

ATTEMPTS TO UNDERSTAND CERTAIN TYPES OF LITERATURE

"Creation" and "At the Red Sea"

This paper is not religious, but rather deals with language and its meaning. After all, in studying a piece of literature, the primary purpose should always be to find the true meaning of the language. Accordingly, we shall seek to find the true meaning of the original Hebrew of Genesis chapter one, supposedly written by Moses. Then, in a different manner, we shall consider a versification of Exodus 14 and 15. The method of the exegesis of the creation will be that learned by the writer from a teacher of French poetry at George Peabody College in Nashville. Usually, in assigning a poem for study, he would say, "Faites explication de texte de ce poem," meaning that the students should find the exact meaning of the language and then draw conclusions.

Who is not interested in how things came to be and in what order they appeared? The science of biology has a general conclusion that life is never by spontaneous generation--even if Aristotle did say that it was sometimes true. Yet, many scientists contend that everything came originally by spontaneous generation in some mysterious way that they called generally evolution. It is not, however, the purpose of this paper to deal with evolution, or any other method--but to seek the meaning of the language. Genesis one says that Elohim created the heavens and the earth. It also gives the order of that creation, which order is completely scientific. What the Hebrew of Genesis one says then is our burden.

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Apr. 5, 1973

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~~Jan 4, 1973~~

We shall begin with the first two verses of Genesis. The most common version in English says, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Hebrew reads,

בְּרֵאשִׁית
 בְּרֵאשִׁית הָאֵלֹהִים יָרָא אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ
 וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תוֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ
 וְחֹשֶׁךְ הָיָה עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹמוֹת
 וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֵף עַל-פְּנֵי
 הַמַּיִם

"In the beginning" is literally "in beginning" indicating the Creator's initial action in creation. *one translation is, "when God began to create"* "Created" means "created out of nothing."

The Hebrew word (בְּרֵאשִׁית) meaning "create" is used in the Hebrew Bible *in this stem* only of divine activity. "The heavens"(heaven) indicates what one can see as he stands and looks into the sky. "Earth" is the land on which the viewer stands, or terra firma. אֵינֶנּוּ means "formless," "empty," "unreal," "without purpose." בֹּהוּ indicates emptiness and void. The picture is of primordial chaos.

"And darkness was upon the face of the deep." This darkness was a universal darkness so far as the earth was concerned. In it were hidden many mysterious secrets. The great deep comprised not only the sea but also the space above the earth which was filled

with vapors and mists. The indication is that this very dark primordial chaos existed for an unspeakably long time. In fact, more time was involved here without doubt than in all recorded history.

"And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" is an expression both poetic and scientific. The Spirit of God in this language is a Person who is above and master of the chaos beneath. "Moved" (מְנַחֵם) is a piel participle indicating timeless action by a life-giving agent. It indicates tender personal care. In Deuteronomy 32: 11 the word is used of an eagle or vulture hovering over and caring for its nest and its young. Therefore, the Spirit of God, as a mother hen, was timelessly hovering over and caring for the dark chaos. This hovering process was over the face of the waters, both mist and liquid. (How long this process continued there is no way of knowing.)

By studying the language, we conclude that part of the hovering process had to do with dispersing the mists. Then God said, "Let light appear, and light appeared." (The sun and other heavenly bodies were already up there above the mists. See discussion of verse 16.) This light was good, and it divided between the day and the night as the earth turned. The light part was called day and the dark part night. By this we know that the mists had cleared sufficiently for some light to shine through the gloom. Certainly the heavenly bodies were not yet visible through the mists. However, a day could be realized and measured.

As to the word day (יָמָא), it sometimes means a twenty-four-hour period. Then sometimes it indicates a season or an indefinite period. Therefore, without doing violence to the language of Genesis one,

a person may think of the days of creation as very long periods of time. Doubtless, there came to be a certain twenty-four-hour period when light was first visible part of the time. *ht, and the stars."*

So In verses six through eight there appeared a firmament, or open expanse, between the clouds above and the waters below. This firmament was dividing (participle again) between the waters above and *for* waters beneath. This firmament was named heavens (heaven). *re, as*

for Verses nine through thirteen record what happened the third *line* day, or period. There were two great events. First, God said, "Let the waters be gathered (passive) from under the heavens into one place, or bed, *01P7*), and let the dry land appear. And it came to be so. And God called the dry land earth, and the collection of waters He called seas." Note that the waters were gathered into one place or bed. If we examine a globe, we find that all seven seas really constitute only body of water. ^They are together or in one place. Now how did the writer know that? *ens. He created the great sea*

re The second event of the third day was the coming of vegetation, a scientific order. The soil of the earth was doubtless fertile, but science teaches that there is no such thing as spontaneous generation. Therefore, God acted in causing the earth to produce green vegetation, including trees, yielding seed, each bearing fruit after its kind. According to the language the land became covered with orderly and useful vegetation. *ave been the sun and substance of the*

re In order for this to be, although a few forms of vegetation are said to grow without light, the light of the sun must have been coming through the gloom rather strongly. But it was in the fourth period that the sun and other heavenly bodies became clearly visible. Now God said, "Let lights appear in the firmament of the heavens." (v. 14)

came to be so.

"For God had made (should be translated past perfect, not perfect or simple past, as often translated) two great lights, the greater to rule the day and the lesser to rule the night, and the stars." So the heavenly bodies became visible during the fourth period. Their purposes were to shine upon the earth, to divide between the day and the night and to be for signs, for seasons, for days and for years. (vv. 14--18) The promise based on these light givers, as found in Genesis 8:22, is, "While there are days on earth, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter and day and night shall not cease."

Now that there was vegetation and light in the earth, there could be animal life. In the next, or fifth, period there came to be life in the sea and in the air over the sea and the earth. In verses 20--23 we are told that God commanded the waters to swarm with swarms of living creatures and birds to fly over the earth and over the firmament of the heavens. He created the great sea monsters and every living thing that creeps and every flying bird after its kind. Then he told them to be fruitful and multiply. The denizens of the seas were to fill up the waters of the seas and the birds were to multiply greatly in the earth. There seems to have been no prospect of an overpopulation problem. Evidently balance in nature was one of the built-in features of the situation. Such seems to have been the sum and substance of the fifth period.

In the sixth period came the so-called higher animal life and man--genus homo--homo sapiens. God had told the earth--the land--to bring forth the living thing after its kind--the cattle, the creepers and the beasts of the ground after their kind. And it came to be so.

God had commanded the waters and the earth to bring forth, but He did not tell the earth or the sea to bring forth man. In verses 26ff, He said, "Let us make man in our image after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." He did not/the sea or the earth to produce man, but said, "Let us make him." What does that mean? The language tells us that He planned to make man as a man might plan to make a gadget. The "us" refers to other persons, or to another person. What does this mean? Two persons were involved in the first two verses--God and the Spirit of God. In verse 27 the language has it, "God created man in his image." Then, to make the matter emphatic, it says, "In the image of God he created him."

"Image" and "likeness" mean pattern. In other words, God took Himself as the pattern for man. Did this mean a physical pattern or a psychical pattern? Certainly the intellect, emotions and will are involved. In chapter two, verse 7, we find, "Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (breath of lives--or living breath) and the man became a living soul (nephesh-- נֶפֶשׁ, or psyche ψυχή)!" The living breath of God became the living breath of man. Was this the first mouth-to-mouth resuscitation?

He made them male and female so that they could have intimate relations and reproduce their kind. He blessed them--gave them special care and endowment. Then He ordered them to be fruitful, to multiply, and fill up the earth--and subdue it. It was necessary for them to do the first three items in order to be able to subdue the earth. They were to have dominion (rule) over all creation--all

things in the water, in the air and on the ground.

When man was ordered to subdue the earth, did that mean that he was to bring all nature into servitude to himself? Did it mean that he was to use it all? Remember he was to subdue the earth. He was to become the earth's master. Does this mean that man is to conquer deformity and disease? Does it mean that he is to have dominion over all things morally? Evidently all these things are included in the meaning of the language. Reproduction, human relations, government--all these are included. In other words, man is given an estate. He is to master it and order it. He is to use vegetation for food. (Later he was instructed concerning the eating of certain animals.) He is to understand that the creatures of nature must eat also. There is order and balance in everything. I knew a Frenchman from the University of Paris who said that nature was made perfect. But when man began to tamper with it, it became marred and out of balance. Has man obeyed the commandment to subdue nature?

Now from the standpoint of literature, does any masterpiece surpass this record in any manner? Does it say anything contrary to what scientists have discovered? Of course, much remains to be discovered. Much remains to be subdued. When men travel into space, are they not subduing the earth? What about advances in surgery? On the other hand, could they not work a little harder to subdue their passions and improve their relations with one another? Is the prevalence of crime and violence indication of failure to subdue the earth?

I have tried in this sketch to give ~~the~~ the meaning of the language in Genesis one. I have not told you what I believe about it. That would be religious.

Now another way to be practical in understanding situations is to put a story into appropriate verse. As an example of this method I shall read "At the Red Sea," a simple versification of a difficult historical passage from Exodus 14 and 15. I wrote it in 1926.

At the Red Sea

When the Angel of Death had smitten the land,
 And the wailing was loud o'er Egyptian sand,
 With Moses the chosen departed apace
 For a land that Jehovah had promised their race.

With their jewels and bundles they hastened amain--
 Like a refugee host they entered the plain--
 And they followed the cloud to the side of the sea
 To rejoice as prisoners by Jehovah set free!

But the dust from afar was rising on high
 As the hosts of the wrathful Egyptians drew nigh:
 Like the waves of the sea when the tempest is drear,
 They bore down on the helpless now quaking with fear.

But the Lord intervened in that direful hour
 To deliver His own from the tyrant's power.
 With the wicked Egyptians was darkness that night,
 But the people of the Lord were encompassed with light.

'Twas by Moses, the greatest of prophets of old,
 That the people were led like the flocks to the fold--
 Never sage did write with his lettered pen
 More inspired truths than he wrote for men.

He uplifted his rod, he extended his hand,
And the chosen went down in the sea on dry land!
As the towering walls of the ocean stood high,
The Children of Israel went marching by!

And the hand of Jehovah the billows restrained
Till the farther strand His people had gained.
Through the pillar of fire, that protecting blaze,
He cast on the wicked His avenging gaze.

Like the powers of earth when her rulers conspire,
That host at the evening was raging with ire;
Like the leaves of the vale when the flood waters sweep,
That host on the morrow lay drowned in the deep!

And the surge of the waters in bitterness chides
As it whispers the names on its rising tides
Of the vaunting Egyptians, condemned by decree,
And drowned by the Lord in that desolate sea.