Jesus told. He explained that the seed which the sower scattered is the word of God (Luke 8 v 5). When the man in the first creation record consumes the food from herbs and trees in Genesis 1 v 29, it consists of eating the seed that they produce, in other words, it involves believing and absorbing the word of God.

Isaiah 55 v 10 can also be regarded as the background to Jesus describing himself as the bread of life. Rain from heaven, which represents God showing his purpose to mankind, results in God providing “**bread to the eater**”, or the bread of life for us to feed on.

The other living things listed in Genesis 1 v 29 - 30 have food, but food which doesn’t yield seed. The notes on Genesis 1 v 20 – 25 identified creatures like beasts and creeping things as being the rest of mankind who are in places where the message of God’s grace is visible, but who are not part of his purpose for salvation. Although they are cared for, they don’t benefit from the rich harvest that comes from God’s grace. They are given green herbs to eat, a phrase that only occurs in one other place, in Genesis 9 v 3. It is used there as part of the blessing to Noah and his sons, and says, “**I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.**”

“Green herbs” may well be another description of the grass that is mentioned in Genesis 1 v 11. This is because grass is the one group of plants from Genesis 1 v 11 – 13 that isn’t specifically mentioned in Genesis 1 v 29 - 30, and we have a colour link between grass (described as “green grass” in Psalm 37 v 2) and green herbs.

**The promises to Noah**

It might be useful to take a detour and spend a bit of time looking at the promises made to Noah and his descendants in Genesis chapter 9, as they apply the words of Genesis 1 v 30 about eating green herbs to Noah and his sons. They were blessed by God, and in some respects the blessing they received was similar to the words that were spoken concerning Adam and his descendants at the start of Genesis chapter 5. These in turn echo the words that were spoken about the Adam in Genesis 1. But although there are similarities between the blessings in Genesis chapter 9 and chapter 1, there are differences as well. This shows that the words of Genesis chapter 1 don’t apply to all of Noah’s descendants.

Instead of them being given the same food as the male and female of Genesis 1 v 26 – 8, they are given green herbs, the food for the other living things in Genesis 1 v 30 which doesn’t produce seed. Most of the sons of Noah and their descendants would not be like those who were mentioned at the start of Genesis chapter 5, who are described as being in the likeness of God, but instead they would be the living things of Genesis chapter 1 who Adam would have dominion over. Only the line of descendants that passes through Noah’s son Shem (Luke 3 v 36) leads to the Lord Jesus Christ, the rest are likely to be among the other living things described in the first creation record.

With this in mind, let’s have a closer look at the blessing to Noah and his sons in a bit more detail.

Genesis 9 v 1 – 7 says

**“So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast (Hebrew chayyah) of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing (Hebrew remesh) that lives (Hebrew chayah) shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.**

**Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.”**

The first part of the blessing is similar to what was spoken to Adam in Genesis 1 v 26 – 28, but instead of Adam subduing and having dominion over groups of animals, it says that the animals were to fear and dread the sons of Noah.

Living things, birds, things that move on the ground and fish were all to fear and dread Noah and his sons. As well as referring to literal living things, it’s worth asking whether these animals are of figurative significance as well, like they are in Genesis chapter 1 (beasts or living things of the earth, and things that creep or move on the ground are mentioned in Genesis 1 v 25, also fish and birds seem to be referred to in Genesis 1 v 20, although fish are included in the category “living thing that moves”). There are two reasons why this seems likely. First of all, in this passage Noah and his sons were not to have dominion over the third category of animals mentioned in Genesis 1 v 25, namely cattle. We’ve already seen that cattle are used figuratively to represent the children of Israel, so it makes sense that they are excluded from the list in Genesis chapter 9, otherwise God’s people could be seen as fearing and dreading Noah and his descendants. The reality is that the descendant of Noah who would ultimately have dominion over all the rest of mankind, including most of Noah’s descendants, would come from the people who are metaphorically cattle, that is the Israelites.

The second reason comes from thinking about the expression, “**the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast** (Genesis 9 v 2).” The only other time when similar expressions like “**do not fear and do not be afraid**” are used, they describe how people feel, and not animals. Israel are often told this, for example in Deuteronomy 1 v 21, Joshua 1 v 9 and Jeremiah 23 v 4. They were not to be afraid of other peoples because their God was with them.

We can view the words of Genesis chapter 9 as meaning that Noah and his sons were to have dominion over literal animals, but that this would have figurative significance as well. In effect, the relationship of Noah and his sons to the rest of nature was a pattern for the relationship that the second Adam would have with the rest of mankind.

Genesis 9 v 3 continues the blessing by saying, “**Every moving thing** (Hebrew **remesh**) **that lives** (Hebrew **chayah**) **shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs**.” You may remember we have come across the Hebrew word **remesh** before. It is translated “creeping” when speaking about things that creep upon the earth or that creep upon the ground. In Genesis chapter 9 it seems to be used more generally, so translators have tended to think that here it describes any living moving thing, as opposed to specifically animals that creep. This seems reasonable and would include animals on the land and sea.

Verse 3 says that Noah and his sons could have a diet that included meat, and the reason for this seems to be so that they would remember that one of their offspring, the Adam mentioned in Genesis chapter 1, was to have dominion over the rest of humanity (who are represented by animals in the first creation record).

When we look at Noah’s descendants and how they relate to the first creation record, we find that most of them were part of the metaphorical animals listed in Genesis chapter 1, who would be ruled over by the Adam mentioned there. Evidence for this comes from verse 3, which continues, “**I have given you all things, even as the green herbs**.” This takes us straight back to Genesis 1 v 30, which says, “**And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.**” The creatures that eat green herbs in Genesis chapter 1 represent mankind in general and are different to the Adam of Genesis chapter 1, because he was to eat from seed bearing herbs and trees (v 29). Most of Noah’s descendants would be cared for by God, but not given the spiritual food that belongs to the Adam of Genesis chapter 1.

In conclusion, the diet of Noah and his sons was not made up of arbitrary things, instead it was to remind them of important truths. The Adam of Genesis chapter 1 would rule over all mankind and, unless the sons of Noah became part of him through faith in God’s promises, they would themselves be figurative “animals” and part of the creatures of Genesis chapter 1 who eat green herbs.

Finally some thoughts on verse 5 – 7 of Genesis chapter 9.

**“But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning; from the hand of every beast I will require it, and from the hand of man. From the hand of every man’s brother I will require the life of man. Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God he made man. And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.”**

This passage focuses on blood. Firstly, the sons of Noah were not to eat flesh that contained blood, and secondly there was to be judgement on those who shed man’s blood.

Let’s start by considering the command to avoid eating flesh that contains blood. We’ve already seen that the diet of Noah and his sons had the aim of demonstrating that most of them were not the group of people who make up the Adam of Genesis chapter 1, and it’s the same here. The command to avoid eating flesh with its blood, showed that they were different from those who could eat it in a spiritual sense.

We’ve already considered John chapter 6 and Jesus’ words, “**Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day** (John 6 v 53, 54)**.**”

Eating Jesus’ flesh and blood, a metaphor that describes sharing in his life and the salvation he brought, was not for most of Noah’s sons, but just for those who had faith in the God of Adam and Seth. Like eating green herbs, avoiding eating flesh with the blood showed that the majority of the sons of Noah were not part of the Adam of the first creation record.

It is difficult to understand the second part of the passage, where God says he will punish those who shed man’s blood, unless there is a spiritual significance. The judgement upon animals who kill people is also part of the law of Moses (for example Exodus 21 v 28, 32), however, when animals kill they are following their instincts, and are not subject to God’s judgement. This passage makes more sense if this teaching has spiritual significance, and if the beasts along with the man who is killed also represent the metaphorical animals and man in the first creation record. The animals would represent ungodly people, as they do in Genesis chapter 1, while the man who is killed represents the godly (the Adam of the first creation record, who is made in the image of God). The slaying of a man in the days of Noah and his sons, whether by another man or an animal, would be a reminder that God will require a recompense from anyone who sheds the blood of a righteous person.

We can see this passage as part of the background to the terrible judgements that came upon the people of Judea when they rejected the Lord Jesus Christ and shed his blood. The blood of the righteous was shed, and in turn the blood of the people who perpetrated the act was shed as well.

**Genesis 1 v 31 – 2 v 1**

**Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.**

When we identify the creation of man on the sixth day with the new creation in Jesus Christ, then what we have in Genesis 1 v 1 – 2 v 1 is a description of God’s purpose for mankind and the earth, stretching from his intention to show himself to mankind to the completion of his plan through the work of Jesus Christ. It is an astonishing prophecy, set out many thousands of years ago, describing the message of the Bible. Genesis chapter 1 is not just the beginning of the Bible, it is a summary of what is to come in the rest of scripture.

The Hebrew word translated “finished” (**kalah**) in Genesis 2 v 1 is used twice in Daniel 12 v 7. This verse comes after a prophecy which describes the resurrection of the righteous, and includes these words, “**Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever** (Daniel 12 v 3).”

Daniel 12 v 7 then says, **“… all these things shall be finished** (Hebrew **kalah**).” Without going into detail about the context of the verse and its other teaching, we have the righteous shining forever like stars when all things are finished. This mirrors Genesis 2 v 1, which says that “**the heavens and the earth and all the host of them were finished.**” Genesis is not talking about literal stars, but metaphorical ones. It is speaking about the salvation of the righteous from death and their resurrection to eternal life. It’s describing the completion of God’s purpose for mankind.

The world in which we live, ruled over by sin and death, is going to be replaced by a new order. The New Testament describes it as a new creation that is brought about through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. As previously mentioned, the greek word translated new (**kainos**) can be regarded as describing things that endure, as opposed to “old” things, like the law of Moses, which become obsolete. So in 2 Corinthians 5 v 17, when Paul writes, “**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away**,” he is contrasting the law with salvation though faith in Christ. One fades away and the other lasts for ever.

Similarly, when Peter speaks about looking for “**new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells** (2 Peter 3 v 13)”, he is speaking about something enduring, which is filled with the righteousness of God through Jesus Christ.

The new heavens and earth, and the fulfilment of the new creation is where the sixth day ends. It finishes with an enduring creation filled with God’s righteousness. It is the time when Jesus returns to the earth and the righteous are resurrected to eternal life, so they can “**shine like the brightness of the firmament**” and be “**like the stars forever and ever**.”

Before we move on, it is worth returning to a theme that was considered earlier on. If the stars in the heavens represent the righteous when they are resurrected to eternal life, then the image we are given on the fourth day of The Sun, Moon and stars being in the heavens is only completed at the end of the sixth day. This indicates that we can view the filling of the heavens, seas and earth as a process which continues up until the start of the seventh day. When we think about it, this makes sense. For example, all the predatory empires that have ruled over mankind, and which are represented by the great sea creatures that appear on the fifth day, don’t emerge at once, but arise over thousands of years.

**Genesis 2 v 2 - 3**

**“And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. Then God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it, because in it he rested from all his work which God had created and made.”**

The first thing we notice is that the seventh day has no ending. The expression “**the evening and the morning were the … day**” is not used. The seventh day does not end because it is the completion of God’s purpose. Now that we see the first creation account as a journey, which ends on the sixth day with the risen Lord Jesus Christ and his bride having dominion over the earth, we can identify God’s rest as being the time of his kingdom. And this is how it is used in Hebrews chapter 4, when it speaks of people sharing in that rest.

First, Hebrews chapter 3 speaks about Israel not being able to enter the land of promise during the days of Moses, because of their unbelief. Hebrews 4 v 9 continues, “**There remains therefore a rest to the people of God**”, and two verses later the recipients of the letter are exhorted, “**Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest**.” As far as the writer of the letter was concerned, God’s rest was something that faithful disciples would receive in the future.

The seventh day, representing the kingdom of God when Messiah reigns and the earth is at peace, is often associated with the expression “in that day.” Here are a few examples:

“**The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; The Lord alone will be exalted in that day** (Isaiah 2 v 17).”

“**And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek him, and his resting place shall be glorious** (Isaiah 11 v 10).”

“**And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk** (Joel 3 v 18).”

“**And the Lord shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be – The Lord is one, and his name one** (Zechariah 14 v 9).”

The seventh day is the time or the “day” of the Kingdom of God. It is a time of rest that the righteous will enjoy when the earth is restored to God’s ways.

The Book of Revelation has some descriptions of the kingdom of God, and it is worthwhile highlighting one passage in particular, as it links together ideas we have already come across in the first creation record.

Revelation 21 v 1 – 3 says, “**Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people. God himself will be with them and be their God.”**

The new heaven and new earth describes an enduring relationship between God and man. It is when the Adam of the first creation record, the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are redeemed through him, are united and have dominion over mankind. The expression, “**there was no more sea**”, picks up on the ideas from Genesis chapter 1 and points to a time when there are no longer godless nations who are opposed to God’s purpose.

Earlier, we concluded that the greater light who rules the day was the Lord Jesus Christ, and further on in Revelation chapter 21 it shows that he will provide the light for the holy city. Verse 23 says, “**The city had no need of the sun or the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb is its light**.” The Bible draws to an end with a vision of the seventh day, a time when God’s work with our world has reached its fulfilment.

**Loose Ends**

The next three sections consider topics that relate to the first creation record, which have not already been covered.

**What about Exodus 20 v 11?**

Exodus 20 v 11 often crops up in discussions about whether Genesis chapter 1 should be understood literally. This verse occurs as part of the ten commandments that God gave to Israel on Mount Sinai.

Verses 9 – 11 say

**“Six days you shall labour, and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”**

Moses quotes from Genesis chapters 1 and 2 to explain why there should be a day of rest every week. He describes the start of the Book of Genesis accurately: God did create the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. That pattern is then used to structure the lives of the children of Israel. But just because the days in Exodus are 24 hours long, it does not mean that the days in Genesis chapter 1 have to be the same.

We’ve already seen that days in scripture can be used in different senses. They can represent periods of spiritual light, and are times when God is visible. The important thing is the pattern of the days: six days of labour and one day rest. What isn’t significant is the length of the days.

We also need to remember that the law is a shadow of the true, and is not the reality. The pattern of the law was there to remind Israel of the way that God’s purpose would be fulfilled through the work of his son. For example, the Day of Atonement was there to show how God would bring about salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. In like manner, the pattern of days under the law was a reminder of God’s seven day plan for the earth. The length of the days are not important.

**Good and very good**

One thing that hasn’t been touched on are the statements that occur throughout the first creation record, “**And God saw that it was good**.” Here is a list of where they occur:

1 v 4 The light is good. (Day 1)

1 v 10 The dry land and the seas are good. (Day 3)

1 v 12 The earth bringing forth plants is good. (Day 3)

1 v 18 The lights that rule over the day and night and divide the light from the darkness are good. (Day 4)

1 v 21 The creation of sea creatures and fowls are good. (Day 5)

1 v 25 The living creatures are good. (Day 6)

1 v 31 After the creation of Adam, everything in God’s creation is very good (Day 6).

On the first day the darkness, which is a metaphor for ungodly attitudes, is not described as good, only the light is. Also the things made on the second day are not described as good, things that include the firmament in the midst of the waters and the division of the waters. There is no reason to suppose that the creation of the firmament was evil, but we will see that the events of the second creation record can be placed in the time of the second and third days, and some of these cannot be described as good. It could be that this is the reason why the second day is not termed ”good”.

If we understand the first creation account in an allegorical way, then the making of things like the great sea creatures may not seem particularly good if they are considered to represent world powers and empires. However scripture teaches that even they have their place in God’s purpose. For example, the prophecy of Isaiah explains about the role of Assyria, which was a dominant, and often violent power in the Middle East during his lifetime.

First it records Assyria’s own perception of why it was powerful. Assyria is quoted as saying, “**By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent** (Isaiah 11 v 13)”. God’s view of Assyria is different however. A few verses later it says, “**Shall the axe boast itself against him who chops with it? Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it? As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up, or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!** (Isaiah 11 v 15)”

We can add to this the words of Daniel 4 v 17, “**The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever he will, and sets over it the lowest of men**.”

The organisation of mankind throughout the ages has been necessary for the fulfilment of God’s purpose, and can be considered good, even though mankind seems so often to abuse the power and responsibility that is given to it.

Apart from the darkness, the creation in the first creation record moves from good to very good once man is added on the sixth day. The last Adam and those who are redeemed through him are the pinnacle of God’s creative acts for our world.

**Showing God’s power and Godhead**

In Paul’s epistle to the Romans there is a passage which challenges the view that the first creation record is solely a historical description of the making of the physical creation**.**

Romans 1 v 18 – 20 says, **“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse.”**

God’s invisible attributes, his eternal power and Godhead, are understood by considering the things that are made. It is true that the things we see around us provide a witness to God’s power, but what about his Godhead? The Greek word translated “Godhead” is **theiotes**, a word which only occurs on this occasion in the New Testament. A related word **theios** is used three times in scripture, and provides some understanding of what “Godhead” means. The first occasion is in Acts chapter 17, when Paul is speaking to the men of Athens.

He explains that the God who they call “the unknown God” is in fact the God of Israel (v 23). He continues by telling them that God “**gives to all life, breath and all things**” (v 25).

Then in verse 29 he says, **“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think the Divine nature (greek theios) is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”**

The divine nature cannot be represented by idols, but this passage doesn’t explain what it is.

The other two places where “**theios**” is used in the New Testament is 2 Peter 1 v 3, 4. This says, **“His divine (theios) power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine (theios) nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”**

The “divine” use of God’s power is not just to demonstrate that he exists, but also to show his purpose for mankind through the gospel, so we can be “divine” like him. With that in mind, let’s return to Paul’s words in Romans 1 v 18, **“For since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead (Greek theiotes).”**

The natural creation shows God’s power, but it does not provide details of his promises to us and the work of Jesus Christ. However, if we view the creation records in an allegorical way, then they do describe his Godhead or divinity, in that they reveal his plan for the world that is fulfilled through Jesus Christ.

**The first creation record as a piece of literal writing**

We have seen that there is evidence for treating Genesis chapter 1 as an allegory. However, the allegory we identified in Galatians chapter 4 about Sarai and Hagar would lead us to expect it has a more obvious meaning, as well as a figurative one.

Is there evidence that the first creation record has a literal meaning? The answer to this is yes. Appendix 2 goes through other Bible passages that refer to God creating the heavens and the earth, and considers whether they are describing a literal or a figurative creation.

Have a look at the appendix for the detail, but it might be worthwhile quoting the summary of findings at the end of it.

“*When we looked at the bible passages that spoke about God making the heavens and the earth, we noticed that some can be understood as describing the making of the things we see around us, others are used in a metaphorical way and some can be understood in either way.*

*When we think about the references to the creation records that we might consider to be literal, we see that they make general points. God made the heavens, earth, sea, world and everything that is in them. Anyone who is unfamiliar with the Bible could glean these points from a straightforward reading of the first creation record. None of the passages that were considered indicated the order in which God made the literal universe or things that live on The Earth.”*

**The big question**

If the first creation record shows that God created the literal heavens and earth, as well as the spiritual ones, does it mean that it is a historical account of how God populated the world and formed the universe?

The indications are that the structure of the first creation record is there primarily to support its allegorical meaning, and not to provide a literal “blow by blow” record of how God made the universe. It uses literal things that God made, like seas, light and animals, in order to show how he will bring about salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ, but the sequence of events in the creation record are not necessarily the order in which the physical creation took place.

Take the creation of light and The Sun as an example. There are no problems with light emerging on the first day and The Sun being made on the fourth day, if the structure of the first creation record is primarily there to support a description of God’s purpose for salvation. But it poses significant issues if it is viewed as a literal description of how God made the Solar System.

As an allegory, Genesis chapter 1 starts with darkness (the absence of God), then describes the appearance of light to indicate that God wishes to show his purpose to mankind, and finally adds The Sun on the fourth day, representing the light shining in a way that brings salvation to mankind through Jesus Christ.

On the other hand, we are likely to struggle with understanding Genesis chapter 1 as a historical description of the creation of the Solar System. This can be demonstrated by looking at the order in which light, day and The Sun are made. Before The Sun exists, on the first day we have a world that is covered in water. This challenges what we know about the working of the universe. Unless objects are near a star, their temperature becomes close to what is known as absolute zero, or about -273 degrees Centigrade. Even for objects relatively near a star, like the planet Neptune, the temperature is about -200 degrees. At these sorts of temperatures the world would be a block of ice, there certainly wouldn’t be flowing water in the world or in the atmosphere. If the first creation record is viewed literally , then the presence of a watery deep before the days of creation would indicate that The Sun already needs to be in existence.

Then we have the existence of light on the first day, along with day and night. The presence of light, as well as planet Earth spinning on its axis to create day and night, are the result of The Sun as a light source and as a massive object causing gravitational effects between The Sun and the Earth.

If we were to view the first creation record as a literal account of the creation of the Solar System, then the obvious problem would be that The Sun’s properties are clearly affecting planet Earth before it is made on the fourth day. The only way to get around this is to come up with explanations as to why The Sun’s presence is felt before it is there, or to argue that the fourth day describes the appearance of The Sun, and not its making.

On the other hand, if we accept that the structure of the first creation record is there primarily to support its allegorical meaning, then there are no disagreements with scientific discovery. The literal part of it is that God created the elements that are used in the allegory, things like animals and stars. The part that is not literal is the way the passage is organised in order to provide its figurative message. So it is literally true that God created plants and the Sun, but it is not literally true that plants appeared on the Earth before the Sun was made. Instead, the order in which things are made supports its allegorical message.

**Chapter 3**

**The second creation account**

Before we start looking at the rest of Genesis chapter 2 and Genesis chapter 3, it would be useful to highlight a couple of conclusions that we’ve already reached:

1. The man created in Genesis 1 v 26 – 7 is a metaphor that describes the righteous of all ages, including the Lord Jesus Christ, his ancestors and those who form part of his body.
2. The first creation record is a piece of allegorical writing, it is not intended to be understood as a strictly chronological description of how God brought life into existence on the Earth.

Once we appreciate these two points, we will be able to place the second creation record within the context of Genesis chapter 1.

**What sort of writing is Genesis chapters 2 and 3?**

The events of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 clearly don’t appear to be an ordinary recount, as its style seems to be quite different to Genesis chapter 4 for example, which describes the killing of Abel by Cain. Instead it appears to be written in the style of an ancient myth, and sections of it do not seem to be literal. We have man made from dust, woman made from the side of man, trees that impart knowledge and eternal life, as well as a talking serpent. It has some similarities to the Book of Revelation, which also speaks of the serpent and the tree of life. So like the first creation record, it appears to be a piece of a figurative writing. Also like the writing in Genesis chapter 1 we can accept that it is true, because scripture is true, it’s just that it isn’t literally true.

If we were to view the second creation account as a literal piece of writing, then we would be forced to believe in a God who thought that an animal might be a suitable helper for man instead of woman, or a God who can be hidden from. This would clearly be a different God to the powerful, all knowing creator who we are told about in chapter 1 of Genesis and in the rest of scripture.

However, we will find that there are factual features woven into the account, just like we find in other ancient myths. Adam and Eve seem to be historical figures, as do the historical and geographical settings of the account. Similarly, figurative writing like the parable of the Good Samaritan uses a real geographical setting, and The Rich Man and Lazarus employs real people in its narrative.

As we start to look at the second creation record, we will begin with the hypothesis that it is a piece of figurative writing and is making spiritual points, but also that it uses real people, and has an accurate historical and geographical setting.

Adam and Eve seem to be real people, as Genesis chapter 4 mentions them in the story of Cain and Abel, and that appears to be a literal description of events. However the figurative nature of the writing in the second creation account presents two possibilities:

1. Adam and Eve were the first people who God interacted with on an intellectual and spiritual level, and the second creation account is a figurative description of how they responded to him. When Adam and Eve are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, it is a reference to the second creation record and the figurative descriptions of events that occurred in their lives.
2. The second creation account uses Adam and Eve in the same sort of way that Jesus used Lazarus in the parable about the rich man. They are historical characters used in an account that teaches spiritual lessons about things like God’s relationship to man, and the link between sin and death. The choice of the characters in the creation account are not significant in the sense that they necessarily commited the first sin, instead they are used to represent the human race and to illustrate spiritual truths. When Adam and Eve are mentioned elsewhere in the Bible, it is a reference to the second creation record and the events it describes, however they are being spoken about in the same way that we might speak about the Good Samaritan or the Prodigal Son.

From the author’s perspective, the description of the woman in the second creation account indicates that the first of these options is correct. Adam and Eve were the first people who God communicated with, and the first people to disobey one of his commandments. These two possibilities will be revisited once we have looked at the teaching of Genesis 2 and 3.

As with our consideration of the first creation record, we can only get so far with general points, and we now need to think about the second account in more detail.

**Genesis 2 v 4 – 6**

**This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown. For the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the ground; but a mist went up from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground.**

The first part of this quotation can be thought of as a heading or a summary of what is to follow, a bit like Genesis 1 v 1 is a heading that describes the purpose of the first creation record.

At first, it seems as if the second creation account might be a re-hash of the first one, in that it too is speaking about the creation of the heavens and the earth, however it soon becomes clear that it is focusing on one particular part of the first account.

Genesis 2 v 4 indicates this when its translation is altered slightly. It should say, “**These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens** (my translation).”

When we looked at the first creation record, we noted that “heavens” (as opposed to “the heavens”) was used to describe the firmament in Genesis 1 v 8, and “earth” (as opposed to “the earth”) was used the first time that the dry land appeared in Genesis 1 v 10. After these occurences, the first creation record spoke about “the heavens” and “the earth”.

So if we wanted to link the second creation narrative to the first one on a timeline, then it is reasonable to put it in the time of the second and third days, because that is when “heavens” and “earth” came into being. We get support for this view when Genesis 2 v 5 says that it is describing a time which was “**before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field was grown.**” This of course ties in with Genesis chapter 1, because it was not until later in the third day, after the creation of “heavens” and “earth”, that it speaks about the earth bringing forth plants. Just in case we’ve forgotten, heavens, earth and plants are metaphors in Genesis chapter 1, and this needs to guide our understanding of their use in chapters 2 and 3 as well.

*(In the first creation record, it say that “heavens” were made on the second day, and “earth” on the third day. Yet in the second creation record is speaks about “****the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens*** *(Genesis 2 v 4 - my translation)”. So shouldn’t it be speaking about the days when they were made, and not the day? If we remember that “day” means a time when God is visible, then both the making of “heavens” and “earth” were during “the day”. This seems to be the meaning of day in Genesis 2 v 4, it is the time when God was working to make “heavens” and “earth”.)*

If we link together the appearance of plants and trees in the Garden of Eden with the creation of plants and trees in Genesis chapter 1, then they need to have a consistent meaning. We thought about the use of plants as metaphors in Genesis chapter 1, and identified them as things which arise from the working of God’s spirit. We also saw that they provided spiritual sustenance for the righteous. We should expect them to have the same or a similar meaning in Genesis chapter 2.

Placing the events of Genesis chapter 2 in the same sort of timescale as Genesis 1 v 8 – 10, clears up another possible anomaly from the early chapters of Genesis. The Adam in Genesis chapter 2 could initially eat from every tree of the garden, except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2 v 16, 17). Later on in Genesis 3, he was not allowed to eat from the tree of life either, in fact once he sinned his food was only to be the herb of the field (Genesis 3 v 18). This can be compared with the man in Genesis 1 v 29, who appears on the sixth day and who is different again. He was told that he was given “**every tree whose fruit yields seed**” for food. As the man in Genesis 1 v 29 represents the Lord Jesus Christ and the redeemed, then the man in the second creation record (who belongs to the second and third days of Genesis chapter 1) precedes him. The creation account about the Adam or man in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 describes what the apostle Paul calls the first man Adam, whereas the events at the end of Genesis chapter 1 relate to the second or last Adam.

So if we put Adam and his access to trees in order, we get this:

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| The first Adam before his disobedience  (Genesis chapter 2). |  | The first Adam after his disobedience  (Genesis chapter 3). |  | Righteous Adam  (Genesis chapter 1). |
| He can eat from every tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. | He doesn’t eat from trees, but eats the herb of the field |  | He eats from every tree  whose fruit yields seed. |

Once we reach the conclusion that the description of the Adam in Genesis 1 v 26 - 27 relates to the risen Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, and that the first creation record is a description of God’s plan to bring salvation to mankind, then the need for the second creation record becomes clear. It is required to provide important information about the start of God’s purpose with mankind, which is something that is not covered in Genesis chapter 1. It also describes the relationship between God and man when God first showed himself to his creation. In other words, it explains the layout of the spiritual heavens and earth when God first dealt with mankind.

Genesis 2 v 5 provides another indication that the Adam of the second creation record is different to the Adam of the first one when it says that “**there was no man to till the ground**.” The Hebrew word translated “till” is “**abad**”, and has the idea of serving. The Adam in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 was to be a servant, as opposed to the Adam (male and female) in Genesis chapter 1, who were to have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth (Genesis 1 v 28). One is described as a servant and the other as a ruler.

There is a link between service and dominion, and this is shown by the description of the Lord Jesus Christ in Philippians chapter 2. In verse 7 it describes Jesus as making himself “**of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men**.” It was only after he had humbled himself that he was glorified and given dominion, as verse 9 says, “**Therefore, God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth**.” In scripture, service comes before dominion.

I’ve heard well-meaning Christians using Genesis chapters 2 and 3 to explain what the world was like when God created life upon it, including things like weather conditions and the lack of plant life. This is inaccurate on two levels. First, if Genesis chapters 2 and 3 use the same sort of metaphorical language as Genesis chapter 1, then when it mentions things like rain and plants, it is not talking about literal things but figurative things. Secondly, the context of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is specific, it is agriculture. The setting of this piece of writing is a precise sort of location, it is not talking about world conditions in general.

Let’s summarise the evidence for the agricultural background to the second creation account. Adam was placed in a garden, and the plants and animals it describes were to do with the field (Genesis 2 v 5, 2 v 20). If we look at the rest of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 we find more confirmation that this was a time and a place of agriculture. Genesis chapters 2 and 3 mention these:

Plant (Hebrew **siach**), herb (Hebrew **eseb**), to plant (Hebrew **nata**), tree (Hebrew **ets**), garden (Hebrew **gan**), to till the ground (Hebrew **abad** - literally to serve the ground), field (Hebrew **sidah**), ground (Hebrew **adamah**), man (Hebrew **ha adam** or the man – related to the idea of the ground, as both have a red colour and man comes from the ground), food (Hebrew **maacal**), fruit (Hebrew **peri**), beast (Hebrew **behemah**) of the field, bread (Hebrew **lechem**), thorn (Hebrew **qots**), thistle (Hebrew **dardar**), fig (Hebrew **teenah**).

The agricultural setting of the second creation record separates it from other sorts of human existence, such as the hunting and gathering lifestyle of earlier humans. An agricultural lifestyle is an advanced form of existence (it is estimated that agriculture started less than 15000 years ago) and belongs to the Neolithic Age (New Stone Age), as opposed to earlier phases of human existence (the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age and the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age). In fact, the setting of the second creation record is likely to be the later Neolithic Age. This is because only six generations after the Adam of the second creation record we have the birth of Tubal-Cain (Genesis 4 v 22), and he is called “**an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron**.” Metal working started about 8000 years ago and employed very sophisticated skills, when compared to earlier forms of human existence. (Although what is termed The Iron Age did not start until about 500 BC, there is evidence that iron working did take place in Mesopotamia as early as 5000 BC, so it is likely that metal workers with the knowledge of both bronze and iron existed during the earlier Bronze Age.)

Let’s now think about the part of the passage which says that God hadn’t caused it to rain on the earth, and that a mist went up from the earth and watered the face of the ground.

One conclusion from looking at Genesis chapter 1 was that the waters above the firmament were a metaphor for how God influenced mankind. When Genesis 2 v 5 says that “**the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth,**” it is the first indication that this passage is going to describe how God first “rained” upon men, in the sense that he showed himself to them.

Initially it says that a mist went up “**from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground”** (Genesis 2 v 6). At this point we need to remind ourselves of some of the other conclusions that came from the first creation record. We remember that on the second day God created a firmament to separate the two waters, and that this firmament was called “heavens”. We also saw that heavens (or the heavens) described where rulers dwell, and that the difference between the heavens and the earth was more to do with status than location. At the start of Genesis chapter 2, the language suggests that there is no hierarchy yet between God and man. There is no heavens to rule mankind and no waters above the firmament to show them God’s purpose. There is the potential for God to have a relationship with man, but nothing has been set up. This hierarchy is what comes about as the events of Genesis 2 and 3 unfold.

The description of a mist rising up from the earth can be thought of as God working before the hierarchy between God and man came about. The waters do not come from above the heavens, because there are no heavens, but from the ground. And the result of God’s initial way of working upon the ground is described in verse 7, “**And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being**”. God was at work with mankind, in that he formed him and gave him life, but there is no relationship between God and man.

**Genesis 2 v 7 – 9**

**“And the Lord God formed man (Hebrew ha adam) of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”**

When man is formed, there is nothing of the heavens about him. “Man” is a translation of the Hebrew **ha adam**, andthe wordadam is related to the Hebrew word translated ground (**adamah**). The man was from the ground and his job was to serve the ground. He was given the breath of life, and this is the same as all living things (see for example its use in Genesis 7 v 22), so when he was formed man was no different to the rest of God’s creation. However, this is about to change.

The fact that this man is a living being, sets him apart from the man described in the first creation record. The man in Genesis chapter 2 is described as a living creature or living soul, just like other living things. The man in Genesis chapter 1 is not described in these terms because he is not “living” but “life giving”, as 1 Corinthians 15 v 45 describes him.

Before we continue, it might be worth considering if this passage indicates that mankind was formed just before God placed the man in the Garden of Eden. When answering this we need to remember that the second creation narrative does not appear to be a literal account, instead it is a piece of figurative writing which is emphasising spiritual teaching.

Because of his link to Genesis chapter 4 (the man in Genesis chapter 2 is the father of Cain and Abel), it is reasonable to conclude that the man in this account was a historic figure. But apart from knowing that God formed him, and what he was made of, we don’t know the details of how this took place.

Similarly, if we look at the genealogy in Luke chapter 3, it ends with Adam (v 38) and says that he was simply “**of God.**” Again, we can conclude that Adam was a historic figure. If we choose, we can debate whether man was made shortly before the events of the second creation record, or whether he had Paleolithic and Mesolithic ancestors, but that is something that scripture does not address. Genesis chapters 2 and 3 also do not tell us whether the man in the garden was the only human living at the time. Other passages of scripture might provide clues to these sorts of questions.

(As has previously been mentioned, the agricultural setting of the second creation account gives a clue that mankind had already developed from a hunter gathering lifestyle by this stage, and that we are dealing with sophisticated humans in this narrative.)

The reality is that God made man from the dust of the ground, and that is all we need to know in order to learn the lessons from the second creation record. Indeed, for all of us it might be said that God formed us from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into our nostrils. Like the man in the story, we are breathing creatures who are formed from the elements of the ground, and on our own we have nothing of the heavens about us.

In Genesis 2 v 8 it says that the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden. The name Eden has the meaning of delight or pleasure, so when waters flow from Eden, we have the idea of God’s blessings pouring out to refresh the lands around it. We get ideas like this in Joel chapter 3 as well, where it speaks of a future time when a fountain will come forth from the house of the Lord, and then in Revelation 22 v 1 – 3 we have the language of Genesis 2 and Joel 3 merged together to describe a river of water of life proceeding out of the throne of God.

Psalm 36 v 7 – 9 is worth mentioning at this stage. It says,

“**How excellent is your loving kindness, O God. Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of your wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of your house; and you shall make them drink of the river of your pleasures** (Hebrew **edanim** – your edens). **For with you is the fountain of life; in your light shall we see light**.”

This passage contains several ideas from the early chapters of Genesis. First of all we have the metaphorical use of light. God gives us his light: he shows us his qualities like his loving kindness and because of this we can “see” him. Then we have a river or fountain bringing about pleasures and life.

We should see the Garden of Eden in this way. It is God revealing his ways to mankind, with the promise that benefits will be poured on them.

At the end of Genesis chapter 1, we saw that the Adam or man described there could eat of “**every tree, whose fruit yields seed** (Genesis 1 v 29)”. The suggestion was made that plants yielding seed could be thought of as things which arise from God’s spirit that mankind could feed on, things like God’s word. Two of the trees mentioned in Genesis chapter 2 are the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. Their names provide further evidence that they represent things that come from the working of God’s spirit.

We can readily understand why scripture could give knowledge of good and evil, and we can also think of it as a tree of life as well. Verses like Psalm 19 v 7 and 2 Timothy 3 v 15 show that God’s word gives wisdom, and Proverbs 3 v 18 adds that wisdom is “**a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retains her**.” God’s word gives wisdom, and wisdom is described in scripture as being a tree of life.

There seems to be a consistent meaning to trees in both creation passages: they are things that originate from God’s spirit or purpose, and produce seed which can provide eternal life for those who eat it.

**Genesis 2 v 10 – 14**

**“Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four river heads. The name of he first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates (Hebrew Perath).”**

This passage adds to the context of Genesis chapters 2 and 3. We have already seen that the second creation record is set in a time of agriculture. It is thought that the area around the Tigris and the Euphrates, known as Sumer, was where large scale agriculture emerged about 5500 BC. We will see that the second creation record has a setting which is not too far away from there, to the North of Sumer.

Verses 10 – 14 add more information about the location of the garden of Eden, and some of it was clearly added after the original record was written. We know this because it mentions places like Assyria, a name which did not exist when the events of the second creation record took place. They were added to give a later audience some sense of the garden’s location.

A river went out of Eden to water the garden, and it then became four heads. Two of these rivers are easy to identify. The Perath is the Euphrates and the Hiddekel is the Tigris. These two rivers point to Eden being a place near Lake Van and Lake Urmia, somewhere in South Eastern Turkey, North of present day Iraq.

The rivers Pishon and Gihon are more difficult to track down. Reginald Walker (1917 – 1989) suggested in his paper, “The Land of Eden”, that the Gihon is the River Araxes (or modern day Aras), which was known as the Gaihun in the past. Genesis 2 v 13 says that it goes around all the land of Cush. If this was the ancient kingdom of Cush near Egypt, then that would make Eden a very large area. However, the name Cush can be linked to the land of Cossaea, which was located near Media and the Caspian Sea. Reginald Walker also suggested that the Pishon was another name for what today is the River Sefid - Rud. Genesis says that it goes around all the land of Havilah, and that there is gold there. The Sefid - Rud is also known as the Kezel Uzun or “long gold,” according to Reginald Walker.

When we read these factual details, we might think this shows that the second creation record needs to be understood literally, as it contains factual information. However, this is not necessarily the case. When Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan, he set it on the road that led from Jerusalem to Jericho. Just because he used a place that his audience knew, it doesn’t mean that the Samaritan, the thieves or the inn keeper were literal people.

Also when we think of other similar writings like ancient myths, for example Theseus and the Minotaur, they too have geographical settings like Crete and Athens, but contain elements that are not literal.

Focusing on the physical location of Eden is missing the point, because Genesis 2 was not written as a geography lesson, just as the parable of the Good Samaritan was not meant to be a description of the road conditions between Jerusalem and Jericho. What we have is the setting of a narrative which is teaching spiritual lessons.

**Genesis 2 v 15 – 17**

**Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”**

In these verses the story moves on, but much of it we have already considered. In Genesis 2 v 5 we noticed that the man’s role was to serve, and this occurs in verse 15 as well, although the Hebrew word **abad** is translated “tend” in the New King James version. The man can perhaps be regarded as something like a priest, who served in God’s sanctuary, just like other priests have done in the past. The identity of the trees comes from noting how plants are described in the first creation record: they are things that arise from the working of God’s spirit and reveal his message to mankind. The important thing in this passage is that God speaks to the man in the form of a commandment. This is the moment that God first communicated with his creation on an intellectual level. His creation could now identify him and relate to him. It is in this sense that the Adam in the second creation narrative was the first man.

When the man ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil he didn’t die, in the sense that his life ceased immediately, but he did die in another way. The notes on Genesis 3 v 19 will explore this further, but it is an indication that death in this creation record does not solely mean cessation of life.

**Genesis 2 v 18 – 25**

**And the Lord God said, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name. So Adam gave names to all cattle, to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper comparable to him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man he made into a woman, and he brought her to the man. And Adam said: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.” Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.**

This passage is surely a challenge to understanding Genesis 2 and 3 literally. We are presented with God forming a succession of birds and animals and bringing them to the man. Not surprisingly, none of them were found to be a suitable helper for the man. Even if we limit this procession of animals and birds to those used in agriculture, after all it is talking about the beast of the field (and not the beast of the earth – see Genesis chapter 1 v 25), we are confronted with a long and fruitless task. We also have the creator of the Universe relegated to someone who entertains the possibility that the man might choose a chicken for his lifelong companion.

In the first creation account, animals represented parts of mankind that would ultimately be ruled by Adam, who in turn can be identified as the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are redeemed by him. Could the animals in the second creation account have the same meaning? We’ve seen that trees and water seem to have the same metaphorical meaning in both records, so at first this seems to be a possibility. However, if we locate the second creation record in the time of the second and third days of Genesis chapter 1, before the animals of the fifth and sixth days are made, then perhaps we should understand the beasts and fowls at face value. They are part of the setting of the account, just like the location and the use of agricultural terms are used to provide a background to the main themes of the passage.

Before moving on, it might be useful to review the purpose of the second creation account. It is not a description of the making of mankind in general, but instead describes how God first interacted with man in an intellectual and spiritual way. The creation of the woman, and her relationship with the man needs to be understood in that context.

The spiritual relationship of the man and woman in the early chapters of Genesis has two facets, and these are alluded to in 1 Corinthians 11 v 11 – 12, “**Nevertheless, neither is man independent of the woman, or woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God**.”

We will see that one of these descriptions, “**woman came from man**,” describes the relationship between man and woman at a time when there is no sin, whereas the other, “**man also comes through woman**,” describes their relationship when there is sin in the world.

As with many other parts of the second creation record, the making of the woman should be seen as a metaphor that conveys spiritual truths, and not as a literal description of how the first female was produced. The woman’s creation shows the closeness of the bond between man and woman, and this pattern is reflected in the closeness between the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride. In Genesis, we have a description of the spiritual relationship between man and woman at a time when sin had not entered into the world. In the New Testament, it is used similarly to represent their relationship at a time when sin has been overcome through Christ’s sacrifice. This is described in Ephesians chapter 5, where Paul uses the language of Genesis 2 v 23 – 24, and the idea of woman coming from man, to show the relationship between Jesus and his church. He had spoken about the bond between husbands and wives in the earlier part of the chapter, before making a related point about Jesus and his followers in verse 30, “**For we are members of his (Christ’s) body, of his flesh and of his bones.**” Paul uses the ideas from Genesis 2 v 23 to re-iterate something that he had already spoken about in Ephesians 4 v 15, 6, where he described the Lord Jesus Christ as the head, and his church as the body. Jesus and his church are one person.

He then uses Genesis 2 v 24 to confirm that Christ and his bride are one. He says in Ephesians 5 verses 31 and 32, “**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh** (quoting Genesis chapter 2). **This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church**.” This is a description of the Adam of the first creation record, an Adam made of men and women with the Lord Jesus Christ as the head, having the closeness of the man and woman of the second creation record. (Paul’s merging of the descriptions of the Adams in the two creation records will be considered further shortly.)

The way in which the woman is made in the second creation record also links to the letter to the Ephesians. Genesis 2 v 22 says, “**Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man he built (Hebrew banah) into a woman, and he brought her to the man** (My translation) ”.

If the second creation record’s account of the forming of the woman prefigures the making of Christ’s bride, then we might expect to discover language to do with building when the New Testament describes how the church came about and develops. We find this in Ephesians chapter 4, with verse 16 saying this about the body of Christ, that it is “**joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the building (Greek oikodome) of itself in love** (My translation).”

Some words in John’s gospel also help us to understand the significance of the way in which the woman was created in the second creation record. Just like Adam, a deep sleep came upon Jesus when he died, and he too had something taken from his side. When his lifeless body hung on the cross, John 19 v 34 says, “**One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out**.” As far as John was concerned, this was of great importance, so in the next verse he adds, “**And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows he is telling the truth, so that you may believe**.”

When he wrote his first epistle, John comes back to the events he witnessed on that terrible day at Golgotha. He says, “**This is he who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood**.” (1 John 5 v 6)

If we follow the pattern in the second creation record, then the things from Jesus’ side, water and blood, should lead to the creation of his bride, the church.

We are helped in identifying the sort of water that came from Jesus by a conversation that he had with a Samaritan woman. John 4 v 14 records that he said to her, “**If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, “Give me a drink,” you would have asked him , and he would have given you living water.**”

If we identify the water that originates from Jesus’ side as living water, and add the blood that issued from him, then we are directed to Leviticus chapter 14, which speaks about various cleansing rituals in the Law of Moses. Verses 5 and 6 describe how lepers were to be cleansed, and says, “**And the priest shall command that one of the birds be killed in an earthen vessel over living (Hebrew chay) water. As for the living bird, he shall take it, the cedar wood and the scarlet and the hyssop, and dip them and the living bird in the blood of the bird that was killed over the living water** (my translation)**.”**

Later on in the chapter, it concentrates on the method for cleansing a house. Just like with lepers, the ritual involved the use of living water (verses 50, 51 and 52 – rendered “running water” in many translations), with verse 53 saying that after this the house would be clean.

These two instances from the law of Moses show that blood and living water together bring about cleansing. This idea is found in the New Testament as well. Consider these:

“**How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit, offered himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God** (Hebrews 9 v 14).”

“**But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanses us from all sin** (1 John 1 v 7).”

Ephesians 5 v26 says this about Christ’s work for his church, “**That he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.**”

We have good grounds for viewing the creation of the woman from Adam in the second creation record as a pattern for Christ’s creation of his bride. The water and blood that came from him brings his bride into existence, by cleansing and sanctifying those who believe in him.

**A problem?**

If our conclusions sofar are correct, then there is a potential problem. Returning to Paul’s teaching about the bride of Christ in Ephesians chapter 5 v 30 – 32, where he applies the words of Genesis chapter 2 to the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, we have ideas relating to the Adam of the second creation record used to describe the Adam of the first creation record. You might be thinking, if Paul merges the descriptions of the man and woman in the first and second creation accounts in the epistle to the Ephesians, and we will see shortly that Jesus does the same in the gospels, then doesn’t that make them descriptions of the same people?

This is a reasonable argument, but on the other hand we’ve seen that there are good grounds for thinking of the two Adams in the first and second creation records as being descriptions of different people.

Although it might be better to address this issue at the end of our consideration of Genesis chapter 3, once we’ve looked at the conseqences of man’s disobedient response to God’s command, it will be considered now as it is important and has arisen from our consideration of this section of Genesis.

**From the beginning**

Let’s think about the occasion when Jesus merged the teaching relating to man and woman in the first and second creation records, just like Paul did in the letter to the Ephesians. In Matthew chapter 19 and Mark chapter 10 it records the time when Jesus was approached by some Pharisees and asked when a man could divorce his wife. Jesus’ response uses both the first and the second creation accounts. He says, “**Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning** (Greek “**ap’ arches**“) **‘made them male and female’** (quoting the first creation record – Genesis 1 v 27), **and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ So then, they are no longer two but one flesh’** (quoting the second creation record – Genesis 2 v 24). **Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate** (v 4 – 6).”

Jesus is describing the state of things “from the beginning”, and uses both the first and second creation records to do it. It’s important to note that Jesus is not saying “at the beginning”, but “from the beginning”, that is to say he’s speaking about God’s intention from the start of his relationship with mankind. “From the beginning” can be contrasted with the state of things today, which arose

from man’s transgression in the second creation record, when mankind became part of death’s kingdom. This is definitely not “from the beginning”. God’s purpose from the beginning was that male and female should become one flesh, and this has its fulfilment in Jesus and his bride.

Even though the events at the start of the second creation record and at the end of the first creation record seem to relate to different times, they are both part of God’s purpose “from the beginning”, as they both describe what he intends mankind should be like when sin and death is not reigning over it. It applies equally to the man and his wife before sin entered the world, and to Jesus and his bride. It is only our present age, where mankind is part of the kingdom of sin and death, that’s not part of God’s original purpose or “from the beginning”.

It can also be said that, if we are in Christ, then we are part of God’s purpose “from the beginning”, and this is how Paul describes the disciples at Thessalonica. 2 Thessalonians 2 v 13 says, “**But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”**

We are living in the kingdom of sin and death, but when God first dealt with mankind, and in the future when Jesus redeems the righteous, things are different. This is what is called “from the beginning” and describes God’s plan for mankind. As such, the end of the first creation record and the start of the second one, even though they describe different Adams and different times, are still both “from the beginning”.

**Helper**

The reason why the events of Genesis 2 v 18 – 25 take place is so that the man can have a helper. The way that the woman was made was by God taking something from the man’s side (v 22), and making a woman (Hebrew **ishshah**). She is a living creature that isn’t made from the ground, and the name Ishshah reflects this, as she is described as being taken from man (Hebrew **ish**) in Genesis 2 v 23.

The idea of the woman being a helper has been understood far too often as her being subservient to the man, a bit like a domestic help might be, but the use of the term “help” in scripture argues against this.

God is described as being man’s help, for example:

“**I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth** (Psalm 121 v 1, 2).”

“**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble** ( Psalm 46 v 1).”

No one would suggest that God is subservient to man, because he helps him. In like manner, the woman is not inferior to the man because she is his helper.

What we have is man, a servant of the ground, being given a helper that comes both from him and God. The help the man receives is not to do with mundane things like growing food or managing a home, but ultimately with gaining access to the tree of life. The woman is similar to the Lord Jesus Christ, because he too was both from man and from God. We will see how the woman was to be a helper as the second creation account unfurls. Suffice it to say, it is not to do with shopping and cooking.

When woman was created initially, man did not need her help because there was no sin. However, once sin entered the world the man needed the woman’s assistance to be saved from death.

Before moving on, we notice that the man and the woman were naked (Hebrew **arom**). If we take out the vowel pointing (the dots that were added to the Hebrew a long time after the original text was written), we have the same Hebrew word that describes the serpent, and which is translated as “**cunning**” in Genesis 3 v 1 (Hebrew **arum**). What this is saying is that the serpent was the same as the man and the woman in some way. We will think about this more when we move into Genesis chapter 3.

**Genesis 3 v 1 – 7**

**Now the serpent was more cunning (or naked) than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, “Has God indeed said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, “You shall not eat of it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.” Then the serpent said unto the woman, “You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit, and ate. She also gave to her husband with her; and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves coverings.”**

This is where it all goes wrong for the man and the woman. They leave behind the state of harmony that they had with God “from the beginning”, and they “die”. Their problem arises because they are persuaded by a serpent to disobey God, a serpent which contradicts his commands. We have noted that the second creation account appears to resemble an ancient myth, and like the trees in the garden of Eden, we should view the serpent as a metaphor, just like we did with the animals in the first creation record. We are helped with the identity of the serpent by a verse in Revelation chapter 12, which speaks about a red dragon with seven heads and ten horns! It isn’t within the scope of this study to identify what this symbolises in detail, but verse 9 says that it was cast out (of heaven), and is described as “**that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan**.” This moves our understanding on, as we can equate the serpent with the Devil and Satan, but of course we now need to grasp what the Bible means by those two terms.

In order to identify what is meant by Satan, we’ll think about what the serpent did wrong. Its error was that it contradicted what God had said, and this sort of behaviour was shown again when the apostle Peter challenged the Lord Jesus Christ. Mark 8 v 31 records the time when Jesus told his disciples that he would be rejected by the leaders of his people, he would be killed and that he would be raised to life again. This was too much for Peter and verse 32 says that he began to rebuke his Lord.

Jesus’ response is telling. He said, “**Get you behind me Satan, for you do not mind the things that be of God, but the things that be of man** (Mark 8 v 33).” Here is Jesus’ definition of what Satan is, it is a man centred way of thinking as opposed to a God centred one.

The conversation between Jesus and Peter is similar to what happened at the start of Genesis chapter 3. Just like Peter, the serpent sought to challenge God’s authority. The consequence of the serpent’s words was that the man and the woman noticed how desirable the fruit was, and ate it. The obvious lesson from this passage is that contradicting God’s commands is not permitted. He expects us to accept his teaching without questioning.

The serpent is not only referred to as Satan in Revelation chapter 12, but also as the devil. The Greek word translated devil in Revelation chapter 12 is **diabolos**. Like Satan, it means an adversary or opponent, but is more specific, as it focuses on spoken opposition. **Diabolos** is used generally in the New Testament to describe people who slander others, but the expression “**ho diabolos**” or “the devil” is used specifically to describe attempts to challenge and contradict God’s teaching. An example of this diabolical behaviour is when Jesus was tempted by the devil in the wilderness. The difficulty Jesus faced were words and ideas which sought to undermine his understanding of God’s ways.

1 John 3 v 8 refers to the second creation record when it says, “**He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil**.” Here we have another use of the expression “from the beginning”, and we now know that the devil is a reference to the serpent in the second creation record, who sinned before the man and woman followed suit and brought about death’s kingdom for mankind. The rest of 1 John 3 v 8 identifies the seed of the woman (the Son of God), and how Jesus would destroy what the devil had brought into being.

Perhaps it is worth stating that the quote by John from the second creation record does not mean that it has to be literally true, in the same way that the sower or the good Samaritan don’t have to be literal characters if we were to refer to them in order to make a spiritual point.

In summary, the serpent can be equated with what the Bible terms the Devil and Satan, and these in turn describe man’s tendency to put his own desires above the recognition of God’s authority and obedience to his commands.

In the second creation record, Satan is represented by a serpent, but what would it have been that actually challenged the woman’s acceptance of God’s commandment? This study concludes elsewhere that other people were alive at the same time that this occurred, so the conversation with the serpent could be a figurative representation of discussions with other people.

However, there was more to the serpent’s behaviour than just contradicting God’s words. Paul wrote this to the Christians at Corinth, “**But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ** (2 Corinthians 11 v 3).” An example of this deceptive form of serpent-like thinking is shown in Luke 20 v 23, when Jesus’ audience tried to entrap him with his own words. They first tried to ingratiate themselves with him by falsely saying, “**Teacher, we know that you say and teach rightly, and you do not show personal favouritism, but teach the way of God in truth**.” They then continued with a trick question, “**Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar or not** (v 22)”. The following verse says that Jesus “**perceived their deceitfulness, and said to them, “Why do you test me?** (my translation)”.

In both the case of the serpent and the crowd surrounding Jesus, they tried to deceive by telling a persuasive lie, in order to bring about a response.

When the passage in 2 Corinthians 11 speaks about Eve being deceived, it is referring to Genesis 3 v 13, and is an idea that is also mentioned in 1 Timothy 2 v 14. This in turn leads to Paul making pronouncements about the role of women in churches. This area will not be discussed here, but will be thought about in an appendix at the end of the study.

I have heard the view expressed that passages like those in 2 Corinthians 11 and 1 Timothy 2 indicate that women are more likely to be deceived than men. A glance at other uses of the greek words **apatao** and **exapatao**, which are translated “to deceive” in the passages in 2 Corinthians and 1 Timothy 2, shows that there is no evidence for this. Men are as likely to be deceived into committing sin as women. This is demonstrated by one of the most powerful passages to do with deceit and sin, where the apostle Paul says this about his own struggles, “**For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed me (Romans 7 v 11)**.”

Based on the words from 2 Corinthians 11, and what Eve says later on in the second creation record (“**the serpent deceived me**”), we can expand the figurative meaning of the serpent to include deceptive persuasion aimed at causing disobedience of God’s commands, as well as mankind’s tendency to contradict and oppose him.

After the serpent spoke to the woman, she saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes and that the tree was desirable. In a sense she was like God in the first creation record, as they both found the creation good, but the difference was that she was looking at it now from very much her own perspective. Also, in scripture it can be good to find things pleasant and to desire them, as long as we see things from God’s viewpoint. Unfortunately in Eve’s case, her thoughts were driven by self interest.

Through eating the fruit, the man and woman understood good and evil. Knowing the difference between these is not a sin, in fact discerning good and evil is a sign of spiritual perfection or maturity (Hebrews 5 v 14). The sin in the second creation account seems to be in identifying the difference between good and evil by performing an evil act.

After the man and the woman ate the fruit from the tree, their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. Our eyes let in physical light, but we also have spiritual eyes that can let in the light of God’s word. These are referred to in passages like Luke 11 v 34 – 5, where Jesus says, **“The lamp of the body is the eye. Therefore, when your eye is good, your whole body also is full of light. But when your eye is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Therefore take heed that the light which is in you is not darkness.”** The opening of the eyes of the man and woman can be regarded as their realisation of the state that they were in, once that they understood the difference between light and darkness, and between good and evil.

We’ve already noticed that nakedness is something that the man and woman shared with the serpent, who is also called naked (although the same Hebrew word is translated cunning in its case). In the creation story, the man and woman’s nakedness is portrayed as physical, but it is likely that the nakedness they shared with the serpent was spiritual nakedness. When we are in Christ we are covered or clothed, as the Book of Revelation expresses it. In the message to the church at Sardis, it says, “**He who overcomes shall be clothed in white garments** (Revelation 3 v 5)”, and then shortly afterwards we get this exhortation to the church at Laodicea , “**I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed.**” We can add to this the words of Isaiah 61 v 10, “**I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; For he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness**.”

Unless we are covered by God’s righteousness and salvation, we are spiritually naked. Once Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, they became aware of their plight, that they were spiritually naked in the sight of God. This was a state that they shared with the serpent.

**Genesis 3 v 8 – 11**

**“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, “Where are you?” So he said, I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?”**

We now get another one of those scenes that would reflect badly on God, if Genesis chapter 3 were to be seen as literal. We need to ask ourselves whether an all seeing God would really lose a couple of people in a garden?

Are we to think that the creator of all things wouldn’t have precise knowledge of what Adam and Eve had done, or that he wouldn’t know exactly where they were? This sort of narrative is quite acceptable if we take it to be a piece of figurative writing, which explains spiritual truths through a story. But it challenges our understanding of God if we are meant to take it literally.

As we saw in the previous section, the nakedness is spiritual. It is a realisation of the huge gulf that exists between God and sinful man, and of our inability to justify ourselves in the sight of our maker.

**Genesis 3 v 12 – 15**

**“Then the man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.” And the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” So the Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”**

The man blamed the woman (and indirectly God), and the woman blamed the serpent. The serpent was cursed and had to eat dust, but in addition the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman were now to be in opposition. Remember, we should not be thinking of the serpent as a literal animal. We have identifed the serpent as a representation of opposition to God, or Satan as it is called in scripture.

With this in mind, the language about the serpent going on its belly and eating dust should not be thought of as describing physical changes made to snakes, but instead viewed as a figurative description of the characteristics of those who oppose God. The serpent’s association with dust should be seen in the context of how it is used elsewhere in the second creation account. We are told in Genesis 2 v 7 that the man was formed from the dust of the ground, and in Genesis 3 v 19 he was informed that he was dust, and that was where he would return. As the second creation account is teaching about the hierarchy between God and man, and about the relationship between heavens and earth, then being of the dust is very much at the bottom of the pile. The serpent is portrayed as eating dust and crawling on its belly to show that those who oppose God will not prosper, and will be subservient to God and his servants.

Psalm 72, Isaiah chapter 49 and Micah chapter 7 all describe godless people using the language of the serpent’s punishment.

We have already considered Psalm 72 as providing a description of God’s righteous king, and verse 9 says, “**Those who dwell in the wilderness will bow before him, and his enemies will lick the dust**.”

Isaiah 49 v 23 says these words about Zion when it is redeemed, “**Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers; They shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick up the dust of your feet.**”

Micah chapter 7 also speaks about the salvation of Israel. Verse 17 says, “**They** (the nations) **shall lick the dust like a serpent; They shall crawl from their holes like snakes of the earth. They shall be afraid of the Lord our God, and shall fear because of you.**”

Who is the seed of the serpent that would oppose the woman’s seed? It can be considered to be people who have the same attitude that the serpent showed in the second creation account. Genesis 3 v 15, which says that the seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent’s head, is referred to in the epistle to the Romans, where Paul says to the believers at Rome, “**And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly** (Romans 16 v 20)”. This is not talking about squashing snakes, but the righteous overcoming the godless attitudes in the world.

**Genesis 3 v 16**

**To the woman he said: “I will greatly multiply your sorrow (hebrew itstsabon) and your conception; in pain (Hebrew etseb) you shall bring forth children; Your desire (Hebrew teshuqah) shall be for your husband and he shall rule (Hebrew mashal) over you.”**

In this verse we have ideas that help to explain the words at the start of the second creation narrative, **“… in the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens** (Genesis 2 v 4 - my translation)”. We saw from Genesis chapter 1 that “earth and heavens” are to do with the hierarchy between God and man. It is about describing who are subjects and who are rulers. This idea is extended in Genesis 3 v 16 and we are told about the relationship between Adam and Eve in a world ruled by sin: the man was to be a ruler and his wife was to be subject to him.

When we think about the meaning of this passage, we need to remember that the second creation account primarily has a spiritual message, not a physical one, so we should try to understand the relationship between the man and the woman, as well as Eve’s sorrow and conception, in a spiritual sense.

When verse 16 says that Eve’s husband would rule over her, the Hebrew word translated “rule” is **mashal**. This is often used to describe the relationship between a king and his subjects, and is translated “to reign” and “to have dominion”, as well as “to rule”. In order to understand the significance of the man ruling or reigning over the woman, we will look at some passages in Romans chapter 5. We will see later on that Romans chapter 5 is an important chapter in explaining how the man in Genesis chapter 3 died, but on three occasions it also refers to the idea of reigning. However it is not man who is reigning there, but death and sin.

Romans 5 v 14 says, **“death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam”**. Then verse 17 says, **“For if by the one man’s offence death reigned”**, with v 21 adding, **“so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”**

Eve was to bring about God’s seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him she would give birth to those who will receive grace and righteousness. But until the Lord Jesus Christ overcame death through his cross, death would reign over her and her descendants.

Once the man and woman had disobeyed God, they became part of death’s kingdom, and death reigned over them. The relationship between the man and the woman would reflect this. The man represents death, as he had brought about the link between death and sin through his disobedience. Eve, in turn represents those who are waiting to be set free from death’s kingdom, by the revealing of God’s righteousness through the Lord jesus Christ.

Similarly, we can view the idea of Eve’s desire towards her husband as a description of our relationship to sin and death. How ever much we try, we are drawn towards sin. This is expressed powerfully by Paul in Romans 7 v 19 – 24. **“For the good that I will do do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practise. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man, but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?”**

We may have good intentions, but we are always drawn eventually to death’s kingdom by our sinful natures. Eve’s desire towards her husband describes our own natural desire to sin.

Eve would now bring forth children accompanied by sorrow and pain. However there was hope, and we can see this from these three passages which also speak about sorrow:

1. In Genesis 5 v 29 it says this about Noah, “**This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil** (or sorrow - Hebrew **itstsabon**) **of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed**.”
2. Psalm 147 v 3 says that the Lord “**heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds** (Hebrew **itstsebeth** – sorrows)”. (In scripture, being broken hearted is used as a description of those who abhor sin, either their own sin or the sin of others.)
3. At the start of Isaiah chapter 14 it speaks about a time when Israel will receive mercy. Verse 3 says, “**It shall come to pass in the day the Lord gives you rest from your sorrow** (Hebrew **otseb** – a related word to **itstsabon**), **and from your fear and the hard bondage in which you were made to serve**.”

Sorrow comes about as a result of separation from God, but it is banished by God’s mercy and salvation.

What about Eve’s conception? Who are Eve’s children? If we were to view the second creation account in a physical sense we might think of Cain, Abel and Seth. We might also think about the trials of women in child bearing. However, I suggest again that we need to think spiritually. We have already thought about the woman’s seed struggling against the seed of the serpent, and being reigned over by death, and we can identify this as the battle that the righteous fight against wickedness, in a world ruled over by sin. Eve’s spiritual seed would be brought forth accompanied by trials and this is spoken about in Romans chapter 8. Verses 22 and 23 say, “**For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body”**. Paul is saying that the woman’s seed, the body of Christ, will only come forth with birthpangs. Both the life and sacrifice of Jesus, and the life of discipleship that Christians lead, is to be one of suffering and hardship as they are shaped and moulded for salvation.

We have seen that passages from Romans chapters 5, 7 and 8 are related to Genesis 3 v 16. We will shortly find that Romans chapter 3 has links to the description of Adam’s existence in Genesis 3 v 19, also that Romans chapter 5 provides the means for understanding how the man dies in the second creation record. This leads to the possibility that Romans chapters 3 – 8 is a commentary on Genesis chapters 2 and 3.

**Genesis 3 v 17 – 19**

**Then to Adam he said, “Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, “You shall not eat of it”: Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil (Hebrew itstsabon) you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.”**

Adam could no longer eat the trees in the Garden of Eden and had to eat the herb of the field instead. Both the trees and the herb of the field were created by God, but the herb of the field that he was now to eat was to be associated with hardship.

The change from eating fruit from the trees of the garden, to eating bread from the herb of the field, is a symbolic way of indicating that life had become difficult. The man’s existence was now to be like making bread: laborious, monotonous and repetitious. All the stages of bread making are mentioned in the Bible and indicate the daily effort required just to keep alive. They consist of:

* Ploughing (Amos 9 v 13)
* Sowing (Psalm 126 v 5)
* Gathering tares (Matthew 13 v 29)
* Reaping (Ruth 2 v 9)
* Threshing (1 Chronicles 21 v 20)
* Winnowing (Ruth 3 v 2)
* Gathering the grain (Genesis 41 v 48)
* Grinding (Lamentations 5 v 13)
* Kneading (Genesis 18 v 6)
* Baking (Genesis 19 v 3)

Just like Eve, Adam’s life was now to have sorrow (or toil as it is translated in the New King James Version), but his sorrow was to come from eating the herb of the field. As part of the curse that came upon man, the ground was to produce thorns and thistles. The only other place in the Old Testament where these are mentioned together is Hosea 10 v 8. The context of this passage is the northern kingdom of Israel being taken into captivity by the Assyrians. In that time of judgement it says, “**The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars (where they commited idolatry); and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us**.” The background to this passage has similarities to Genesis chapter 3, because Israel had followed their own desires and ignored God’s commands, just like Adam and Eve did.

The mention of the herb of the field in verse 18 takes us back to its first occurrence in Genesis 2 v 5. If we remember, verses 4-5 said, “**This is the history of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens, before any plant of the field was in the earth and before any herb of the field had grown** (my translation).” When the garden was first planted, man’s food was to be from trees, and there was no mention of him eating the herb of the field. But now, as a consequence of sin, his food would be from the herb of the field and his job was to till or serve the ground. This is different to his first uncursed job, which was to serve the Garden of Eden.

The consequence of sin was that man would no longer be allowed to eat fruit from the trees of the garden. In the first creation record, The Adam could eat “**every herb that yields seed”** and **“every tree whose fruit yields seed** (Genesis 1 v 29)”. The other living things were able to have “**every green herb for food**.” (Genesis 1 v 30). Sin had moved the Adam of Genesis chapter 3 from a category that was similar to the first Adam to the status of the beast of the earth, the bird of the air and things that creep on the earth, as Genesis 1 v 30 describes them. What Adam could now eat did not produce seed, which we saw earlier provides the means of mankind’s salvation.

If we follow the theme of bread in the rest of scripture, we arrive at Eve’s offspring, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a different kind of bread – the bread of life - who came from Bethlehem (literally the house of bread or the bakery). The way to the tree of life was still there for mankind, through eating the bread that God provides, but it would involve a difficult path of reconciliation between God and man, the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, and us taking up our crosses and following our Lord. The tree of life was no longer something that Adam could access using his own efforts. Instead it could only be accessed through Eve and her seed.

The alternative to the bread of life, which God provides, is the bread that Adam was to make. This man-made bread can be considered to represent his efforts to achieve eternal life on his own, and can be equated to things like keeping the law of Moses. This approach would involve lots of repetitive toil but ultimately achieve nothing. The idea of human effort being profitless is a major theme in Paul’s epistles, for example he says this in Romans 3 v 20, “**Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin**.” He also adds in Galatians 2 v 16, “**A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ … for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**.”

**Adam dies**

In Genesis 2 v 17 it said that if Adam ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. Clearly he did not die on the day when he ate from the tree, in the sense that his life ceased, so in what way did he die?

Romans chapter 5 explains how Adam’s disobedience in Genesis chapter 3 affected the human race.

Verse 12 says, “**Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin: and thus death spread to all men, because** (greek **eph oi) all sinned**.”

*(Eph oi, which is translated “because” in this verse, is used in a similar way in these two verses:*

***“For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because (greek eph’ oi) we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life”*** *(2 Corinthians 5 v 4).*

***“But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at last your care for me has flourished again; for (greek eph’ oi) you surely did care, but you lacked opportunity (my translation)”*** *(Philippians 4 v 10). )*

Our understanding of Romans 5 v 12 is heavily dependant on whether or not Adam was the first man who ever existed. If he was the first man, then we can see how Adam’s sin might physically affect all humanity in some way. But what if he wasn’t the first man, what if there were other people alive when God spoke to Adam, what if men had lived and died before him, and what if all mankind weren’t descended from him?

I think it’s time to digress for a moment and consider whether the man in the second creation record was the first man to exist. We’ll then come back to the nature of death.

**Adam – the first man**

Paul describes the man in the second creation record as the first man Adam. Was he the first man to exist, or was he the first man in some other sense?

As has been mentioned before, Adam certainly seems to be a historical figure, even though he is a character in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, which appears to be a piece of figurative writing. In this sense, there is a parallel with the parable that Jesus told in Luke 16 v 19 – 31. It is about a poor man called Lazarus, a rich man dressed in purple who had five brothers, and Abraham. It is likely that the rich man in the parable was Caiaphas the high priest, who had five brothers, and that Lazarus was a reference to Jesus’ friend. Real people can appear in sections of the Bible which aren’t literally true, like parables.

Genesis chapter 4 indicates that the Adam of the second creation record may not have been the first man to exist, and that other people were living at the time when he was alive. When Cain murdered Abel, he was driven out and became a fugitive and a vagabond in the Earth. He was afraid that he would be killed by those who met him, also he acquired a wife (v 14). These two statements indicate that Adam and his family were not the only humans alive at the time. The argument is sometimes put forward that Cain took one of his sisters as a wife and that he was afraid of family members pursuing him. Although this is possible, it seems unlikely.

A passage which is sometimes used to argue that Adam was the first man to exist is Acts 17 v 22 – 31, which is where Paul addresses the Athenians on Mars Hill. In his speech he says, “(God) **has made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth**.” In many manuscripts “blood” does not occur, but it still says that “**God has made of one all nations of men**”, and this seems to be speaking about a single person as the originator of the nations. Is this saying that all men came from the Adam of Genesis chapter 3? Let’s look a bit deeper. Paul was speaking to Greeks who were descendants of Javan. In turn, his father was Japheth, so that makes Javan Noah’s grandson.

Genesis 10 v 5 says that Javan and his brothers divided the isles of the Gentiles, which is another way of speaking about the lands on the other side of the Mediterranean from the land of promise. The “one blood” or “one” that both Paul and the Greeks were descended from was Noah. Paul says that from this “one” came all nations of men. This seems to echo the words of Genesis 10 v 32, “**These are the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood**.” The nations (including jews and Greeks) are descended from one man, and this is Noah.

In Genesis chapter 11 we have a description of events at the tower of Babel, which resulted in the Lord scattering the people of Babel or Babylon “**upon the face of all the earth**” (Genesis 11 v 9). When we read about expressions like “the face of all the earth” or “all the face of the earth”, we might be tempted to assume that this is speaking about the whole world, but this is unlikely. In his speech to the Athenians, Paul says that God made the world (greek **kosmos**) (Acts 17 v 24), but also uses the expression “the face of the earth”, and we might have expected him to refer to the world again here if he was conveying the idea of nations spreading around the globe. If we look at where the descendants of Noah settled, we see it included Europe, the Balkans, Russia, the Middle East and Northern Africa. The spread of Noah’s descendants does not preclude the possibility of other people living around the globe who were not descended from Noah and who weren’t affected by the flood. Although it is not part of the scope of this study, the flood described in Genesis chapter 6 does not have to be global in my opinion, so some (or even many) groups of people would have been unaffected by the biblical deluge.

In addition, we will consider a passage in Genesis chapter 6 later on, which also indicates that there were other people who were not descended from the Adam of the second creation record.

**Back to death**

So in what way could Adam be the first man, if he was not the first man to exist? The most obvious way is that he was the first man that God showed his purpose to. He was also the first man with the capability to sin deliberately, and to have that sin counted or imputed to him. The consequences of Adam’s sin are described in Romans 5 v 12 – 13, “**As through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all have sinned – (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law)**.”

These verses build on Paul’s previous argument in Romans chapter 3. In verses 8 – 22 of that chapter he shows that both jews and gentiles were incapable of justifying themselves before God. No one can claim to be sinless. This leads to the statement in verse 23, “**For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.**” So what Paul is saying in Romans chapter 5 is that because everyone sins, death reigns over all of mankind. It was Adam who was responsible for forming the link between sin and death, and for bringing the death state on mankind.

Adam’s sin brought about a change in the relationship between God and mankind, and his decisions affected the rest of humanity. This view is supported by Romans 5 v 18, which says, “**Therefore as through one man’s offence judgement came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one man’s righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life**.”

As members of the human race we can be represented by one of two Adams, either the first Adam or the last Adam. The first Adam sinned and his disobedience was counted or imputed to him, with the consequence that it brought about judgement, condemnation and death for all men. This is because it established the principle that “**the wages of sin is death** (Romans 6 v 23)”. The reason for death in the human race was now linked to sin.

Let’s explore the nature of the death that the first Adam brought about.

Sin came into existence when God gave Adam a command and he transgressed. Romans 5 v 14 shows that death is a ruler and that mankind became part of its kingdom when Adam sinned. It says, “**Death reigned from Adam to Moses**,” and verse 17 continues, “**For if by one man’s offence death reigned.**”

When Adam was commanded not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he was told, “**You shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die** (Genesis 2 v 17).” He did eat the fruit but he didn’t die in the sense that his life ceased immediately. He did die though, because he was now under a death sentence, he was now part of death’s kingdom and subject to the principle that sin brings death. As such, he was separated from God. He was told, “**In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, until you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and to dust you shall return** (Genesis 3 v 19).”

Because he was part of death’s kingdom, Adam was dead, even though he was still alive. Other people in scripture are similarly described as being dead while still being physically alive, just like Adam was, because they too are part of death’s kingdom. The Christians at Ephesus, for example, are described by Paul in this way, “**And you has he (Jesus) made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins** (Ephesians 2 v 1)**.**”

Jesus similarly describes his audience as being dead in the same sense. He says, “**Truly, truly, I say unto you. The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God, and they that hear shall live** (John 5 v 25)**.**”

He also uses the dead in this sense in Matthew 10 v 22. The verse contains Jesus’ response to a disciple who said that he wanted to bury his father. His reply was, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead”.

(*We’ve considered people who are physically alive but who are spiritually dead. We can add to this people who are physically dead but who are spiritually alive. Jesus was involved in a discussion with the Sadducees about the resurrection of the dead. To demonstrate his point, Jesus quoted the words that God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. “****Have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’*** *(Matthew 22 v 31 – 32)?” He then adds, “****God is not the God of the dead, but of the living****.” Even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were physically dead, as far as the God of Israel was concerned, they were alive, as they will be part of the resurrection of the righteous*.)

If we are part of death’s kingdom, then we are dead. Adam was the first person to sin in the sense that he knew what God’s will was, and decided to ignore it or disobey it. At this point he entered a death state, which involves being separated from God through sin. If we know what God’s commands are, and we disobey them, then we are children of Adam. We “**have sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression**,” as Romans 5 v 14 puts it.

But there’s another group of people which Paul describes as those who “**did not sin after the similitude of Adam’s transgression**.” Romans 5 v 14 says that death reigns over these people as well. Who are these?

Those who have an understanding of God have some responsibility for the way that they live their lives, but those who have no understanding are in a different category. Without knowledge of God, man is like the animals and will perish. We see this from the following:

“**Man that is in honour and understands not, is like the beasts that perish**. (Psalm 49 v 20).”

We could add to this quotation Romans 2 v 12, which says, “**For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law**.”

In the time since Adam’s sin, if a man has no knowledge of God he is still dead in trespasses and sins, even though he has no understanding of what God’s commands are. This is because the first Adam brought about death’s kingdom upon all mankind and created the death state by forming a link between sin and death. Even if people do not sin like Adam because they don’t know about God’s commands, they still sin, albeit in ignorance. They too are ruled over by death, because sin leads to death.

This leads on to the question of whether the lives of other living creatures changed when Adam sinned. Adam was capable of responding to God’s commands, as are most other human beings, whereas other living things are not. Adam’s relationship to God changed when he sinned, but there is no reason to suppose that the relationship between God and the rest of creation did.

The whole of nature is born, lives and then perishes, and man without knowledge of God is no different. Remember, the place of animals in God’s creation is not really described in the early chapters of Genesis, as the animals in Genesis chapter 1 are primarily used in a metaphorical sense.

This view of nature has consequences for how we understand a passage in Romans chapter 8. Verses 22 and 23 were quoted when we considered how Eve’s sorrow and conception would be multiplied (Genesis 3 v 16). Preceding them, we have these words, **“For I consider that the suffering of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope (v 18 – 21).”** When was the creation subjected to futility? Was it as a result of Adam’s sin? It is difficult to imagine the current range of living creatures, with their complex food chains and mix of predators and prey, producers and consumers, being able to exist if there was no death prior to Adam’s sin. Even with a strict literal approach to the creation records and assuming a relatively short time between the creation of living creatures and Adam’s sin, it is hard to see how the variety of carnivores, omnivores and herbivores could exist in a world without death.

The conclusion from this study is that Adam’s punishment, bringing a link between sin and death, came upon mankind, but that the rest of creation was not affected. This would mean that the “futility” (or vanity in the King James Version) that Paul speaks about in the epistle to the Romans was in God’s creation prior to Adam’s sin.

We get support for this view from the Book of Ecclesiastes, which seems to have the clearest description of vanity in scripture. Ecclesiastes 1 v 4 – 9 describes vanity in this way, **“One generation passes away and another generation comes. But the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes towards the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again.”**

The principle of vanity does not relate just to generation following generation, but also to the rotation of the Earth, the water cycle and weather patterns. Vanity describes the repetitious nature of things, which seems to produce little or no change. Adam’s sin did not affect the way that the Earth moves or the rain falls. That is simply the nature of things, and part of that vanity or futility is the replacement of one generation by another.

Romans chapter 8 is comparing the repetitive order of things in our universe with the enduring nature of the new creation in Jesus Christ. Adam’s sin was not responsible for changing the way that God’s creation worked, but it did link man’s mortality to sin.

Before Adam and Eve sinned, there were no commandments that could be disobeyed, so there was no sin. It was only when Adam and Eve disobeyed God that sin came into existence. This is explained in Romans 5 v 12, “**As through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin”.** Any humans who were alive before the events in the second creation record were just like the rest of nature, they were not subject to God’s commands, they lived and they perished.

So let’s summarise this section. Adam does not have to be the first man ever to exist, in fact it is very likely that there were other people alive at the time of Adam. He was the first man in the sense that he was the first to receive God’s commandments. Because he disobeyed, he brought about the death state upon mankind. Death was now linked to sin.

Prior to God giving his commands to Adam, animals or humans lived and perished. It was just the natural order of things. Animals, or any other living thing for that matter, were not subject to God’s laws or the consequences of obeying or disobeying them. However, after Adam’s transgression, all mankind became subject to the principle that sin leads to death, even for individuals who had no knowledge of the God of the Bible. All mankind were now in Adam, and they faced the same consequence for sin that he did. People who do not have an understanding of God and his purpose are still like the rest of living things, they live and they perish. But as they are also in Adam, they are now in the death state, which animals are not. This means that they are subject to the principle that sin brings separation from God. When they sin, even if it is in ignorance, death reigns over them.

In a sense, the linking of death and sin can be regarded as a good thing, because if sin can be overcome, then so can death. It is the Lord Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman “**who takes away the sin of the world** (John 1 v 29)”, and who “**put** **away** **sin by the sacrifice of himself** (Hebrews 9 v 26)”. The message of the second creation record is that death can be overcome. The purpose of the rest of the Bible is to explain how this will come about.

A consequence of sin was that man and woman would no longer live in the sheltered surroundings of the garden, a place of delight, and instead their lives would be full of labour. However, the next part of the creation account shows that there was still a way back to the tree of life.

**Disease**

The conclusions about sin and death have consequences for how we view disease. If animals and humans lived and died before the events in the second creation record, then disease would have existed prior to Adam receiving the first command from God. But is there a relationship between sin and disease? Disease, like cessation of life, could perhaps be viewed as becoming part of death’s kingdom when Adam sinned, and that Christ’s sacrifice can be seen as overcoming it as well as death. It could then be understood as an ongoing reminder for each of us that we are in the death state.

One passage is often quoted to show that disease and sin are linked.

**Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him (Jesus). And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus. When He saw their faith, He said to him, “Man, your sins are forgiven you.” And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, “Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?” But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, “Why are you reasoning in your hearts?  Which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven you,’ or to say, ‘Rise up and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins”—He said to the man who was paralyzed, “I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house** (Luke 5 v 18 – 24)**.”**

This clearly shows that there is a link between disease and forgiveness of sin, however the passage can be understood in at least two ways. It could mean that disease is a direct consequence of Adam’s sin, and that when Jesus healed the sick he was showing he could forgive sins. However, it is also possible that this man’s disease was a consequence of a sinful life (for example sexually transmitted diseases can be the result of fornication), so that in this specific instance, when Jesus healed the man he was showing forgiveness for the lifestyle that had resulted in his disability.

A similar instance of Jesus healing the sick is recorded at the start of John chapter 9.

**“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth.  And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered,  “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him** (John 9 v 1 – 3)**.”**

Jesus could have linked the healing of the blind man to forgiveness of sins, but yet he emphasises that the man’s affliction was not associated with either the sins of his parents or his own sins. The act of healing was to show God’s works. In this case, it would have been inappropriate for him to tell the man that his sins were forgiven him.

A key message of Jesus’ teaching is that he came primarily to heal those with spiritual diseases. Healing physical disease brings temporary relief, but healing spiritual ailments brings eternal benefits. Although Jesus healed the physically blind, his main role was to give sight to the spiritually blind (Luke 4 v 18).

So, although some events in Jesus’ ministry might suggest a link between sin and disease, they can be interpreted in more than one way.

There is a comment by Peter about Jesus’ ministry, however, that suggests there is a link between sin and disease. In Acts 10 v 38, while at the house of Cornelius at Capernaum, Peter says that Jesus “**went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil**”.

We have seen that the devil represents spoken opposition to God, and that in the second creation record this sets a chain of events in motion. The devil, (represented by the serpent’s words) reacted with God’s commandment to bring about Adam’s sin. That sin brought mankind into death’s kingdom, as death was now a consequence of sin. Disease and suffering also became part of the “death state” or death’s kingdom that mankind was subjected to. They became everyday reminders for us that we are in a sinful, condemned condition. It is appropriate to refer to the effects of disease as “being oppressed by the devil”, as the two became linked in the second creation record. The devil was a cause of the death state and disease became one of its manifestations.

There is also evidence for a link between sin and disease from the description of the Kingdom of God in Isaiah chapter 35, as it is presented as a time when illness and disease will be removed. So verses 5 and 6 say, **“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.”** An era of salvation and righteousness is portrayed as a time of healing.

In summary, disease and aging can be seen as being associated with the cessation of life, as one leads to the other. They both can be regarded as part of the death state that came upon mankind when Adam sinned. Although death, aging and disease occurred in nature before Adam’s transgression, they took on a spiritual significance once he sinned. They became part of death’s kingdom, and, as far as mankind was concerned, they could be regarded as a consequence of sin, and not just a natural process that regulated life. Just like death, disease and aging became something that could be overcome through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Genesis 3 v 20**

**“And Adam called his wife’s name Eve (Hebrew Chawwah), becasuse she was the mother of all living (Hebrew chay).”**

The name Eve is derived from the Hebrew word “to live” (Hebrew **chayah**) and leads us to ask in what way she was the mother of all living, or perhaps the mother of every life?

It would be easy to start guessing, but does the context give us any help? Yes it does. The Hebrew word translated “living” (when it says that Eve was “the mother of all living”) is the same as is used when talking about the tree of life (literally it could be translated as “**the tree of the lives**”).

When Eve is described as “**the mother of all living**”, it could be that Adam was referring to his wife as the mother of the human race, but the context of his words leads to another, more fitting, possibility. The second creation account in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 is written in the style of an ancient myth, and teaches spiritual things like the consequences of sin and the hierarchy that exists between “heaven” and “earth”. It also indicates that there was a way for mankind to get back to the “tree of life”. This was referred to in Genesis 3 v 15, where the serpent was told that the seed of the woman would bruise his head. Similarly, when Eve is called the mother of all living or the mother of all life, we can see this as a prophecy describing what Eve’s seed or offspring would do: Jesus would bring life for all who believe in him.

This leads us back to the difference between the two Adams, which was described in 1 Corinthians 15. “**The first man Adam was made a living soul, the last Adam was made a life giving spirit** (v 45).” Eve is the mother of all living or all life, not because she was the second human being and bore Adam’s children, but because her offspring or seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, would bring eternal life through his sacrifice.

**Genesis 3 v 21**

**Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them.**

We have gone from the man and his wife being naked in Genesis 2 v 25, to them sewing fig leaves together in order to make clothing (Genesis 3 v 7), to the Lord God making them coats of skins (Genesis 3 v 21). The man and the woman needed to be clothed because they had sinned, but the clothing needed to be provided by God.

We cannot clothe ourselves before God, we can only be clothed with God’s righteousness, as it says in Isaiah 61 v 10, “**I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels**.“

The coats that the man and woman were given, were made of animal skins. This bears similarities to what we read in Genesis chapter 4, where Abel’s animal sacrifice was acceptable, whereas Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground wasn’t. This is another hint that a life would need to be sacrificed to cover sins, and we now know that the sacrifice was made by the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Genesis 3 v 22 – 24**

**Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever,” - therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.”**

The second creation account ends with mankind excluded from the garden of Eden, and with it, the tree of life. There is now only one way to achieve access to life, and that is through the seed of the woman. It is now the turn of the rest of the Bible to explain how that seed was promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David, and how he emerged from Bethlehem to bring eternal life to those who believe in God’s grace.

The role of guarding (literally “keeping”) the way to the tree of life, or protecting it, was performed by cherubim and a flaming sword. This isn’t really the place to explain in detail about the significance of cherubim in the Bible. However, if we look at Ezekiel chapter 1, which also speaks about cherubim, we discover that they do what the Spirit of God wants them to (Ezekiel 1 v 20).

The derivation of the Hebrew word Cherub is uncertain, but one possibility is that it is related to the Hebrew word **rachab**, which means “to ride”. (In the Hebrew, **rachab** and **cherub** include the same letters, r, ch and b, just in a different order). So in 2 Samuel 22 v 11 it says, “**(God) rode** (Hebrew **rachab**) **upon a cherub and flew**.” We can think of the cherubim as God’s Spirit in action, carrying out his purpose.

The flaming sword gives the idea of God’s judgements coming upon those who approach the tree of life in the wrong way. The sword could represent the work of God’s angels, who are described in Psalm 104 v 4 as “**a flame of fire**.”

Although the cherubim and flaming fire create an imposing image, the reality is that through Christ there is access to the tree of life, as Revelation 22 v 14 shows when it says, “**Blessed are those who do his commandments** (or wash their robes, as it says in some manuscripts) , **that they may have the right to the tree of life**.” The cherubim and flaming sword are protecting the way of the tree of life, so that in time they can provide access to those who are redeemed through Jesus Christ.

In these verses we also have a fulfilment of Genesis 2 v 5, as there is now someone to till or serve the ground. The man’s original role was to serve the Garden of Eden and to keep it (Genesis 2 v 15), now he was to serve the ground in an ultimately profitless way.

**The question of Adam and Eve**

We can now return to some ideas that were considered at the introduction to the second creation account. It was suggested that the people in it could be viewed in one of two ways:

1. Adam and Eve were the first people to sin.
2. The account explains the link between sin and death. Adam and Eve are used in the story to represent the human race, but were not necessarily the first to sin.

Now that we have worked through the account, there are aspects of it which indicate that the first of these suggestions is correct. The way that Eve is portrayed gives the strongest evidence for this point of view. The woman is described as the means of salvation for the man, as the following shows:

1. She is his helper in that she is his means of salvation;
2. She will bear a seed who will overcome the serpent;
3. She is named “Eve,” the mother of all living.

In my view, the second and third of these points indicate that we are dealing with a specific person who is directly involved in the first act of deliberate disobedience to God’s will. Eve provides a direct link between the first and the last Adams and demonstrates that, even when man first sinned against God, there was a means of redemption provided.

**What sort of writing is the second creation account?**

Now that we’ve worked our way through the second creation account, we can identify these features in it:

1. It includes some literal elements, such as the geographical location of the Garden of Eden.
2. The man and the woman are historical characters who were involved in the first act of disobedience to God’s will.
3. It uses some metaphors that were seen in the first creation account, for example, the earth, the heavens and trees.
4. It has other links to the first creation account, for example it also speaks about a man, but this time one who serves, as opposed to someone who has dominion.
5. It describes the relationship between God, man and woman in a world where sin does and does not exist.
6. It uses other biblical metaphors in the narrative, for example nakedness, clothing and bread.
7. It uses events and characters, for example taking fruit from a tree and the serpent, to represent emotions and desires.
8. It is not a parable, in the sense that it is a story with a spiritual lesson, rather it is a narrative that uses figurative language to convey truth. As such, it is more in the style of an ancient myth.

Although the second creation account is written in a mythical style, it is still true, as long as it is understood in the sense in which it was written. It’s just that it isn’t literally true.

**The names of God**

Now we’ve considered both creation accounts, it would be worth touching on a difference between the name and titles of God used in them. In the first creation account, it refers to God as the creator, and this is a translation of the Hebrew word Elohim.

In the second creation account, the creator is referred to as the Lord God, or Yahweh Elohim in Hebrew.

We have already thought about the meaning of the Hebrew word Elohim, and seen that it is a general term describing the God of Israel. On occasions, it can be used to describe angels and men, as long as they speak and do God’s will.

The name Yahweh was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3 v 15), and is associated with the preceding verse, where God says that his name was “**I am who I am**”, or “**I will be who I will be**”. Yahweh is likely to mean “he who will be” and is linked with God’s future purpose for mankind, hence its use in the name Jesus, which means “Yahweh saves.“ Because the name Yahweh was revealed to Moses, it’s reasonable to think that the second creation record was written in its present form after the Exodus, even if it was based on an older text. (We’ve already noted that the reference to the name Assyria in the second creation record indicates the same thing.)

We have seen that the two creation records are complementary, however they are different genres and it is quite possible that they were written at different times and in different places. In this respect, they are no different to the rest of the Bible. It too contains many varied writings from a range of places and times, but all are complementary to each other and reveal the truth about one God and one creator. So are the different titles of God in the two records just a product of them being written at different times?

There are two reasons why the use of the name Yahweh Elohim in the second creation account may be significant. First, the name Yahweh is associated with God’s purpose and mankind’s salvation, and this is a major theme in the creation record in Genesis 2 and 3. We have already mentioned that Jesus means “Yahweh saves”, and that he is the woman’s seed who will deliver mankind from death’s kingdom by re-opening the way to the tree of life. The use of the name Yahweh Elohim shows that the focus of the second creation record is God’s plan to save mankind from death’s kingdom.

The first creation record is different in that it doesn’t really allude to the nature of sin and mankind’s need for redemption. Instead if concentrates on the greatness of the last Adam, comprising the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are redeemed through him.

The second reason why the use of Yahweh Elohim and Elohim is significant is because the only place in the second creation record where it does not use the name Yahweh Elohim (or Lord God) is when the serpent is speaking. In Genesis 3 v 1 – 5 the serpent uses language like, “**God has said**” and “**God knows that …**”. The serpent is portrayed as having no understanding of God’s purpose, but simply being able to repeat what he had heard. He is able to acknowledge God in general terms, but has no perception of what God’s purpose with mankind might be.

**Chapter 4**

**Genesis Chapters 4 and 6**

We’ve worked our way through Genesis chapters 1, 2 and 3 and come to conclusions about the genres of the two creation accounts. So why continue into Genesis chapter 4?

It is important to carry on into the next chapter because it will help to confirm some of the conclusions that we’ve already reached. It won’t be necessary to go into as much detail as the earlier chapters, but it does contain a number of ideas that we’ve already come across.

First, what sort of writing is Genesis chapter 4? As we read through it, we notice that the figurative imagery has gone. There are no trees with special powers or talking serpents, and instead we have what appears to be a historical recount. We do have conversations between the Lord and Cain, but there seems to be nothing that you wouldn’t expect from a historical recount of biblical events.

Genesis 4 v 1 continues to use the description of the man and the woman we were given in chapters 2 and 3. Adam in verse 1 could be translated as “the Adam” or the man, and the woman is called Eve, using her name from Genesis 3 v 20. So we seem to have the same two people appearing in two different types of texts. First they appear in a figurative piece of writing in chapters 2 and 3, and then in a historical narrative in chapter 4. Although this might seem a bit confusing, it isn’t unknown in scripture. We’ve already mentioned the parable in Luke 16 v 19 - 31 where Lazarus dies and goes to Abraham’s bosom, whereas the rich man, who is clothed in purple, goes to hell. The parable mentions a number of historical figures: Lazarus, Abraham and the rich man (who is likely to be Caiaphas the high priest), and these individuals appear in factual recounts as well. As has been stated before, just because a piece of writing refers to historical places and people does not mean it has to be taken literally. That decision needs to be made based on the characteristics of the passage.

The important thing is that the events of Genesis chapter 4 are linked to the previous two chapters, where the man and his wife disobeyed God. Unsurprisingly, the two children born to the man and the woman in chapter 4 do not prosper. One is murdered and the other is exiled because of his crime. The curse is starting to manifest itself in the lives of the man and his children.

Cain’s punishment is similar to the one passed on his father. Verse 11 says, “**You are** c**ursed from the ground**” (compare Genesis 3 v 17 **– my translation**), with verse 12 adding, “**When you serve the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive** **and a vagabond** **you shall be on the earth (my translation)**.”

Verse 17 says that “**Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bare Enoch**.” This verse is a problem if we insist that the Adam of Genesis chapter 2 was the first man to exist. It could be argued that Cain married one of his sisters, but this is conjecture. We have already seen that this does not have to be the solution to the potential problem in this verse. If we understand Genesis chapters 2 and 3 to be a passage which deals with the first time that God revealed his purpose to mankind, then there is no reason why there shouldn’t be other people living at the time of Cain, people who had no knowledge of the true God.

At the end of chapter 4 (verse 25) we have another child born to Adam and his wife, but this time Adam in our Bibles is not a translation of the Hebrew “**Ha Adam**” or “the man”, but just Adam. Then at the start of Genesis chapter 5, when it speaks about Adam, it is also a translation of the Hebrew **Adam** and not **Ha Adam**. Additionally, Genesis 5 v 1 includes an allusion to Genesis 1 v 26, when it says that God “**made him in the likeness of God**.” In both Genesis chapter 1 and the start of chapter 5, Adam is used as a name and not as a reference to mankind. When Genesis 5 v 1 says, “**this is the book of the genealogy of Adam**”, it does not include Cain and his descendants, but it identifies the

continuation of the lineage (starting from the Adam of chapter 2 and Seth) that would lead to the ultimate Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Genesis chapter 6 – the sons of God**

The possibility that Adam and Eve weren’t the first man and woman to exist also explains the words at the start of Genesis chapter 6, “**The sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose**. (v 2).” I’m sure we’ve all heard this verse used to justify all sorts of theories about angels becoming embroiled with women that they desired, ideas which cannot be supported by what we know about the nature of angels. Instead, it provides more evidence that descendants of Adam (the sons of God) started intermarrying with other people around them. It is similar to the days of Israel in the wilderness, when the men of Israel started intermarrying by taking wives from the Moabites.

It seems that the sons of God, these descendants of Adam, were the ones called

Nephilim (giants in the New King James Version) in Genesis 6 v 4. The word Nephilim appears to have taken on an identity in literature which misses its original meaning. It is derived from the hebrew word **naphal** meaning “to fall”, and can be thought of as indicating that these were men who had drifted away from the religion of their ancestors. They became mighty men (Hebrew **gibbor**) and men of renown (literally men of the name). There is a similar Hebrew expression to the one translated “**men of renown**” in Numbers 16 v 2, which describes the two hundred and fifty men who tried to usurp Moses’ powers when Israel were in the wilderness. Just because the sons of God were mighty and men of renown, it does not mean that they were necessarily godly men. We get confirmation of this in verse 5, “**Then God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.**” These descendants of Adam or sons of God had fallen from what was expected of them – they were Nephilim.

**Chapter 5**

**A summary of conclusions**

We’ve travelled a long way in this study and come to many conclusions, so it would be helpful to summarise the most important of them.

**The first creation record**

The first creation record is a piece of allegorical writing that describes God’s purpose for mankind. The passage is set out in an order that primarily supports its figurative meaning. Like the allegory in Galatians chapter 4, aspects of it can also be understood on a literal level. It shows that God created things like the seas and life on Earth, but it does not give the order of the literal creation.

Genesis 1 v 1 - 2

This is a heading that summarises what is to follow in the rest of the first creation narrative. The remainder of the account describes how God created what are termed “the heavens and the earth”.

Genesis 1 v 3

Day 1. This is the first use of the light metaphor in the Bible. Light stands for the things of God and how he shows them to mankind. Darkness is also a metaphor and describes the things that are opposed to God.

Genesis 1 v 4 - 5

Day 1. Day and night are also metaphors and describe times of spiritual light and darkness. These are times when God is visible and is working to fulfil his purpose, and times when he is not visible.

Genesis 1 v 6 – 10

Day 2. The firmament or heavens is where those who rule over the earth are. This is where God can be, but earthly rulers can be here as well.

The waters above the firmament represent how God works to influence the earth or dry land. The waters below the firmament are where ungodly nations are. The earth or dry land is where God’s salvation is visible. Often it is used to describe the land of promise.

There is a distinction between “the firmament” and “the firmament of the heavens”, which is spoken about on the fourth day. The firmament has waters above it, whereas the firmament of the heavens is above the waters. The lights of the fourth day are in the firmament of the heavens.

Genesis 1 v 11 – 13

Day 3. Grass, herbs that bear seed and trees which have seed bearing fruit appear. Plants are produced as a result of the working of God’s spirit. The ones that bear seed give spiritual life. The grass represents God’s provision for the rest of mankind.

Genesis 1 v 14 – 19

Day 4. The lights in the firmament of the heavens are related to the light of Genesis 1 v 3. They represent things that show God’s light, including the law of Moses, the Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel and those who walk in God’s ways. The firmament of the heavens is different to the firmament or heavens of the second day.

Genesis 1 v 20 – 23

Day 5. The creatures that live in the waters represent ungodly peoples. They do not arise from the land of promise. The great sea creatures represent rulers and kingdoms that have dominion over the other creatures who live in the waters, which in turn symbolise their subjects.

The birds represent peoples who arise from the earth, a place where God is visible. However, they are subjects in a succession of kingdoms and don’t seem to be righteous.

Genesis 1 v 24 – 25

Day 6. These verses list three sorts of living creature that arise from the earth. They are cattle, creeping things and beast of the earth. The cattle represent the people of Israel, whereas the other two groups of creatures represent peoples in the land of promise who were regarded as unclean by the Israelites, and who showed violence towards them.

Genesis 1 v 26 - 28

Day 6. Adam is made (consisting of male and female). This is what the apostle Paul calls the last Adam and consists of the Lord Jesus Christ, as well as those who are redeemed through his saving work. This Adam has dominion over the other creatures (i.e. other groups of people).

Genesis 2 v 1 – 3

The seventh day is when God rests, and represents the kingdom of God which will appear after the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**The second creation record**

This piece of writing is similar in style to an ancient myth, and describes the spiritual effects of man committing sin for the first time.

Genesis 2 v 4

The second record describes the creation of “heavens” and “earth”. These terms have the same meaning as the first creation narrative, and refer to the hierarchy between God and man. It places this passage in the time of the second and third days of the first creation record.

Genesis 2 v 5, 6

The meaning of the earth and the rain are the same as in the first creation narrative. The rain represents how God influences mankind. The earth is where God’s purpose for man is revealed.

Genesis 2 v 7

The man in the second creation narrative is different to the man in the first one. This man is what Paul calls the first man Adam, and is portrayed as a servant in the garden of Eden.

Genesis 2 v 8 – 15

The language of the second creation narrative indicates that it is set in a time of agriculture (the Neolithic Age), and that the location of the Garden of Eden was in South Eastern Turkey.

The tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil employ the same metaphorical meaning of plants that was used in the first creation record. They are things that come from God and show his purpose to mankind. They also have the potential to bring about salvation.

Genesis 2 v 16 – 17

The man in the Garden of Eden was the first man in the sense that he was the first man to be spoken to by God, and to receive commands from him. It is unlikely that the man in Genesis chapters 2 and 3 was the first man ever to exist.

Genesis 2 v 18 – 25

Eve is taken out of the man. This shows the closeness between man and woman and prefigures the way in which Christ’s bride will be formed. She is a helper, which means that she will bring about the salvation of the man. The man and the woman are naked in the sense that there is no way of covering sins, but at this stage they have no need to be covered.

Genesis 3 v 1 – 7

The serpent is a metaphor and represents opposition to God and to his purpose.

Genesis 3 v 8 – 10

The man and woman sin and are now naked in the sense that they have disobeyed God, and have no covering for their sin. At that time there is no means of having their sin covered.

Genesis 3 v 11 – 15

The woman’s seed is introduced, who will bruise the head of the serpent’s seed. This is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. The serpent’s seed represents those who oppose God and his purpose.

Genesis 3 v 16

The woman’s sorrow and conception are not physical but spiritual. Her children are a reference to those who are redeemed in Christ, but they only achieve salvation through spiritual sorrow and trials. Also her subjection to her husband represents the domination of sin and death over mankind until the woman’s seed overcomes it.

Genesis 3 v 17 – 19

The man’s labour is to make bread and is ultimately without reward. This shows that serving God through things like the law of Moses, where justification comes from works, is fruitless. The true bread that gives life is the Lord Jesus Christ, and this is provided by God.

Genesis 3 v 20

Eve is the mother of all living in the sense that her seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, brings eternal life for those who are saved through his sacrifice.

Genesis 3 v 21

Man cannot make his own clothing to cover his sins, only God’s covering for sins is acceptable.

Genesis 3 v 22 – 24

There is a way to the tree of life, and this is through the Lord Jesus Christ, the woman’s seed.

**Other conclusions**

If the early chapters of Genesis are interpreted allegorically using the rest of the Bible, then there is no clash with scientific discoveries about the start of the universe, and with current views about the appearance of life on the Earth.

It is unlikely that the Adam of Genesis chapters 2 and 3 was the first man to exist. As such, the Bible is silent on the process used to make the man of Genesis chapter 2. All we know is that he was made by God from the things of the ground.

**Final Thoughts**

I set out, what seems an age ago, with a thought that Genesis 1 v 3 was employing a metaphor when it said, “**And God said, let there be light**.” At the end of my journey I feel that I have achieved the goals that I set myself: I can understand how the two creation records fit together, and I can explain what they mean by using the Bible’s own language to interpret them. Although I am happy that the allegorical approach to the early chapters of Genesis is the right way to understand them, I am conscious that I am fallible and some arguments are stronger than others.

There are other questions that have arisen while looking at the early chapters of Genesis that I do not have an easy answer for. A major one is why allegories are used at the start of the Bible, when many readers will, quite understandably, assume them to be literal? Many people, who have a rudimentary faith, struggle with reconciling their literal understanding of scripture with what seems to be contradictions from scientific discovery. I know of several Christians who have lost their faith while trying to understand the early chapters of Genesis, and I find it difficult to explain why they should have had that battle in the first place.

One possible suggestion why the creation records are so misunderstood in our current age can be summed up by the words arrogance and ignorance. I feel that we often approach the Bible with too narrow a view of how to understand it. We live in a world where we generally expect writing to be factual and literal. Unless we take the time to appreciate the beauty and variety of genres like poetry, we may find it difficult to appreciate the diversity of writings in the Bible. Perhaps we are too ready to assume that ancient people were incapable of appreciating figurative language, and that they must have viewed their writings as primarily having a literal meaning. However, it may well be that earlier generations, with their story telling traditions, were more able to appreciate figurative writing than we are.

**Appendix 1 - Genesis and the role of women in the church**

The first few chapters of Genesis contain some information about the role of men and women in God’s purpose. A number of other Bible passages that deal with the same theme contain quotations from Genesis, and we’ll look at them to see if our conclusions are consistent with what they teach.

1. **1 Timothy 2**

1 Timothy 2 v 11 – 15 says:

**“Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control.”**

We don’t know the reason why Paul wrote these words to Timothy. We know that Timothy had a jewish mother and greek father, and that Timothy had been brought up to know the scriptures. One possible reason why Paul wrote the passage might be that Timothy was being influenced too much by his mother Eunice, his grandmother Lois or others in his family (2 Timothy 1 v 5), but we just don’t know.

Paul seems to be making the general point that a woman was to be in submission to a man in some way. This view is supported by the two points that Paul makes from Genesis chapter 3. He doesn’t refer to the hierarchy of Adam and Eve after they sinned, but the fact that Adam was made before Eve and that Eve was deceived, not Adam.

We are not helped by the fact that this teaching has often been used in a general sense, whereas it is specific. It is to do with teaching and learning. The first part of our passage in 1 Timothy 2 is to do with the role of teachers and disciples, and we’ll now look at these in more detail.

A teacher (greek **didaskalos**) is someone who interprets scripture and explains its meaning, often as a result of others asking questions. In the New Testament, Jesus is the clearest example of a teacher, and some of the ways that he answers questions and reasons about scripture are shown by the following passages, which are all places where he is called Teacher.

Matthew 9 v 11 – 13, Matthew 19 v 16, Matthew 22 v 16 – 17, Matthew 22 v 24 – 28, Matthew 22 v 36, Mark 9 v 38 – 40, John 3 v 2.

People who learn from a teacher are called disciples (greek **mathetes** – literally a learner). So Jesus, the teacher, asks his disciples or learners to learn from him (Matthew 11 v 29, 24 v 32).

Teachers are people with authority, and this is shown by their Hebrew titles, rabbi or rabboni. Both are derived from the Hebrew word **rab**, which means great.

On one level, none of us should be teachers, as Jesus says in Matthew 23 v 8, “**Do not be called Rabbi, for one is your teacher, the Christ, and all you are brethren**”. However, in the absence of Jesus, others need to teach in his name. This is an important role, as there is always a danger that false teachers can lead others astray. James writes, “**Let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgement** (James 3 v 1).”

Examples of teachers in the New Testament include Paul, who was a teacher of the Gentiles (1 Timothy 2 v 7), and older women, who were teachers of good things (Titus 2 v 4), with their role including teaching younger women to be sober minded or sensible (v 5).

More generally, the Colossians were commanded to teach each other in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (3 v 16). Also, in 1 Corinthians 14 v 26 it speaks about brethren (which is a generic term for brothers and sisters in Christ) having a psalm, a teaching, a tongue, a revelation or an interpretation to contribute when the whole church came together.

These ideas provide a bit of background to 1 Timothy 2 v 11 – 12, which says

“**Let a woman learn in quietness with all submission. And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in quietness** (my translation).”

The first part of this passage is to do with women learning or being a disciple, and the second part is to do with them teaching.

The authorized version translates the greek word “**hesuchia**” as silence (“**let the woman learn in silence**”), but this is incorrect, as can be seen from other uses of the word and related words. The verb “**hesuchazo**” is translated “to be quiet” in 1 Thessalonians 4 v 11. “**Hesuchia**” is translated “quietness” in 2 Thessalonians 3 v 12, and “**hesuchios**” is translated “quiet” in 1 Peter 3 v 4, when saying that a woman’s adornment should be “**with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit**”. (Note also that **hesuchios** is translated “**peaceable**” in 1 Timothy 2 v 2, which is only a few verses before the ones we are considering).

Our passage in 1 Timothy chapter 2 is commanding women to learn in quietness, and not silence, which is in line with the sort of spirit Peter speaks about Christian women having in 1 Peter 3 v 4.

In 1 Timothy chapter 2, once he has spoken about women learning or being disciples, Paul turns to the related role of women teaching.

“**I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in quietness** (my translation).” *(The greek word translated “to have authority” is one of those frustrating words that only occur once in the Bible. It seems to have the idea of having sovereignty over, so the passage could perhaps be rendered, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to be the sovereign of a man, but to be in quietness.”)*

1 Timothy 2 v 11 - 12 could be understood in a number of ways:

a) A Christian woman is never to practise teaching in the church.

b) A Christian woman is never to practise teaching when a man is present.

c) A wife is not to dominate her husband.

d) A woman is not to take the full time role of a teacher, like Jesus or Paul did, but may be able to contribute teaching in the manner described by passages like Colossians 3 v 16 (“**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs**”) and 1 Corinthians 14 v 26 (“**Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation**”).

Options a) and b) seem to be ruled out by other passages in scripture, such as Colossians 3 v 16 and 1 Corinthians 14 v 26. Option c) is a possibility, however usually when wife and husband are being spoken about in scripture, it speaks about “his woman” or “her man”, as opposed to “a man” or “a woman”.

The most likely meaning is d), which seems to fit in with other passages in scripture, but does 1 Timothy chapter 2 support this view? At this stage we need to understand a bit about greek grammar, as the greeks thought and spoke a bit differently to us.

In English, we have less infinitives in our grammar than biblical Greek (an infinitive is “to do something”, so to run or to eat are both examples of infinitives). “To fly” in English might be used to describe someone who goes on holiday to Spain for the first and only time, or it could refer to a bird who is flying all day, every day. However, in biblical Greek, there is a distinction between the two sorts of actions. The one off or occasional activity, like flying to Spain, is described in Greek using the aorist infinitive. However the continuous activity, like a bird flying, is described using the present infinitive.

It’s worth mentioning this aspect of Greek grammar because the infinitives used in 1 Timothy 2 v 12 (“to teach” and “to have sovereignty”) are the present infinitive type, and describe continuous or habitual activity.

This means that Paul is speaking about women who habitually teach and have sovereignty over men, as opposed to women who might sometimes offer teaching as part of their work in the church.

*(2 Timothy 2 v 2 is a passage that uses the other sort (aorist) of infinitive, when Paul tells Timothy to commit the things he had heard to faithful men, so that they may be able to teach (aorist infinitive) others also. The greek word translated men is* ***anthropos****, which has more the idea of a member of mankind than specifically a male, so could be used to support the idea of both men and women teaching. This passage is talking about disciples performing acts of teaching, but not about those who have the continuous role of a teacher within the church (the present infinitive). 2 Timothy 2 v 2 is referring to men and possibly women who are able to provide teaching as part of their discipleship (the aorist infinitive), as opposed to those who have a teaching role in the way that Jesus had. As such, this passage is in harmony with the suggested meaning of 1 Timothy 2 v 11 – 12.)*

The reason for Paul’s words about women’s role in Christ is given by 1 Timothy 2 v 13 – 14:

“**For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression**”.

He refers to the second creation record and picks out two points to show that, in Christ, women should not dominate men when teaching and learning. This might seem to give the impression that women are somehow more likely to be deceived than men, but scripture does not teach this. The tendency to be deceived is as much a male trait as a female one. What Paul is doing is using two events from the second creation to back up his statements about the roles of men and women in the early church.

*(We note that he doesn’t use Genesis 3 v 16, where Eve is told,* ***“Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”*** *It was concluded that this described the relationship between death and mankind, so would be inappropriate to use when setting out the relationship between men and women in Christ.)*

He then continues with ideas from the second creation record in 1 Timothy 2 v 15. This verse is ambiguous, but I think its meaning is, “**Nevertheless she (Eve) will be saved in childbearing if they (women in general) continue in faith, love, holiness, with self-control**.”

It’s a curious verse, which switches from the singular to plural in the middle. The first part of the verse expresses the same conclusion that we reached earlier when we looked at Genesis chapter 3.

Eve is the mother of all living, as one of her descendants or seed would bring about her salvation from sin and death. Her seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, would then be the means of salvation for all women who turn in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ.

To summarise, women were not to have the sort of full time teaching role that Jesus had. However, mistranslation has unduly limited the contribution that women could make in the church. They could teach, but should not seek to dominate men.

**Galatians 3 v 26 - 8**

1 Timothy chapter 2 focused on the role of men and women when it came specifically to teaching and learning, and the meaning was that women should not seek to dominate men. However, this has been used far too often as an excuse for men to dominate women in Christianity. Galatians chapter 3 sets out the reality of the relationship between men and women in Christ. All disciples of Christ are equally subject to the Lord Jesus Christ and he rules over them. There is no hierarchy among disciples of Christ. All are subjects, all are servants one of the other. Hence the words of Galatians 3 v 26 – 8, “**For you are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Christ Jesus**.”

Jesus also taught this when Sadduccees came to him and put a question to him based on an imaginary case where seven brothers all had the same woman as a wife, and the woman was widowed seven times. They asked him, “**Therefore in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her**.” (Matthew 22 v 28)

Jesus’s answer was, “**You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven** (Matthew 22 v 29 – 30) .”

In the resurrection, there is no difference between men and women, they are all like the angels. The equality of men and women in Christ now simply reflects what the future will be like for the righteous after Jesus returns.

1. **Ephesians 5**

In the Epistle to the Ephesians Paul focuses on the hierarchy between husbands and wives, and how this mirrors the relationship between Christ and his church, which is his bride.

Husbands need to love their wives in the same way that Christ loves the church. Wives in turn should submit to their husbands, as disciples submit to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul then speaks about the unity of Christ and his bride. In this context, he quotes from Genesis 2 v 24 when he says, “**For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh** (Ephesians 5 v 30).” He then adds, “**This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church** (v 31).”

For disciples today, there is a oneness between men and women in Christ. However, wives should be subject to their own husbands, in order to show the hierarchy between the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride. In like manner, husbands need to take on the role of Jesus and show love, dedication and service towards their wives.

1. **1 Corinthians 11**

The meaning of the first part of 1 Corinthians 11, with its teaching about headship and head coverings, is one of the most contentious passages in the Bible, and it is difficult to be certain precisely what Paul’s argument was. This is chiefly the result of not knowing the details of the problems that he was addressing. So it is with a degree of trepidation that we discover it uses teaching from the early chapters of Genesis.

We will test our conclusions from Genesis 1, 2 and 3 against the way that Paul uses the creation accounts in the letter, but will not attempt to explain the passage in detail.

1 Corinthians 11 v 3 says, “**But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God**.”

This sets out a hierarchy: God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of the man and man is the head of the woman. The Lord Jesus Christ is described as the head of man in that he is the exalted son of God, the first born from the dead. The idea of man being the head of the woman might at first be thought to be linked to Genesis 3 v 16, and be considered to describe the hierarchy of man and woman that came about after Adam and Eve’s sin. This is unlikely, however, because in 1 Corinthians 11 we are speaking about the order of things in Christ, and not in a world that is reigned over by death. We need to look for another reason for this hierarchy, and this emerges later on.

Verse 4 addresses the question of whether men should pray or prophesy with “the head” covered. It says, “**Every man praying or prophesying, having the head covered, dishonours his head** (my translation).” We do not know the reason why men were covering their heads, but we do know that it lessened Christ’s achievements. The important point made in the verse is that a man’s literal head represents his spiritual head, the Lord Jesus Christ, in some way. If a Christian man prays or prophesies with his literal head covered, then it could be seen as devaluing the role of Jesus in God’s plan for salvation.

We are helped in understanding the significance of this verse when Paul returns to the same subject in verse 7, “**For a man indeed ought not to cover the head, being the image and glory of God** (my translation).” The argument of verse 4 was that if a man covered his literal head when praying, then it would dishonour his spiritual head, the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 7 says something similar, but uses different language. A man shouldn’t cover his head, this time because he is the image and glory of God.

Other parts of scripture indicate that male disciples are not literally the image and glory of God, but that this is a description of the Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier, when we looked at the teaching of Genesis chapter 1, we saw that Jesus is the image of God, an idea which is confirmed by passages like 2 Corinthians 4 v 4 and Colossians 1 v 15. He is also the glory of God through his resurrection from the dead (Hebrews 1 v 3, 2 v 7, 9).

Up until now, mankind has never been the image and glory of God, only the Lord Jesus Christ has. It is in the future that we will share Christ’s image (1 Corinthians 15 v 49), although our life of discipleship should be shaping us now to be like our spiritual head (Romans 8 v 29, 2 Corinthians 3 v 18, Philippians 3 v 21). Also, mankind is not the glory of God at present. It is at the resurrection, when disciples receive immortality, that they will have glory through the work of Jesus (Colossians 3 v 4, Hebrews 2 v 10, 1 Peter 5 v 4).

Saying that a man is the image and glory of God in 1 Corinthians 11 indicates that male disciples (and not just their heads) are representing Christ in some way. If we use this to explain verse 4, then a man covering his head would be the same as covering Christ, because disciples represent their Lord. To use the language of Matthew 5 v 15, this would be like putting a lighted lamp under a basket.

If a male disciple represents Christ, then when Paul speaks about woman in verse 7 (“**woman is the glory of the man**”), she is representing Christ’s bride. She certainly is his glory, as Ephesians 5 v 27 speaks about Christ presenting his bride as “**a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish.**”

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul is applying the language of Genesis chapter 1 in a way that is consistent with his teaching about the two Adams. Christ is represented by male disciples, and because of this they are described as having the image and glory of God. For this reason they should not cover their heads, as this would dishonour the Lord Jesus Christ.

Similarly, women disciples are described as being the glory of the man, and represent Christ’s bride, the church. When Paul says in verses 8 and 9, “**For man is not from woman, but woman from man. Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man**”, he is referring ultimately to the Lord Jesus Christ and the creation of his bride. It is also a reference to the creation of the woman in the second creation record in Genesis, which prefigures the same thing.

In 1 Corinthians 11 v 11 – 12 he moves on to address the relationship of male and female disciples in Christ. He continues, “**Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God** (1 Corinthians 11 v 11 – 12).” In the Lord Jesus Christ or “In the Lord”, the woman (the body of Christ) is from man (the Lord Jesus Christ), however the woman is the man’s helper who brought about the Lord Jesus Christ. “In the Lord”, there is a mutual dependency in Christ between male and female disciples.

Where a man is described as head of a woman, it is to represent the relationship between Christ and his church, and is not to do with a hierarchy among male and female disciples.

1. **1 Corinthians 14**

A passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 14 is similar to what we have already considered in 1 Timothy chapter 2, because it speaks about the way that women should behave when they are learning. Verse 34 says,

**“Let your women (or “the women” in many manuscripts) keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says”.**

At this point we are not sure if this is a general command, or if it is specific to certain sorts of behaviour. Verse 35 gives us the context of this statement, when it says,

**“And if they want to learn** (greek **manthano** – related to the idea of being a disciple) **something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church”.**

1 Corinthians 14 v 34 – 35 makes it clear that when women are performing the role of a disciple they should not be talking in the church. The Greek word translated “to be silent” in 1 Corinthians 14 v 34 is **sigao**, which does mean silent and not quiet (see for example Acts 15 v 12, 13). As long as we keep hold of the context of the passage, there is not a problem in reconciling it with other passages of scripture. The difficulty arises when it is incorrectly given a wider meaning.

It seems that there was a problem at Corinth with some women talking and perhaps interrupting when others were teaching, so Paul’s command was, not surprisingly, that they should be silent while the teaching was happening. If they wanted to discuss what was said, they could speak to their husbands later.

This did not preclude women speaking in other contexts, such as praying or prophesying (which is spoken about in 1 Corinthians 11 v 5) or singing praise or...

The teaching of 1 Corinthians chapter 14 does not preclude women contributing within the church, as this would contradict what Paul says earlier in the epistle, but it is directed at one specific problem. Women are told to be submissive (Greek **hupotasso**), but this is no more than all disciples of Christ should be towards each other. Ephesians 5 v 21 says that we should all be “**submitting (Greek hupotasso) to one another in the fear of God.**”

**Summary**

We have considered these areas:

1. The behaviour of female disciples relating to teaching and learning.
2. The relationship between a husband and wife in Christ, and how it reflects the relationship between the Lord Jesus Christ and his bride, the church.
3. The equality that there is between male and female disciples in Christ. We are all servants of each other and dependant on each other.

As long as we remember the context of the passages we have considered, there is no contradiction between them.

**Appendix 2 – Other references to the creation records in scripture**

When we looked at the first and second creation records, we concluded that they were allegorical pieces of writing. This means that they have a hidden meaning as well as a more obvious one.

Apart from the early chapters of Genesis, there are over twenty references to God making the heavens and earth (or conveying a similar meaning) in scripture. If our understanding is correct, we would expect some of these passages to reflect the figurative meaning of the creation records, as well as some that use the passages at the start of Genesis in a more literal way. The following tries to group these references together and discover whether they support an allegorical interpretation of the creation records. At the end of this appendix there will be an attempt to summarise what we have learnt from these passages.

**2 Chronicles 2 v 12, Isaiah 37 v 16**

Isaiah 37 v 16 occurs at the start of one of Hezekiah’s prayers and 2 Chronicles 2 v 12 at the beginning of a blessing spoken by Hiram, king of Tyre. In both cases they speak of the Lord making the heavens and the earth, and the expression is used to show the power and authority of the God of Israel.

In 2 Chronicles 2 v 12, Hiram says, “**Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who made heaven and earth.**” Then in Isaiah 37 v 16, Hezekiah prays, “**O Lord of hosts, God of Israel, the one who dwells between the cherubim, you are God. You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth.**”

Both verses clearly refer to the start of the Bible and describe the authority of God, but neither clearly indicates whether they are referring to a literal or allegorical view of the creation records.

**Exodus 20 v 11, Exodus 31 v 17**

These verses argue that, as God made the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested, there needs to be a Sabbath rest every seventh day.

Again, both verses refer to the start of the Bible and the first creation record, but neither clearly indicates if it was being understood in an allegorical or literal way. Exodus 20 v 11 was referred to earlier on, and the point made that, just because Exodus is referring to literal days, there is no reason why the days in the first creation record need to be viewed literally as well.

**Psalm 115 v 15, Psalm 121 v 2, Psalm 124 v 8**

These passages refer to God making “heavens and earth” (as opposed to “the heavens and the earth”). They speak about the Lord being a help, before adding that he “**made heavens and earth**” (Psalm 115 refers to God being a help in verses 9 – 11). They seem to be referring primarily to the second creation record, as it is a description of God making “**earth and heavens**” (Genesis 2 v 4 – my translation). The second creation record also considers how the woman was to be a helper for the man who is appears that account. When we looked at the second creation record, we found that God is a help because he saves, and that the woman was to provde help by being the source of salvation for the man. Salvation is the help that is offered in the three psalms as well.

Heavens and earth in the second creation record did not describe planets and stars, but the hierarchy between God and man. It is reasonable to understand heavens and earth in the same way in these psalms. We get justification for this view from Psalm 115. Verse 15 says that the Lord made “**heavens and earth**”, with verse 16 continuing, “**The heavens, heavens, are the Lord’s, and the earth he has given to the sons of men**” (my translation)”. This uses the heavens and the earth to describe the hierarchy between God and man, just like the second creation record does.

**Psalm 146 v 6, Acts 4 v 24, Acts 14 v 15**

We will treat Psalm 146 v 6, Acts 4 v 24 and Acts 14 v 15 together, as the Acts passages are quotations from Psalm 146.

Psalm 146 v 5 – 7 says, “**Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.**”

This passage is similar to the ones that we have just considered. It refers to God making heaven and earth, and describes him as a help. It is different to the others though, because it continues by saying that God made “**the sea and all that is in them**”. This is no longer a reference just to the second creation record, but to the first one as well, as it describes how the sea was separated from the earth.

This passage provides confirmation that the earth is not the world, but is the dry land, which is separate to the sea. Its context is God saving the oppressed and providing them with help, which we have seen is linked to salvation.

In Acts 4, Psalm 146 is quoted in response to Peter and John being released by the jewish rulers. The prayer that was offered focused on how powerful God is compared to the rulers in the earth (like Herod) and the rulers from the sea of the nations (like Pontius Pilate – see v 27). In Acts 4, heavens and earth seems to be a reference to the hierarchy between God and men.

In Acts 14, we have a very different context. Paul and Barnabas were proclaimed to be Zeus and Mercury because they performed a miracle in the town of Lystra. Paul quotes Psalm 146 to show that his God, the living God, made the heavens, earth, sea and things in them, as opposed to the greek deities that the people of Lystra worshipped. It is unlikely that Paul’s audience had any knowledge of the God of Israel, or of the creation records. His words would have been received in a literal way, and they would’ve understood that Paul’s god was the creator of the things they saw around them. He then continues in very general terms, by telling his audience that his god gives rain and fruitful seasons (Acts 14 v 17).

So Psalm 146 is used in the Book of Acts in both a literal and a figurative manner, and the difference in its use is the level of understanding of the audience. For those who had no understanding of the God of Israel, it showed that God was a creator of things that people saw around them, but for those with more understanding it showed the hierarchy between God and man, and God’s mercy for those who trust in him.

**Acts 17 v 24**

This passage is included here because it has similarities to Acts chapter 14. Just like at Lystra, Paul is speaking to people who had little or no knowledge of the God of the Bible: he is speaking to greek philosophers in Athens. Paul addresses them with these words, “**God, who made the world and everything in it, since he is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands** (Acts 17 v 24).” Here we have an explicit statement that his God made the world (and not the earth), and Paul argues that this is the case because he is Lord of heaven and earth. He rules over everything.

**Isaiah 45**

Some of the passages we have looked at so far could be understood in a literal or figurative way. However, the references to God making the heavens and earth in Isaiah chapter 45 seem to be definitely figurative in nature. The chapter is addressed to the Persian king Cyrus, who was responsible for sending the jewish exiles in Babylon back to their land in 538 BC. But the name Cyrus suggests that he pre-figures someone else. The greek Kurios or “Lord” is used to translate Cyrus in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, and it is clear that Isaiah chapter 45 is looking to a greater Cyrus or lord who will bring salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are three passages in the chapter that have clear links to the creation records in Genesis.

Isaiah 45 v 7 says:

“**I form the light and create the darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the Lord, do all these things**.”

This tells us that God creates light and darkness, just like it says in Genesis 1 v 3. However the light and darkness spoken about here is metaphorical, as light is identified as including peace and darkness as including calamity.

Verse 8 continues,

“**Rain down, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; Let the earth open, let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together. I, the Lord, have created it**.”

This verse should give us confidence about the validity of the metaphorical approach we used with the first creation record. The waters above the heavens are not literal but metaphorical. They come from God and pour down righteousness. The earth responds to this rain by producing metaphorical plants: salvation and righteousness. This use of rain and plants here is in keeping with how they are used in Genesis chapter 1.

If we now move on the verses 12 – 13, we read this,

“**Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his maker: Ask me of things to come concerning my sons; and concerning the work of my hands, you command me. I have made the earth, and created man (literally Adam) on it, I – my hands – stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded. I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways, He shall build my city and let my exiles go free, not for price nor reward, says the Lord of Hosts**.”

On a literal level it describes the work of king Cyrus of Persia, but its more important fulfilment is through the greater Cyrus, the Lord (greek Kurios) Jesus Christ. If we understand Genesis chapter 1 as a piece of figurative writing, then “Adam” of Genesis 1 v 26 is seen to be the Lord Jesus Christ and those who are saved through his sacrifice. If we use this meaning to understand our passage in Isaiah 45, then it tells us that God has created the Lord Jesus Christ (Adam), he has raised him up in righteousness and he will let his exiles go free. This can be thought of as a reference to Christ’s work of recovering those who are exiled from God through sin and death.

**Nehemiah 9 v 6**

This verse is clearly referring to the first Creation record. It records the Levites saying this,

“**You alone are the Lord; You have made the heavens, heaven of the heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, the host of heaven worships you**.” (My translation).

The Levites then went on to talk about events that followed the creation in the Bible, like those in the days of Abraham and Moses.

This verse is about those who inhabit the heavens, heaven of the heavens, the earth and the seas. What is significant is that the host of heaven worships the Lord.

In the first creation record, we saw that the host of heaven describes the righteous. It can mean angels as well as people, for example that well known verse about the birth of Jesus says, “**And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God** (Luke 2 v 13).

The important point is that the host of the heavens who worship God are not literal stars but figurative ones. So when the Levites referred to the first creation record, they understood it in a figurative sense.

*(The reference to heaven of the heavens seems to be a reference to the third heaven that Paul spoke about in 2 Corinthians 12 v 2, and represents a heavens in which God alone dwells.)*

**Jeremiah 27 v 5**

This verse says, “**I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are on the face of the earth, by my great power and by my outstretched arm, and have given it to whom it seemed proper to me** (My translation).”

The verse speaks about the earth, and this is clarified in the following verse, which says, “**And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon**.” This is clearly not speaking about the world but the lands of the Middle East. The earth in this passage seems to refer to a literal place, like the land of promise, and the men and beasts which are on it are literal as well.

**Jeremiah 32 v 17**

This verse is part of a prayer that Jeremiah offered. He said, “**Ah, Lord God! Behold, you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and outstretched arm. There is nothing too hard for you**.”

Jeremiah quotes some of the words that are recorded in Jeremiah 27 v 5, so it is reasonable to think that the making of the heavens and the earth has the same sort of meaning as in that verse. Just like Jeremiah 27, it is likely to have a literal meaning.

**Jeremiah 51 v 15**

The context of the previous two quotations is the ascendancy of Babylon over nations around it. The context of this verse is completely different: it is describing its demise.

It says, **“(God) has made earth by his power; he has established the world (Hebrew tebel) by his wisdom, and stretched out heavens by his understanding.** (my translation).” The heavens that are referred to in this verse seem to be literal heavens, as the following verse says, “**When he utters his voice – there is a multitude of waters in the heavens: He causes vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain; He brings the wind out of his treasuries**.”

**Jeremiah 10 v 12, 13**

This passage is identical to Jeremiah 51 v 15, 16 and the context is to do with the way that the nations around Judah worship idols. If we return to Jeremiah 51 we see that after verses 15 and 16 there is also a passage that deals with the futility of worshipping idols (vs 17 – 19).

It contrasts “**the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth**” with the God that has. It does not specify whether the heavens and the earth are literal or metaphorical, and it does not have to. The distinction is that one God is able to bring things about, whereas idols cannot.

**Isaiah 42 v 5**

This verse says, “**Thus says God the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it**.”

This verse has a similar context to Isaiah 45, in that it is talking about the Messiah who will bring about righteousness and salvation. The chapter also uses things from the first creation record in a figurative way. Verse 6 says that God’s servant will be a light to the Gentiles, and that he will rescue those who sit in darkness.

In verse 5 it says that God stretched out (Hebrew **natah**) the heavens and spread forth (Hebrew **raqa**) the earth. Stretching out the heavens is similar to Jeremiah 10 v 12 and 51 v 15, and there are a number of other passages that speak of God stretching out the heavens. They include Job 9 v 8, 26 v 7, Psalm 104 v 2, Isaiah 40 v 22, 44 v 24, 45 v 12, 51 v 13, Zechariah 12 v 1.

This idea of stretching out the heavens is a metaphor linked to God’s dwelling place. This is seen from two verses. First in Psalm 104 v 2 it says that God covers himself with light as with a garment, and stretches out the heavens like a curtain. So stretching out is something that is done to material. The significance of curtains in the Bible world is seen from Isaiah 54 v 2, which describes the dwelling place of Israel. It says, “**Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings.**” Curtains are stretched out when a tent is put up, and stretching out the heavens is part of the metaphor that describes God’s dwelling place as being like a tent.

Isaiah 42 v 5 also speaks about God spreading forth the earth. The Hebrew verb translated “to spread forth” is **raqa** and is related to the Hebrew word which is translated “firmament” in the first creation record (Hebrew **raqia**). There are also similar expressions about spreading forth the earth in Psalm 136 v 6 and Isaiah 44 v 24. The context of Psalm 136 indicates that spreading forth the earth is a metaphor, just like stretching out the heavens is. Psalm 136 v 6 says, “**To him who laid out (Hebrew raqa) the earth above the waters.**” If we were to try to understand this statement literally, then we are likely to get into all sorts of difficulties with understanding its meaning, however if we understand it figuratively then we are able to grasp its significance more easily. We have here an image of God spreading out a habitation for his people, and that in status it is above the nations that surround it (represented by the waters).

The idea of spreading forth occurs again in Isaiah 40 v 19, in the context of people making idols. It says, “**The workman moulds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it (Hebrew raqa) with gold**.” The gold is gilding, it’s something ornate and beautiful that is laid over something of lesser value. And this is what the earth is, it is laid over the waters of the nations. The earth is spread forth or laid over the waters, to show it is more precious than them.

**1 Chronicles 16 v 26, Psalm 96 v 5**

These verses are identical, as is 1 Chronicles 16 v 23 – 36 and most of Psalm 96 v 1 – 13. The two verses say, “**For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens**.” These contrast the true God with man-made idols. It says that God made the heavens, but gives no more details about them. It could refer to literal or figurative heavens.

**Psalm 33 v 6**

This verse says, “**By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all the host of them by the spirit (Hebrew ruach) of his mouth** (my translation).” The idea of God making things through his word is a reference to the first creation record and the repeating expression, “**And God said…**” that we find there. The immediate context indicates that it is speaking about a literal creation, because verse 7 says, “**He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses**.”

Psalm 33 v 6 seems to be a reference to the literal creation of stars, but it could also have a figurative sense as well. This thought comes from the expression “the spirit of his mouth.”

“Spirit of … mouth” is quoted in 2 Thessalonians 2 v 8 and describes the Lord Jesus Christ overcoming his enemies when he returns, an event which is called “**the brightness of his coming**.” (The return of Jesus is described in a similar manner when it speaks of the rising of The Sun of righteousness in Malachi 4.)

You get a similar idea of judgment upon God’s enemies in Isaiah 11, with verse 4 saying that the Messiah will slay the wicked “**with the spirit (Hebrew ruach) of his lips**.”

The time when the Messiah returns is also the time when the righteous are saved and are given eternal life. When we looked at the making of the stars in the first creation record we considered Daniel chapter 12 and the salvation of the righteous, who shall shine “**like the stars forever and ever**” Daniel 12 v 3.

So, putting this all together, the description of God making the host of heaven in Psalm 33 could also be a description of the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the greater light in the heavens which rules the day (the Lord Jesus Christ), who will judge the wicked and bestow eternal life on the righteous when he returns. He will do both these things “by the spirit of his mouth.”

**Revelation 14 v 7**

In this verse an angel says, **“Fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water**.” In the Book of Revelation, heaven, earth and sea are used figuratively. We have already mentioned in this study the words of Revelation 21 v 1, “**Also, there was no more sea**.” We might also consider Revelation chapter 12 which speaks about there being “**war … in heaven**”. The book uses heaven, earth and sea metaphorically, in the same way that they are used in Genesis chapter 1.

**Summary**

When we looked at the bible passages that spoke about God making the heavens and the earth, we noticed that some can be understood as describing the making of the things we see around us, some are used metaphorically and some could be understood in either way.

Psalm 146 v 5 – 7 is used in both a literal and metaphorical sense when it is quoted in the Acts of the Apostles, and this difference was due to the audience who heard it. It was employed in a literal sense when it was heard by those who had no understanding of scripture, but it was understood metaphorically when used by those who had a better grasp of God’s word. These two meanings are what we would expect from a passage that is an allegory, just like when Paul explained that the story of Sarah and Hagar was an allegory.

The consideration of the passages we looked at confirms the view that the creation records are allegorical, having two meanings.

When we think about the references to the creation records that we might consider to be literal, we see that they make general points. God made the heavens, earth, sea, world and everything that is in them. Anyone who is unfamiliar with the Bible could glean these points from a straightforward reading of the first creation record. None of the passages that were considered indicated the order in which God made the literal universe or things that live on The Earth.”