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SERIES FOREWORD

This series of volumes supplements Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. The commentary series offers an exposition of the books of the Bible written for those who teach, preach, and study the Bible in the community of faith. This new series is addressed to the same audience and serves a similar purpose, providing additional resources for the interpretation of Scripture, but now dealing with features, themes, and issues significant for the whole rather than with individual books.

The Bible is composed of separate books. Its composition naturally has led its interpreters to address particular books. But there are other ways to approach the interpretation of the Bible that respond to other characteristics and features of the Scriptures. These other entries to the task of interpretation provide contexts, overviews, and perspectives that complement the book-by-book approach and discern dimensions of the Scriptures that the commentary design may not adequately explore.

The Bible as used in the Christian community is not only a collection of books but also itself a book that has a unity and coherence important to its meaning. Some volumes in this new series will deal with this canonical wholeness and seek to provide a wider context for the interpretation of individual books as well as a comprehensive theological perspective that reading single books does not provide.

Other volumes in the series will examine particular texts, like the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and the Sermon on the Mount, texts that have played such an important role in the faith and life of the Christian community that they constitute orienting foci for the understanding and use of Scripture.

A further concern of the series will be to consider important and often difficult topics, addressed at many different places in the books of the canon, that are of recurrent interest and concern to the church in its dependence on Scripture for faith and life. So the series will include volumes dealing with such topics as eschatology, women, wealth, and violence.

The books of the Bible are constituted from a variety of kinds of literature such as narrative, laws, hymns and prayers, letters,

parables, and miracle stories. To recognize and discern the contribution and importance of all these different kinds of material enriches and enlightens the use of Scripture. Volumes in the series will provide help in the interpretation of Scripture's literary forms and genres.

The liturgy and practices of the gathered church are anchored in Scripture, as with the sacraments observed and the creeds recited. So another entry to the task of discerning the meaning and significance of biblical texts explored in this series is the relation between the liturgy of the church and the Scriptures.

Finally, there is certain ancient literature, such as the Apocrypha and the noncanonical gospels, that constitutes an important context to the interpretation of Scripture itself. Consequently, this series will provide volumes that offer guidance in understanding such writings and explore their significance for the interpretation of the Protestant canon.

The volumes in this second series of Interpretation deal with these important entries into the interpretation of the Bible. Together with the commentaries, they compose a library of resources for those who interpret Scripture as members of the community of faith. Each of them can be used independently for its own significant addition to the resources for the study of Scripture. But all of them intersect the commentaries in various ways and provide an important context for their use. The authors of these volumes are biblical scholars and theologians who are committed to the service of interpreting the Scriptures in and for the church. The editors and authors hope that the addition of this series to the commentaries will provide a major contribution to the vitality and richness of biblical interpretation in the church.

The Editors

PREFACE

This book has been a very long time coming! In my first teaching position out of graduate school, at Erskine College in Due West, South Carolina, I designed a course exploring Creation, and invited colleagues in the sciences to team-teach it with me. I offered a similar course several times at my next post, Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, as an honors class, and was especially thankful there to find a good friend, astronomer and physicist George Spagna, to guide me through the intricacies of physical cosmology.

When my pursuit of Christ's call took me to Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, I once more adapted the course, this time for a graduate school setting. I have been thankful for the guidance of friends and colleagues in theology: Edwin van Driel, Ron Cole-Turner, and Andrew Purves in particular. In biblical studies, my New Testament colleague Dale Allison challenged me to take the history of interpretation seriously, prompting me to listen to early Christian interpreters and, in particular, to Jewish sources. Bereshit Rabbah, the rabbinic midrashim on Genesis, has proven to be a particular source of inspiration and delight.

Along the way, I adapted my Creation class as a seminar presentation for churches, teaching it in adult Bible classes, in retreat settings, and to pastors' academies. Teaching in local churches, I came to realize that while little I was saying was *new*—clergy had been exposed to these ideas in seminaries for decades—the implications of the multiple perspectives on Creation in Scripture had somehow rarely made it into the pews. Time after time, I met Christians who believed that their faith compelled them to a sacrifice of the intellect, requiring them to mistrust physicists, geologists, and biologists, not to mention scholars of Scripture who simply directed them to what the text on the page actually said. I became convinced that there was a need for a book like this one.

My old friend and Pittsburgh Theological Seminary colleague Jerome Creach had written a book on violence in Scripture for the Interpretation Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church series; he encouraged me to submit a proposal to this series, which after some give-and-take was accepted. In particular, my then-editor

Sam Balentine pushed me to broaden my approach, from my initial proposal of a study of the first two chapters of Genesis to a consideration of creation texts in the whole of Scripture.

The pandemic of 2020 compelled me, as it did all of us, to find new ways to teach, write, and research, and forced a lengthy delay in this project; I am thankful that Westminster John Knox had patience with me! I am especially grateful to my current editor, Brent Strawn, for his careful and insightful reading of this work, and to Julie Mullins, editor for Westminster John Knox, for her enthusiasm and support for this project.

Along the way, sadly, many who inspired and guided this work have died. My teacher and mentor, S. Dean McBride Jr., died in the midst of the pandemic; his example of faithful, honest, and uncompromising scholarship has shaped everything I do, including this present book. Sam Balentine, my first editor in this series, started me on this path; I am deeply grateful. Walter Brueggemann died in June 2025; I am thankful for his always-provocative take on Scripture. May light perpetual shine upon them.

Finally, as is ever the case, I am thankful that God has gifted me with a loving and supportive family. My sons Sean, Anthony, and Mark have grown into men of piercing intellect, and their insights have shaped my life as well as my work. Most of all, thank you, darling Wendy, for loving and believing in me. This book is yours as much as mine.

ABBREVIATIONS

Alphabetized by abbreviation

AB	Anchor Bible
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. Edited by James B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969.
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BDAG	*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Revised and edited by Frederick William Danker. Based on Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6th ed. Edited by Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, with an Appendix Containing the Biblical Aramaic*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1978.
Ber. Rab.	Bereshit Rabbah
BibOr	Biblica et Orientalia
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestimentliche Wissenschaft
CD	*Church Dogmatics*
CTA	*Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939.* Edited by André Herdner. Paris: Geuthner, 1963.
DCH	*Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2016.
DDD	*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. 2nd ed. Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. Leiden: Brill, 1995. 2nd rev. ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999.

DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
ESV	English Standard Version, 2016
HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KJV	The King James Version, 1611
LXX	The Septuagint
MT	The Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version, 2011
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society translation, 1999
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version, 1989
NRSVue	New Revised Standard Version, updated edition, 2021
OTE	*Old Testament Essays*
OTL	Old Testament Library
RCL	Revised Common Lectionary
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

The Ground of Eden

Dual-voice poem: Sherrell Wigal (left) and Kirk Judd (right)

Go up the mountain
Go to the end of the road
Go to gray boulders of yesterday
Here, on the lip of the world
Hesitate
Pause while the earth breathes around you
Inhales you
Exhales with you.

Starlight of millennia
Traveled here from ever
Angled through the hidden eyes of animals
Filtered through the ageless stone

It is dusk
And the dreams of almost-lovers
Hang like the shadows of children
Around the edges of night
A rabbit crouches
Unseen against a thicket of laurel
Her nervousness vibrates the mountain
Vibrates the humans who linger here

Found me here in this shadowed night
Thrummed into me the quasar pulse

There is a stirring
Maybe the boulders move
Maybe the spruce grows another seven inches
Maybe the world slips out of its orbit

The resonant wave
Of some authenticity
Started long ago

Listen
Listen for the whisper of night-wings
The ferns curling back upon themselves
This mountain moving with the galaxy

Some clear truth
I didn't know
I had always known

And if there is a touching
The forest will explode

Broke inside me
With a flood of certainty
Charged me with prismatic fire

Light of creation
Light of the scriptures
Light of a thousand promises kept

And everything changed
Light into mountain
Mountain into me
And I became . . .

This
This is the land which owns you
This is the ground of Eden
This is the soil
You cannot leave.

CHAPTER 1

Talking about Beginnings

Faith is woven into every human culture of which we are aware, no matter how isolated. Indeed, no matter how far back in human history we go, this still appears to be the case. Paleolithic cave paintings in southern France studied by Wentzel van Huyssteen led him to conclude, "In a very specific sense religious belief is one of the earliest social propensities or dispositions that we are able to detect in the archaeological record of modern humans" (van Huyssteen 2006, 204). Our species is designated Homo sapiens, "thinking people," but perhaps, as Fr. Alexander Schmemann urges, we could more aptly be named *Homo adorans*: "*worshiping* people" (Schmemann 1973, 15).

Indeed, religious behavior may not even be restricted to our species in the genus Homo. Based on a huge cache of fossils from chambers deep in the Rising Star Cave system in South Africa, paleoanthropologist Lee Berger and his team identified a new hominid species, *Homo naledi* (Berger et al., 2015; Brophy et al., 2021). The profusion of bones in the cave's nearly inaccessible chambers (1,550 specimens, belonging to at least fifteen individuals, in the first chamber alone), together with the ages of the individuals (mostly very young or very old) and the absence of signs of predation prompted Berger to propose that the bodies may have been deliberately *placed* there—that these primitive hominids were burying their dead (Gray 2015; Bower 2021). Surely, awe in the face of death and care for the

dead are fundamentally religious acts—indeed, perhaps the *original* religious acts (e.g., Tylor 1920, 424–29).

Archaeologist Klaus Schmidt, who excavated at Göbekli Tepe in Turkey from 1996 until his death in 2014, argued that this Neolithic site was the oldest temple in the world (Curry 2008). Anthropologists had long thought that farming enabled humans to live together in communities, and that religion began in the leisure and stability provided by agriculture. But the antiquity of the temple at Göbekli Tepe (ca. eleven thousand years ago) suggests that that order may be inverted (cf. Harari 2015, 89–91). Perhaps humans first gathered together for worship, and agriculture developed out of the need to provide for those worshiping communities—making religion the source of civilization rather than its by-product! There is, it seems, nothing more essentially *human* than awe and praise before God.

Truth and Myth

The diverse religions of the world yield a marvelous array of stories about beginnings, or creation myths. We would do well to define our terms carefully, however. It is sometimes assumed that myths function, in less sophisticated cultures than ours, as a way to explain what could not otherwise be explained. Certainly, there are explanatory features in many myths: for example, the rumble of thunder in Norse mythology is the noise of the wheels of Thor's goat-drawn cart, or in the ancient Near East, thunder, wind, and lightning are the weapons of the storm god, whether Enlil, Marduk, Baal, or according to some texts in the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod. 15:1–18; Judg. 5:1–31; Ps. 29; Nah. 1:2–11; Hab. 3:1–19), even the Lord.

But in their deepest sense, myths aim not to explain (that is, to answer "how" questions), but to generate meaning: that is, to answer "why" questions. Joseph Campbell described this as "the first function of mythology":

> A mythological order is a system of images that gives the consciousness a sense of meaning in existence. . . . That's the first function of mythology, to evoke in the individual a sense of grateful, affirmative awe before the monstrous mystery that is existence. (Campbell 2004, 6)

Creation myths are not proto-science, that is, explanations of *how* the world began. Rather, they are symbolic affirmations of the order and meaningfulness of reality. So, for the Lakota Sioux, their myth affirmes their connection to the natural world:

> From Wakan Tanka there came a great unifying life force that flowed in and through all things—the flowers of the plains, blowing wind, rocks, trees, birds, animals—and was the same force that had been breathed into the first man. Thus all things were kindred and brought together by the same Great Mystery.
>
> Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. For the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. (Standing Bear 2006, 193)

In the Memphite Theology of ancient Egypt, the meaningfulness of reality is assured by the word of the creator god Ptah (*ANET*, 5; Morenz 1973, 163–65). Myths of creation through primordial combat such as the Babylonian Enuma Elish and the Canaanite Baal cycle assert that the creator has imposed order upon chaos, making the world an ordered and meaningful place.

Unfortunately, in popular parlance, a "myth" is a lie, something at odds with the facts. I recently encountered a crossword clue, "The Loch Ness monster, for example," to which the required answer was "myth"! Little wonder that folk bridle when Bible scholars refer to the accounts of beginnings in Scripture as "creation myths." But if myths symbolically express the meaning of existence, then myths are *of course* true. Our problem comes from the post-Enlightenment view in the West that "truth" and "fact" are one and the same.

A little reflection reveals the poverty of that assertion. Consider what matters most to you: your faith, your friendships, those you love, what you find beautiful, what brings you joy. Now, ask how you might go about establishing these claims as facts. How would you prove them, empirically: What evidence could you marshal? What tests could you use?

I love my wife. But how would I establish that, empirically? I could analyze my actions toward Wendy, but could those same actions not be performed if I were practicing a deception and only pretending that I loved her? If I were a chemist or biologist, I could talk about glands and hormones and chemical reactions in

my brain. If I were a sociologist or anthropologist, I might compare our marriage with others statistically and determine the likelihood of our relationship enduring; or examine courtship rituals in Western cultures. None of this, however, has anything to do with what I *mean* when I tell Wendy that I love her, or how I feel when she says that she loves me.

Certainly we want to affirm as *truth* much that we cannot demonstrate as *fact*. To put this more precisely, we realize that what we can demonstrate as fact does not adequately express truth, as if love were reducible to bioelectrical impulses in the brain or hormones or social convention. Such oversimplifications fail to comprehend the tremendously complex world of human life and experience, wherein the whole cannot be reduced to the mere sum of its parts.

Yet, curiously, avid creationist Kenneth Ham and militant atheist Richard Dawkins share that reductionist worldview. On his website "Answers in Genesis," Dr. Ham writes:

> If Christians doubt what at first appears [*sic*] to be insignificant details of Scripture, then others may begin to look at the whole Bible differently, eventually doubting the central tenets of the Christian faith, namely the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the historicity of Scripture is quite important. . . . Ultimately, the controversy about the age of the earth is a controversy about the authority of Scripture. If millions of years really happened, then the Bible is false and cannot speak with authority on any issue, even the Gospel. (https://answersingenesis.org/why-does-creation-matter/)

For his part, in his book *The God Delusion,* Dr. Dawkins writes:

> Of course, irritated theologians will protest that we don't take the book of Genesis literally anymore. But that is my whole point! We pick and choose which bits of scripture to believe, which bits to write off as symbols or allegories. (Dawkins 2006, 238)

> The truth of the holy book is an axiom, not the end product of a process of reasoning. The book is true, and if the evidence seems to contradict it, it is the evidence that must be thrown out, not the book. . . . When a science book is wrong, somebody eventually discovers the mistake and it is corrected in subsequent books. That conspicuously doesn't happen with holy books. (Dawkins 2006, 282)

To say that the Bible is *true*, according to both Ham and Dawkins, must mean that it is *factual*. Both Ham and Dawkins assume that what Scripture says about creation is to be read as fact: a historically and scientifically accurate depiction of how the world began. Ham regards that account as reliable, while Dawkins regards it as deceptive.

Which Creation?

A close reading of the Bible, however, demonstrates from its very beginning that this assumption is wrongheaded, as Genesis opens with two different Creation Accounts. The identification of two accounts in Genesis 1–2 was among the first assured results of historical-critical research in the nineteenth century (Friedman 1989, 50–53). Specifically, *source criticism* explained the final form of the first five books of Scripture (also called "the Pentateuch," meaning "five books") as the product of different source documents combined by editors.

In 1883, Julius Wellhausen published his masterwork *Prologomena zur Geschichte Israels* (the English-language edition, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, appeared two years later). Wellhausen based his approach on what came to be called the Documentary Hypothesis, describing the Pentateuch as a combination of four documents: a ninth-century-BCE southern source called J, the old epic that forms the fundamental plot line of the Pentateuch; a fragmentary northern source called E, from the eighth century BCE (when the northern tribes were independent); the source back of the book of Deuteronomy, called D (dated to King Josiah's reforms in 622–621 BCE, which sound like the laws set forth in Deuteronomy); and P, a priestly source that Wellhausen dated to the sixth century, the time of reconstruction and rebuilding after the Babylonian exile (Wellhausen 1957).

Today, few if any scholars hold to this hypothesis in full. What we know of scribal practice in the ancient world makes it more likely that the sources back of the Pentateuch were oral traditions rather than actual documents, and many scholars date most if not all of the Pentateuch's written composition much later than Wellhausen did. Yet while much modified over the years, source criticism remains a useful tool and is still commonly taught in universities and seminaries.

Generally, Genesis 1:1–2:4a is assigned to the priestly source P, and Genesis 2:4b–25 to the narrative J source (skeptical of the evidence for a comprehensive J narrative across the Pentateuch, David M. Carr refers simply to P and "non-P," Carr 1996; 2021).

The insight that Genesis 1–2 contains two different accounts does not depend on the labels and hypothetical dates of any particular historical-critical reading, however. Serge Frolov, who rejects traditional source-critical approaches to this material, nonetheless recognizes that the form of Genesis 1:1–2:3 is distinct from that of Genesis 2:4–25: "The two texts not only differ in their presentation of the creation process and belong to different segments of the Enneateuch [Genesis–Kings, the nine books forming the Hebrew Bible's Primary History], but they are also written in different genres" (Frolov 2017, 21–22). Genesis 2:4–25 is a *story*, introducing and in continuity with the ancestral stories that follow it (Frolov 2017, 20). Genesis 1:1–2:3 is a separate and distinctive *list*: "an accumulation of order-fulfillment sequences that are nearly identical except with regard to the level of detail (which seems gradually to increase)" (Frolov 2017, 21).

The Legend of Lilith

This insight also far precedes the beginnings of historical-critical scholarship. Long ago, close readers of Scripture recognized that God creates Woman *twice* in the opening chapters of Genesis. The first creation of Woman is described in Genesis 1:27: "So God created humankind [Hebrew *'adam*: that is, humanity] in his image, in the image of God he created them; *male and female* he created them" (my emphasis; unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotes are from NRSV). The second account of the creation of Woman is the familiar story in Genesis 2:21–23, where God causes a deep sleep to come upon Adam (the KJV has the personal name, but note that in Hebrew this is *'adam*, the same word used in Gen. 1:27) and performs major surgery, crafting the woman (named Eve in Gen. 3:20) from Adam's own substance.

Jewish legend made sense of this repetition by proposing that God created two wives for Adam. The first wife was called Lilith (Ginsberg 1912, 64–69). Lilith was beautiful, but willful and vain, refusing to submit to the authority either of God or of Adam. So,

the legend says, she was expelled from the garden, and God created Eve: a second, presumably more pliant wife, from Adam's own stuff—hence, the story of the creation of Woman in Genesis 2. As for Lilith, she became a creature of the night: a temptress who seduces holy men in their dreams, giving birth to demons and monsters.

Two Names for the Creator

The legend of Lilith reveals an early awareness of tension within the opening chapters of Genesis. This tension is apparent in three major ways. First, close readers of Genesis have long noted two different ways of identifying the Creator in these chapters, evident even in English translation. In Genesis 1:1–2:4a, the Creator is called *'elohim*, a plural noun sometimes meaning "gods" (e.g., Gen. 6:2; Exod. 12:12; Ps. 86:8). But as Hebrew can use the plural to indicate greatness or majesty, *'elohim* is commonly used in Scripture as shorthand for "God of gods" or "God above all gods" (e.g., Deut. 10:17; Jer. 10:10; Pss. 80:3 [4]; 84:7 [8]), and so properly translated "God."

In Genesis 2:4b–25, however, *'elohim* is combined with another term in the expression "LORD God" (in most English translations, "LORD" is placed in all capitals, as here). Behind "LORD" is the personal name of the Divine, which can be rendered from Hebrew into English characters as YHWH. In Jewish tradition the Name of God is revered (Exod. 20:7//Deut. 5:11). So, when one comes to the Name while reading the text aloud, the Name is not pronounced: instead, one says *'adonai*, that is, "my Lord"—hence, the translator's convention of representing *YHWH* as LORD in all capitals. Indeed, to help the reader, the Masoretes (the Jewish scribes who preserved and transmitted the text of the Hebrew Bible used in the synagogue, called the Masoretic Text, or MT; the Christian Old Testament is based on this text) began presenting the Name as a deliberately unpronounceable combination of the consonants *Y-H-W-H* and the vowels of *'adonai*. Continental scholars transliterated the Name as *JHVH*, leading to the designation "J" for the narrative material in the Pentateuch (and Genesis particularly) that prefers to use the Name, and to the term "Jehovah," a Western Christian attempt to pronounce the unpronounceable Name (Gen. 22:14; Exod. 6:3; 17:15; Judg. 6:24; Ps. 83:18; and Isa. 12:2; 26:4 in the KJV).

Two Processes of Creation

The use of two different names for God in these chapters is suggestive but does not in itself require us to identify two different accounts. However, *'elohim* in Genesis 1:1–2:4a and *YHWH* in Genesis 2:4b–25 also create in distinctive ways. This is apparent from the first verse. The NRSV has, "In the beginning *when* God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void" (Gen. 1:1–2; emphasis mine). This translation may be something of a surprise; the more familiar, traditional translation renders Genesis 1:1 as a complete sentence, following the Septuagint (the Greek translation of Jewish Scripture, abbreviated LXX): "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (so Jenson 2010, 89; e.g., the KJV, the RSV, and the NIV). However, the MT *bereshit bara' 'elohim* means something more like "When God began to create . . ." (cf. the 1985 NJPS translation and the NRSVue). Genesis 1:1–2 does not describe the first act of God in creation, but rather is the heading or title of this account, describing the state of things as God's creation begins. The verb translated "create" (Hebrew *bara'*) in Genesis 1:1 is never used with a human subject—only God creates! This verb recurs in Genesis 1:21, 27 and in 2:3–4a, but does not appear in Genesis 2:4b–25 at all; indeed, the next time *bara'* is found is in the heading to Adam's genealogy (Gen. 5:1–2), which alludes to Genesis 1:27–28.

The means by which *'elohim* creates becomes explicit with God's first creative act, in Genesis 1:3: "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light." This pattern continues throughout the chapter: "God said, 'Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters'" (Gen. 1:6); "God said, 'Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place'" (Gen. 1:9); and so on (cf. Gen. 1:11, 14, 20, 24). In this first account, God *speaks* each element of the world into existence, and as God pronounces its name, each element comes into being, "in exact accordance with God's uncontested decree" (Frolov 2017, 21).

But in Genesis 2:7, we learn that the Lord God "formed" the first human from the dust of the ground. Likewise, in Genesis 2:19, the Lord God "formed . . . every animal of the field and every bird of the air." The verb translated "formed" in the NRSV is the Hebrew *yatsar*, the term for what a potter does (cf. Isa. 64:8 [7]; Jer. 18:11). Potters form the formless clay into useful and beautiful objects. So

in Genesis 2, the Lord like a potter forms the human, the animals, and the birds from the ground, intimately and directly fashioning with the divine fingers what the Lord creates.

Two Creation Sequences

Finally, close reading reveals a different sense of the sequence of God's creative activity in Genesis 2:4b–25 than we find in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. Of course, a carefully ordered sequence is the point of the list in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, which imagines creation taking place over the seven days of the first week, culminating in God's observance of the first Sabbath (Gen. 2:1–3). In Genesis 1:1–2:4a, humanity is the climax of creation: the last creative act of God, performed at the end of Day Six (Gen. 1:26–31).

However, in Genesis 2:4b–25, the forming of *'adam* is the first explicitly described creative act of the Lord. This happened, we are told, "in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens" (their creation is assumed, as having happened offstage, so to speak), when "no plant of the field was yet in the earth for there was no one to till the ground" (Gen. 2:4b–5). In the first Creation Account, plants are created at the end of Day Three (Gen. 1:11–13), and so before the humans at the end of Day Six (Gen. 1:26–31). But in Genesis 2:5 we are expressly told that there were no plants when *'adam* was created. As the story unfolds, plants are created for the human: the Lord God plants a garden in Eden in order to provide food to eat, beauty to enjoy, a place to dwell, and fruitful labor for *'adam* (Gen. 2:8; see also 2:15).

But although *'adam* seems to have in the garden everything required for life, the Lord nonetheless says, "It is not good" (Gen. 2:18). Something more after all is necessary: "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner [Hebrew *'ezer kenegdo*]" (Gen. 2:18). This rich, ambiguous Hebrew phrase will be further unpacked later; for now, the NRSV translation aptly expresses that it is a mutual relationship, not one of subordination, that is sought. To address *'adam*'s loneliness, the Lord once more begins fashioning creatures from the earth: "Out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them" (Gen. 2:19). By giving the animals their names, *'adam* completes their creation.

In Genesis 1:20–23, birds and fish are created on Day Five, while the land animals are made on the morning of Day Six (Gen. 1:24–25)—all before humans are made at the end of the day (Gen. 1:26–31). But in Genesis 2:7, just as the plants are created for *'adam* when God plants the garden in Eden, so the animals are created for the Human, in the quest to find an *'ezer kenegdo*. None of the animals can fill this role (Gen. 2:20). The Human is still alone, so the Lord recognizes that more extreme action is required:

> [T]he LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. (Gen. 2:21–22; note that here, NRSV renders the Hebrew *'adam* as "man")

In Genesis 2:4b–25, the creation of humanity both opens and closes the narrative: the Lord 's first explicitly described creative act is to fashion the Human (Hebrew *'adam*) from the ground, and the Lord's last creative act is to fashion from *'adam* the Woman (Hebrew *'ishah*) and the Man (Hebrew *'ish*, cf. Gen. 2:23–24, where these gendered terms are used for the first time).

Implications for Reading Genesis 1–2

When we read Genesis 1 and 2 closely and carefully, it becomes evident that we really are looking not at one account of creation, but at *two*. If we insist on saying, "I believe that the world began the way that Genesis says it did," we are faced with a choice: we must either choose one and reject the other, defeating the very point of our claim that the Bible is "true" (that is, factual), or find some way to collapse the two into a single account. But when we try to conflate these two passages, the text resists us. For example, we could claim that the first account is an overview of creation, while Genesis 2:4b–25 focuses particularly on God's activity on Day 6, emphasizing the creation of humans in greater detail (e.g., Lennox 2011, 158). But even setting aside the different ways of referring to the Divine and the different ways of describing the Divine's creative activity in these chapters, Genesis 2:4b–25 states, contrary to the explicit order in Genesis 1, that there were no plants when the human was made, and further, that the animals were made after the human.

The NIV attempts to resolve this perceived conflict grammatically. In this translation, Genesis 2:8 reads, "Now the LORD God *had planted* [Hebrew *wayyitta'*] a garden in the east, in Eden" (emphasis mine). Rather than rendering the verb as a simple past tense, the NIV has a past perfect, implying that the plants had been made and the garden planted *before* the human was formed. Similarly, in Genesis 2:19, the NIV reads, "Now the LORD God had formed [Hebrew *wayyitser*] out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky."

This translation is *possible* for the Hebrew verb form used in Genesis 2:8 and 19 (the so-called *wayyiqtol*), but the verbs in these verses are typical of Hebrew narrative style, and no different than the forms that surround them (including the verb for the creation of *'adam* in 2:7, where the NIV uses a simple past tense). There is thus no grammatical warrant for rendering these two verses in a different tense. Indeed, the translation of the NIV loses the narrative logic of the story, where the Lord God sets out to solve the problem posed by human loneliness (Gen. 2:18). Collapsing the two accounts into one does not solve our problems; it only creates different ones.

Even so, it is evident that generations of readers *have* read the Creation Accounts in the opening pages of Scripture together, as indeed their presentation in Genesis invites us to do. For example, the second-century-BCE Jewish sage Jesus ben Sirach's reflections on the Sabbath (found in the Apocrypha in Wisdom of Jesus Son of Sirach, sometimes called Ecclesiasticus) draw upon both accounts:

> Why is one day more important than another,
> when all the daylight in the year is from the sun?
> By the Lord's wisdom they were distinguished,
> and he appointed the different seasons and festivals.
> Some days he exalted and hallowed,
> and some he made ordinary days.
> All human beings come from the ground,
> and humankind was created out of the dust.
> In the fullness of his knowledge the Lord distinguished them
> and appointed their different ways.
> Some he blessed and exalted,
> and some he made holy and brought near to himself;
> but some he cursed and brought low,
> and turned them out of their place.

> Like clay in the hand of the potter,
> to be molded as he pleases,
> so all are in the hand of their Maker,
> to be given whatever he decides.
> (Sir. 33:7–13)

Ben Sirach's reference to "seasons and festivals" (Sir. 33:8; cf. Gen. 1:14) and to some days being "hallowed" (Sir. 33:9; cf. Gen. 2:3) has the first account in view, while his depiction of humans coming "from the ground" and made "out of dust" (Sir. 33:19; cf. Gen. 2:7), and of God as a potter (Sir. 33:13; cf. Gen. 2:7, 19) relate to the second.

In the Gospels, Jesus responds to a question from the Pharisees about divorce by quoting from Genesis 1 and 2:

> "Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning 'made them male and female,' [cf. Gen. 1:27] 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' [cf. Gen. 2:24]? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Matt. 19:4–6; cf. Mark 10:6–9)

Both Jesus ben Sirach and Jesus of Nazareth are apparently undisturbed by any disjunction between Genesis 1:1–2:4a and 2:4b–25. Could it be that they, and generations of other readers, *missed* the tensions so evident to us in these chapters? Does this invalidate the distinction between these accounts that we have proposed?

There is, of course, another possibility—that earlier readers were aware of a distinction between these accounts, but saw no real problem. After all, these traditions need only be seen in conflict if we believe it necessary to read them as *fact* statements, rather than as *truth* statements. The canon itself models such a reading repeatedly. In the Pentateuch, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, with their separate and distinctive views of priesthood and sacrificial ritual, appear side by side; and of course, the Christian New Testament begins with *four* distinctive tellings of Jesus's story. Reading canonically, we can embrace the implications of each tradition, while still permitting each its autonomy.

12 For example, in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, God calls *everything* into being, including time and space. While one could say that God creates light on the first day, the text avows, "God called the light Day,

and the darkness he called Night" (Gen. 1:5). It is more accurate, then, to say that by creating light, God *creates* the first day, and so every day thereafter; time itself begins here. Similarly, when on Day Two God inserts the solid bowl of the heavens into the roiling waters of chaos, dividing them into the waters above and below (Gen. 1:6–8), suddenly space has come into being; there is now up and down, back and forth, right and left. As their Creator, *'elohim* stands outside of both space and time. In Genesis 1, to use the theological language of Karl Barth, God is "'wholly other' breaking in upon us 'perpendicularly from above'"; there is an "'infinite qualitative distinction' between God and man" (Barth 1960, 42); that is, *'elohim* is *transcendent*.

But in Genesis 2:4b–25, the Lord formed (*yatsar*) *'adam* "from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (Gen. 2:7)—a very intimate, personal, indeed *human-like* view of the Divine. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, that we are shaped by the Lord's hands "expresses . . . the bodily nearness of the Creator to the creature, that it is really he who makes me—man—with his own hands; his concern, his thought for me, his design for me, his nearness to me" (Bonhoeffer 1966, 45). In theological shorthand, the Lord is *immanent*.

Clearly, believers want and need to affirm both: God is transcendent *and* God is immanent. If all we had was the first account of creation, we could well think of God as distant, abstract, and uninvolved. If all we had was the narrative in Genesis 2, we could well lose the wonder, majesty, and mystery of the Divine. But Genesis 1 and 2 together present God as both transcendent and immanent. The whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Creation beyond Genesis

The biblical picture of creation is even more complex than this swift overview of the Bible's first pages reveals, for Genesis 1:1–2:4a and 2:4b–25 are far from the only accounts of creation in Scripture! With no claim that his list is exhaustive, William P. Brown identifies in the Hebrew Bible "seven separate traditions, each worthy of reflection but each incomplete in itself"—not only Genesis 1:1–2:3 and 2:4b–3:24, but also Job 38–41; Psalm 104; Proverbs 8:22–31; Ecclesiastes 1:2–11; 12:1–7; and Isaiah 40–55 (Brown 2010, 6). If we include the

New Testament in our purview, other Creation Accounts come to light: for example, the prologue to the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1–18), and the Cosmic Christ passages in Colossians 1:15–20; Ephesians 1:20–23; and Hebrews 1:1–4. But we need not regard each biblical account as a "separate tradition." Othmar Keel and Silvia Schroer (2015) have identified four distinctive (though by no means mutually exclusive) views of creation from the cultures that surrounded and influenced Israel in the ancient Near East. These provide us a way to organize our varied biblical Creation Accounts.

Cosmogony

One of these ancient views of Creation, sometimes called "cosmogony," regards the universe as born in the way that a child is born, but from a deity or out of a union between deities (Keel and Schroer 2015, 84; cf. Morenz 1973, 162–63). From the Middle Kingdom (2050–1800 BCE) on, Egyptians imagined the world as hatching from a world-egg (Keel and Schroer 2015, 93; Morenz 1973, 177–79). But in the Egyptian Book of the Dead papyrus of Chentawi (ca. 950 BCE), Atum's self-insemination brings forth the male Geb (Earth) and the female Nut (Sky), and so the world we know (Keel and Schroer 2015, 90–91). The old Babylonian (second millennium BCE) creation epic, the Enuma Elish, opens with these words:

> When on high the heaven had not been named,
> Firm ground below had not been called by name,
> Naught by primordial Apsu, their begetter
> (And) Mummu-Tiamat, who bore them all.
> *(Tablet I, lines 1–4, ANET, 60–61; cf. Jacobsen 1976, 168)*

In Akkadian, the language of the Babylonians, *apsu* refers to the waters under the earth, the freshwater reservoir out of which all streams and springs emerge. Our word "abyss" comes (by way of the Greek *abyssos*) from this Akkadian root. The counterpart to the male Apsu is the female Tiamat, which in Akkadian means "salt water"; Tiamat is, quite literally, the sea monster. Out of the union of Apsu and Tiamat, the gods were born.

Not only the birth of the world, but also its continuing fertility could be ascribed to the sexual union of god and goddess. In the Gudea Cylinders from ancient Lagash (ca. 2100 BCE), once a

bedchamber has been prepared in the temple for Ningirsu and his consort Baba, abundance and prosperity are assured:

> [T]he marshes stocked
> with marsh carp and giant carp,
> Their inspector of fisheries,
> the one stocking (them with) fish, guiding them;
> with the grain laden
> for (transport on) the great waters,
> With the storage piles and heaps
> of Lagash piled up,
> With the river filled with flowing waters,
> the sheepfolds built,
> The lambs placed with good ewes,
> the ram released unto its good ewes,
> With the calves placed with good cows,
> and the bull bellowing loudly among them,
> With the oxen properly in their yokes,
> and their oxdriver standing by their side,
> With the asses saddled with their packsaddles,
> and their drivers who feed them following after them,
> With huge copper ingots
> strapped on the jackasses,
> With the huge millhouse supported.
>
> *(Cylinder B, 14.25–15.15, Jacobsen 1976, 438)*

The notion of God as parent to the world was not unknown in Israel. Most frequently, God is regarded in Scripture metaphorically as the father of the community:

> A son honors his father, and servants their master. If then I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? says the LORD of hosts.
>
> *(Mal. 1:6; cf. also Ps. 68:5 [6]; in the NT, cf. Matt. 6:9–13//Luke 11:2–4)*

But the Lord can also be Israel's metaphorical mother:

> Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk,
> I took them up in my arms;
> but they did not know that I healed them.
> I led them with cords of human kindness,
> with bands of love.

> I was to them like those
> who lift infants to their cheeks.
> I bent down to them and fed them.
> *(Hos. 11:3–4)*

More specifically, God can be the metaphorical or adoptive parent of the king:

> I will tell of the decree of the LORD:
> He said to me, "You are my son;
> today I have begotten you.
> *(Ps 2:7; cf., e.g., 89:26 [27])*

Still, there are passages that push beyond the metaphorical and at least suggest something closer to cosmogony. So Malachi 2:10 focuses on the community but has in view not just an analogy to familial obligations (as in Mal. 1:6), but God's role in calling Israel into being:

> Have we not all one father? Has not one God created [Hebrew *bara'*] us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

So too the ancient Song of Moses accuses the community:

> You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you;
> you forgot the God who gave you birth.
> *(Deut. 32:18)*

Here the verbs *yeladeka* ("bore you") and *mekholeleka* ("gave you birth") are the same verbs used for human childbirth: in the feminine for the mother bearing a child, in the masculine (as here) for the father's role. Remarkably, both of these verbs are used in Psalm 90:2 for the creation of the natural world:

> Before the mountains were brought forth [*yulladu*, better "born"], or ever you had formed [*tekholel*; better "engendered," as the verb is masculine] the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.

16 Similarly, in Job 38:7 the morning stars appear to be identified with the *bene 'elohim* (or "sons of God"), while in James 1:17 God is addressed as *patros tōn phōtōn*, that is, "the Father of lights": a

title not found elsewhere before James, but likely related to similar expressions from the first-century-BCE Jewish philosopher Philo (e.g., "father of the world"; cf. Allison 2013, 272).

The ancient Near Eastern link between the fertility of the land and the building of the temple was affirmed in Israel as well (e.g., Ezek. 47:1–12; Hag. 1:3–11). Still, there is no biblical account of the renewal of the world through sex, despite the archaeological evidence suggesting that, in the popular religion of ancient Judah and Israel, the Lord may have had a consort (Roberts and Roberts 2006). Also, in striking contrast to the gods of Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia, the biblical God is given no ancestry. Apart from a few isolated remnants, there is little evidence for cosmogony in the Hebrew Bible. Perhaps it was polemically excluded, as Israel distinguished itself and its conception of God from the fertility cults of Canaan.

Creation through Combat

The other three ancient Near Eastern views of creation, however, are certainly much in evidence in Scripture, and permit us to organize the biblical Creation Accounts into three broad traditions. The oldest of these is creation through combat: the Creator god defeats primordial chaos in battle, imposes order, and so brings the world into being (Keel and Schroer 2015, 97). This was the dominant creation story among Israel's closest neighbors: the main plot of the Babylonian Enuma Elish and the Canaanite Baal cycle viewed creation in this way. The Bible's oldest passages, Exodus 15 and Judges 5, also view God as a Warrior, in language and imagery clearly drawn from this mythic ground. What is more, numerous features of the first Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–2:4a are clarified by comparison specifically with the Enuma Elish. The motif of the Divine Warrior's battle with chaos features in many psalms (e.g., Pss. 24; 104), as well as in the wisdom book of Job (e.g., Job 40:15–41:34 [26]), in prophetic books (e.g., Nah. 1:2–11; Hab. 3), and particularly in apocalypses (e.g., Isa. 27:1; Rev. 12).

Creation by the Word

A third type of ancient Near Eastern Creation Account Keel and Schroer call "Creation as Magic, Command, and Decree" (Keel and

Schroer 2015, 106; cf. Morenz 1973, 163–65). So, in the Memphite theology of ancient Egypt, the world and the gods themselves are manifestations of the word and will of Ptah, god of wisdom, through whose "heart and tongue . . . he is in every body and in every mouth of all gods, all men, [all] cattle, all creeping things, and (everything) that lives, by thinking and commanding everything that he wishes" (Memphite Theology line 54, *ANET*, 5). In the Bible, this is paralleled in Genesis 1:1–2:4a, where God creates by God's word. But this view of creation is also manifest in Proverbs 8:22–31, where the world is fashioned in and through divine Wisdom, as well as in the New Testament passages affirming a Wisdom Christology (John 1:1–18; Col. 1:15–20; Eph. 1:20–23).

Creation with Hands

The final type of Creation Account Keel and Schroer discuss is creation as handicraft (Keel and Schroer 2015, 95; cf. Morenz 1973, 161), where the Creator as potter or sculptor fashions beings with the god's own hands. Here, the fact that these Creation Accounts were not mutually exclusive becomes particularly apparent. As Keel and Schroer observe, "The Egyptian god Ptah," who in the Memphite Theology "creates entirely by thought and word," was "originally a craftsman-god, creating the uraeus [the image of the rearing cobra that was in Egypt the sign of royalty] on the potter's wheel" (Keel and Schroer 2015, 77; cf. Morenz 1973, 267). So too, the potter god Khnum, who in Eighteenth Dynasty Egypt (1540–1292 BCE) was thought to craft the king's body and essence on his wheel (Keel and Schroer 2015, 95–96; cf. Morenz 1973, 264, who notes that "At Antinoë and Esna, [Knum] . . . forms mankind on his potter's wheel"), was by the Roman period believed to have fashioned the world egg (Keel and Schroer 2015, 93)! Here the primary biblical parallel is the second Genesis account (Gen. 2:4b–3:24), which also shares plot elements of the ancient Sumerian Epic of Gilgamesh (particularly, as we will see, in the rift between the humans and the natural world, and the role of the snake).

Within the Bible, however, the primary influence of this second Creation Account is not through the means of creation it sets forth, or even in the narrative it relates. Indeed, Christian readers may be surprised at how slight a role the Garden Story plays in the Hebrew

Bible. Apart from Genesis (2:8, 10, 15; 3:23–24; 4:16) and Ezekiel (28:13; 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35), Eden is mentioned only in Isaiah 51:3 and Joel 2:3 in the Hebrew Bible. In the New Testament, Adam assumes an important role in Paul's letters as the typical human, as well as a type for Christ ("Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come," Rom. 5:14; cf. 1 Cor. 15:22, 45), but in the Hebrew Bible he is mentioned outside of Genesis 1–5 only once, in a genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:1.

Far more important and influential is the theme of the garden of God as source of waters and center of the world (Gen. 2:8–14). This theme recurs in temple and Zion imagery throughout the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Ezek. 47:1–12; Zech. 13:1; Joel 3:18 [4:18]; Ps. 46:4 [5]; Tuell 2000), as well as in apocalypses (e.g., Zech. 14:8; Rev. 22:1–5). The theme of the land, and of strong connections to land and place, is reminiscent of Native American spirituality, also rooted in "a sacred center at a particular place," which "enables the people to look out along the four dimensions and locate their lands" (Deloria 1994, 67). It may also point us toward a healthy theology of nature.

But even as these parallels demonstrate Israel's continuity with other religious traditions in the ancient Near East, and indeed with religious traditions around the world, they also reveal Israel's distinctiveness. As we have seen, apart from a very few isolated texts, cosmogony played no role in Israel's view of God and the world. So too, for all the clear parallels between Genesis 1:1–2:4a and the Enuma Elish, no trace of combat remains in the Genesis account: chaos has no will to oppose to the creative, ordering will of God. While the accounts of creation in Scripture address many of the same purposes and themes found in other creation myths, they also provide distinctive answers to our questions about God, the world, and ourselves.

In this book, we will discuss the Creation Accounts of Scripture as representing four distinct ways of thinking about God and the world. We will begin with the texts describing God as Warrior and creation as primordial conflict (e.g., Exod. 15; Judg. 4; Hab. 3), relating these back to their ancient Near Eastern counterparts and forward to their transformation in apocalypse. Next, in chapter 3, we will move to texts involving God as King and creation via command and decree: Genesis 1:1–2:4a and its ancient Near Eastern counterparts, as well as the texts reflecting this perception,

particularly in Wisdom and wisdom-influenced traditions. Chapter 4 will consider God as Potter and creation as handicraft, particularly in Genesis 2:4b–3:24 and its related traditions. Chapter 5 will pursue Eden/Zion as God's garden, and the implications of this image for faith and ecology. In the interwoven complexity of these varied traditions, Scripture opens us up to new answers to our deepest questions about who we are, who God is, and the meaning of life in this wonderful world.